

By Sidney Smith

A BACHELOR HUSBAND

By RUBY M. AYRES

Author of "Richard Chatterton," Etc.
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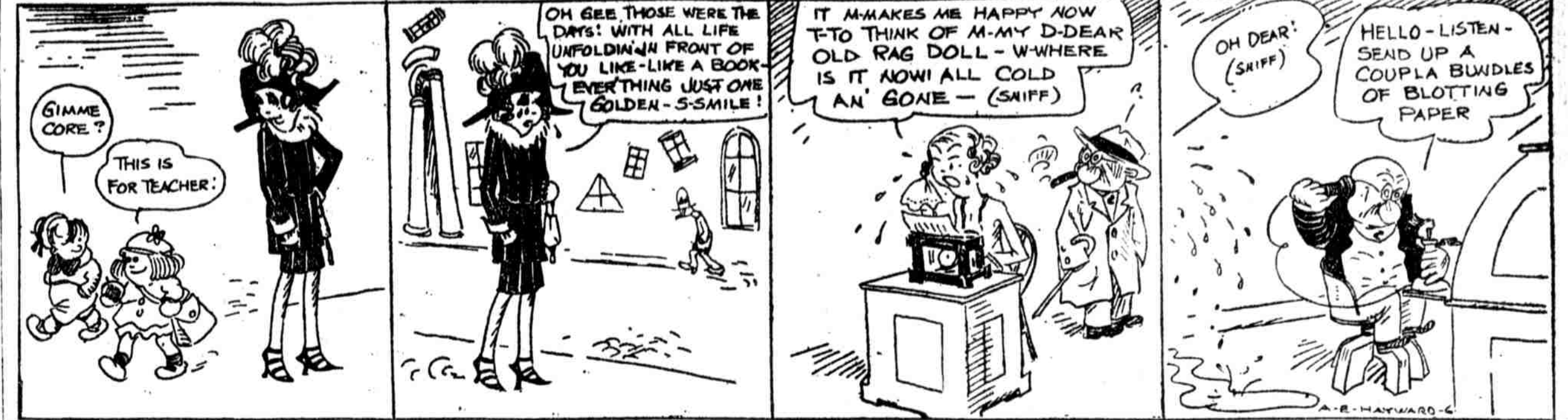
THIS BEGINS THE STORY
 Marie Chester and Christopher were raised together. She loved him always; he was indifferent to her. When her father died she was married; he because he needed the money and he liked her; she because she loved him and she thought he looked like a clean chap. Christopher, he's a clean chap, but he's not for the most part; he just doesn't think of the injury he was doing her. When Marie overheard her friend discussing their marriage she felt it for granted that he would love her if he nearly broke her heart. This is on the first night of her honeymoon; a queer honey-moon at a hotel among his friends. And so she tells him that she must continue to love him and that he must continue to be her husband; and it hurts her further to realize that he is rather relieved than otherwise; but she would be happy.

"But we never know what we may want in this queer old world, and brothers can be very useful things at times, you know."
 She did not answer. She thought he was the strangest man she had ever met.
 "We ought to be turning back," he said presently. "It's nearly nine o'clock, and we're some way from the hotel."
 She walked reluctantly beside him. Suddenly she asked a question.
 "If you are Chris' best friend, why weren't you his best man at our wedding?"
 She looked up at him as she spoke, and saw the quick frown that crossed his face.
 "Am I to answer that question?" he asked.
 "Of course, I should like to know."
 "Very well, then, as you insist—Chris asked me to be best man, or whatever you call it, and I refused."
 "Why?" She was really interested now.
 "Why? Well, because—before I saw you—I disliked the idea of Chris being married. Married. Married! How I disliked those spoils-mot friendship marriages between men."
 "No," he agreed, "I am afraid it will not."
 There was a queer, hard note of disapproval in his voice, and Marie looked at him in bewilderment.
 "I don't think I understand you," she said angrily. "I don't think I understand what you mean."
 "Perhaps I don't understand myself," he answered. "Let's leave it at that, shall we, and forget all the nonsense I've been talking?"
 They went up to the hotel silently. There were several people about now, and a smartly-dressed woman with red hair, to whom Feathers bowed formally, stared at Marie rather insolently as they passed.
 "Is that one of Chris' friends?" Marie asked with an effort when they were out of hearing.
 "Chris knows her," was the reply. "She is Mrs. Heriot."
 "She is very smart," Marie said wistfully.
 "Smart!" Feathers stopped and looked back at the woman deliberately. "Do you call her smart?" he asked, mildly amazed. "I think she looks a sight; but then, so do most of the women in this hotel. I suppose it's their way of attracting attention—all others failing."
 Marie smiled faintly.
 "You don't like women," she said. "He shook his shaggy head. "I do not," he agreed.
 "And yet—just now, you told me I should be wise to make a friend of you."
 "I did—and I still mean it, and hope some day that you will do so—Here is Chris."
 Chris came toward them with a batch of newspapers in his hands. He looked at his wife with faint embarrassment.
 "Early birds!" he said, and then, as Feathers moved away, "Is your head better, Marie Celeste?"
 "Oh, yes, it's quite gone! I got up early and had a long walk along the sands, and I met Mr. Dakers, and he came back with me."
 "Call him Feathers," said Chris. "Everybody does."
 "Do they? But I hardly know him."
 "You soon will." He looked at her doubtfully. "Do you think you will manage to have a good time here, Marie?"
 "Oh, yes, with—" "With you," she had been going to add, but stopped. She felt instinctively that she would not be allowed to have much of her husband's undivided attention. There were so many people in the hotel who were friends of his.
 "There is a Mrs. Heriot here who knows you," she said, "and for some thing to say than for any other reason, and she was surprised at the way Chris suddenly flushed."
 "Yes, I know," he said. "I saw her last night."
 They went in to breakfast together. Marie thought she had never seen such a big room. She kept close to Chris, conscious that all eyes were upon her. Feathers and young Atkins occupied a table a little way from theirs, and Atkins got up as soon as he saw Marie, and came over to ask how she was.
 "I'm quite well, thank you, and isn't it a lovely morning?"
 "Ripping! I say, can you swim?"
 "Yes."
 Chris looked up. "Can you?" he asked in surprise, then laughed and collected his wits. "I wish you would really know about Marie and her accomplishments."
 "I wish people wouldn't stare at me so," she said to him nervously, when breakfast was over and they were out in the lounge once more. "Is there anything funny looking about me, Chris?"
 He cast a casual eye over her daintiness.
 "You look all right," he said, without much enthusiasm. "Probably they know we're newly married," he added.
 Marie said nothing, but she turned away from him and looked out over the twinkling lips.
 He was quite indifferent to her, she knew. And in her passionate pain and bitterness she almost wished for his hatred. Anything, anything rather than this terrible feeling that she was nothing at all in his life!
 Young Atkins joined them almost immediately and attached himself to Marie. "We're going to bathe presently," he said. "You'll come, too, won't you?"
 Marie looked at her husband, but he was talking to some one else, and she answered hurriedly.
 "Oh, yes, I'll come, of course! What time are you going?"
 "We generally go about half-past 10 before the crowd gets down. We'll take a boat out if you're sure you can swim."
 She laughed. "Why, of course I can."
 "Get your breakfast settle first, my boy," said Feathers, looking up from his newspaper. "There's no hurry, is there?"
 "Oh, shut up!" said young Atkins lightly. "You're always such an old croaker."
 At half-past 10 he sought Marie out.
 "I'll be waiting for you," he said. "I'll be waiting for you."
 "I know—Chris has gone to phone to some one. I wonder if I ought to wait."
 "Of course not! He'll be all right! Leave a message."
 "Very well." It would be a good opportunity to show him that she did not depend on him for her amusement, she thought desperately. She went off through the sunshine with young Atkins chattering nineteen to the dozen beside her.
 It was a perfect morning! Marie stood for a moment on the steps of the bathing machine in her blue and white costume, and looked up at the sun. It might be such a perfect world if only things were a little different! She wondered if there was always something in life to prevent people being too happy.

THE GUMPS—The Old Cutup Again



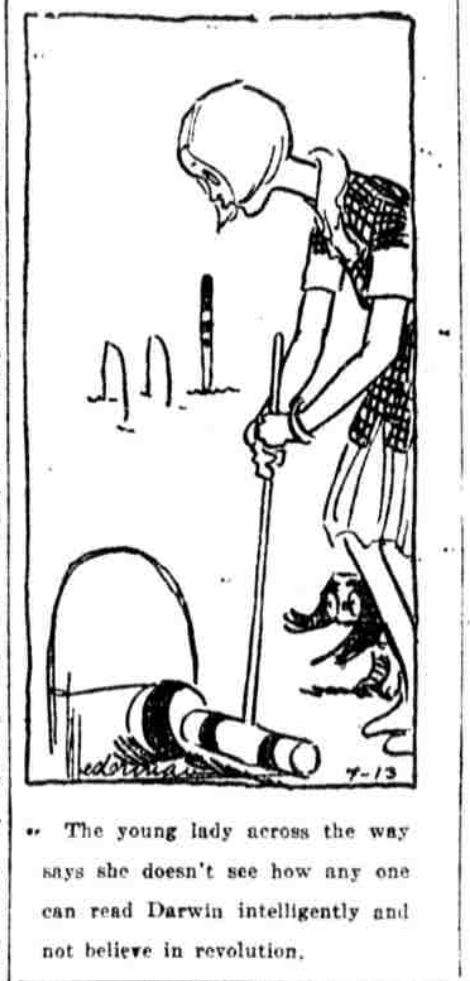
SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER—More Rain



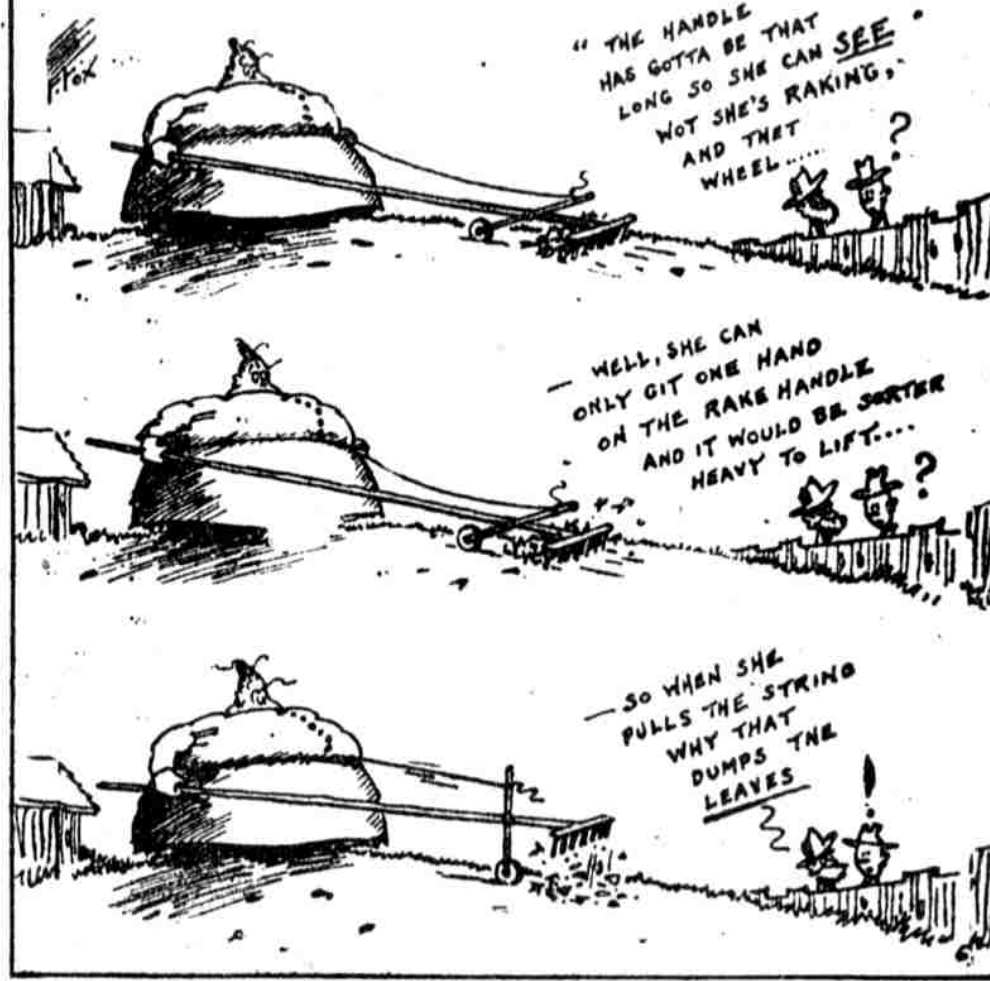
AND HERE IT CONTINUES

AND HERE IT CONTINUES
 HOW could she have said such a thing—knowing what she knew? "I will be happy," she said to herself over and over again. In the world there were other things in the world besides love. She had seen other people in the hotel were astir, and went out and down to the sands. It was a lovely morning, warm and sunny, and the tide was out, leaving a long wet stretch of golden sand behind. A boy with bare, brown legs was pushing his way through the little waves with a skipping net, and further along a man was strolling by the water's edge, idly picking up pebbles and throwing them into the sea. Marie looked at the fresh breeze blowing through her hair and fanning her tired face.
 Only two months ago and she had been a girl at school with her hair down and not a care in the world. She had an occasional headache, but she thought of Chris. Only two months! She felt as if she had taken a great spring across the gulf dividing a girl from womanhood, and was looking back across it now with regretful eyes.
 Why had she been in such a hurry to get married? She understood for the first time what Aunt Madge and other grown-up people meant when they said that she looked up their school days as the happiest of their lives.
 "The main going to be the happiest?" Marie thought. Even they had not been very happy. She had never been very popular at school, and she had never been clever. Her lessons had always worried her, and she never quite got over her first feeling of homesickness as the other girls did.
 "You're too sentimental, too romantic," so her best friend, Dorothy Weber, had often told her. "If you don't cure yourself, my dear, you'll find a lot of trouble waiting for you in the future."
 She had found it already, sooner even than Dorothy had dreamed. She looked down at her hand with its new wedding ring, and a little flush rose to her pale cheeks.
 "He's mine, at any rate," she told herself fiercely. "Even if he doesn't love me, he is my husband, and nobody else can have him."
 It was some sort of comfort to know that the adored Chris was hers. The knowledge sent some streak of sunshine across the blackness of last night.
 She strolled along restlessly, blind to the beauty of the sea and sky, lost in her own bruised bewildered thoughts. She had passed the boy with the skipping net, and had come abreast with the man sauntering at the water's edge without noticing it, until he spoke to her.
 "Good morning, Mrs. Lawless."
 She started, flushing painfully as her eyes met the kindly quizzical gaze of "Feathers."
 He looked uglier than ever in the morning sunshine, was her first bitter thought, and he wore a loose, collarless shirt which was open at the neck and showed his thick, muscular throat. His big feet were thrust into not-over-clean white canvas shoes, and a damp towel and bathing costume hung inelegantly over one shoulder.
 "Good morning," said Marie. "I thought I was the first one up," she added resentfully.
 He laughed carelessly.
 "I'm always up with the lark—or even there any lark at a place like this! I've had my slip on the sea to myself, before it's crowded with flappers and fat old ladies."
 "Perhaps they prefer it, too," said Marie. The words came into her mind most before she was aware of it, and she flushed hotly, ashamed of her rudeness.
 "Feathers" only laughed.
 "I knew you didn't like me," he said in friendly fashion. "I could read it in your eyes last night."
 She was nonplussed by his frankness. "I can't like you or dislike you," she said after a moment. "I don't know anything about you."
 "I know you don't," he agreed calmly. "But you think you do! And that's where you're mistaken. If you take my advice, Mrs. Lawless, you'll be a friend of mine."
 She stared at him with growing indignation.
 "Why, whatever for?" she asked blankly. She had never been spoken to in such a manner before.
 Feathers laughed again, and ran his fingers through his unruly hair.
 "Well, for one thing, I'm your husband's best friend," he said sententiously. "And I always think it's silly for a woman to keep in with her husband's best friend. What do you think?"
 There was nothing but friendliness in his voice and words, but they angered Marie.
 "My husband's friends don't interest me in the least," she said untruthfully.
 Feathers stopped and picked up another smooth pebble, with which he skillfully skinned the surface of the sea half a dozen times.
 "That's a pity," he said. "And look down at her. How old are you?" he asked interestedly.
 She ignored the last question. He was more indignant as she answered, but it also sounds as if you are very young, rude and inquisitive."
 His dark face flushed.
 "I beg your pardon. I haven't the least intention of being either rude or inquisitive," he said hastily. "I should like to be friends with you. As a rule, I've no use for women any more."
 He stopped abruptly, biting his lip. Marie knew that he had been going to add, "Any more than Chris' brother."
 "Not now, of course," he agreed.

The Young Lady Across the Way



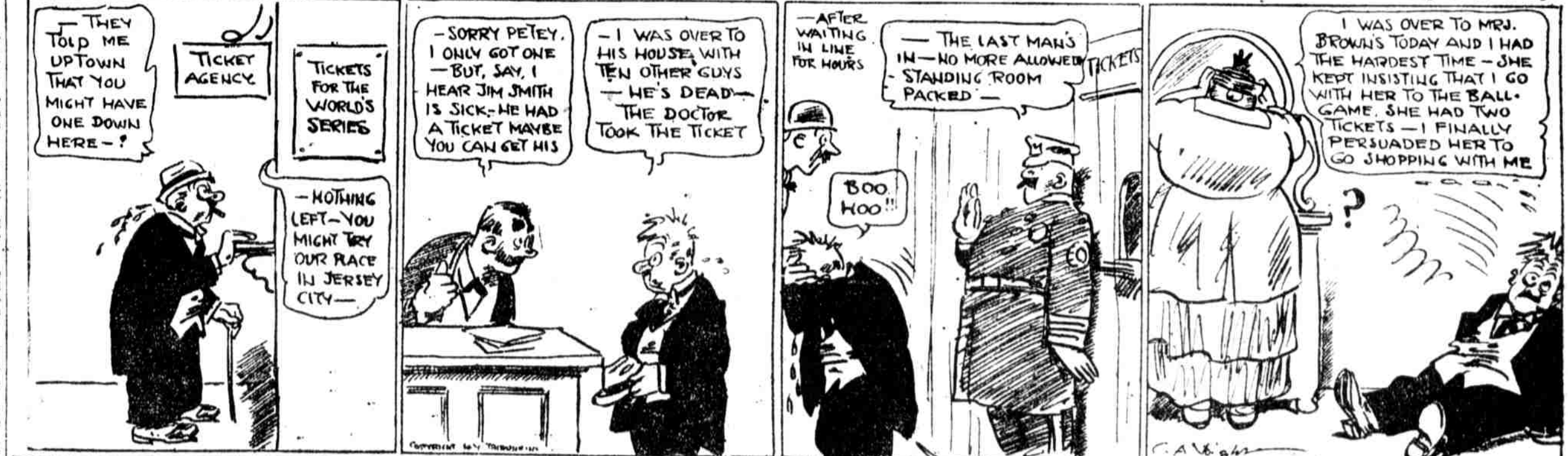
Aunt Eppie Hogg, the Fattest Woman in Three Counties



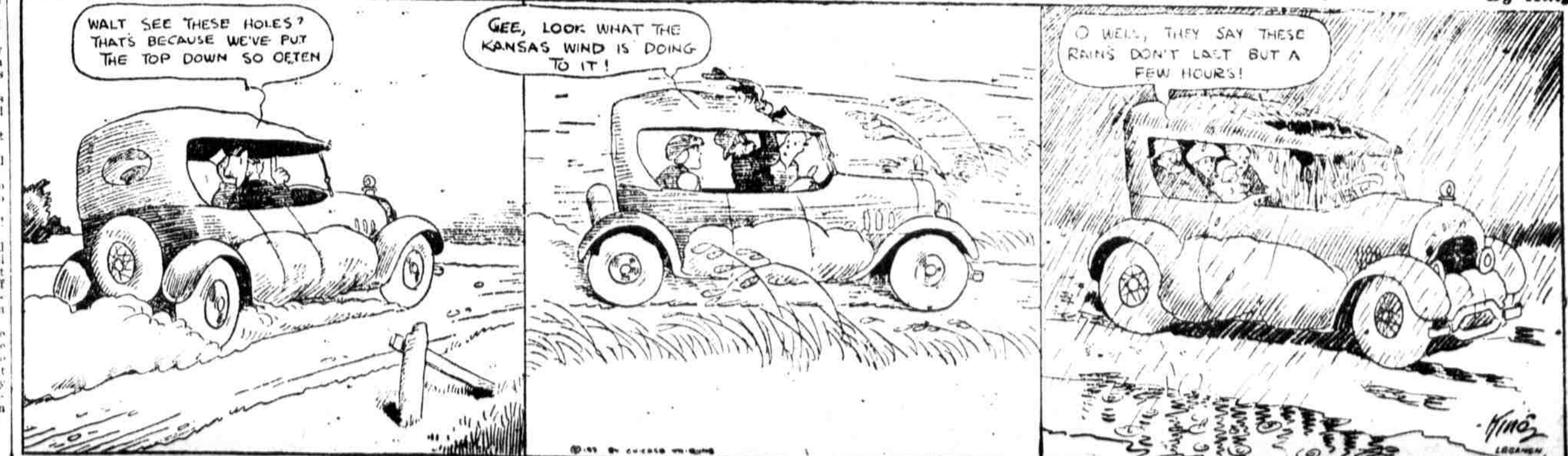
SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—The End of a Perfectly Terrible Day



GASOLINE ALLEY—Open Plumbing



CONTINUED TOMORROW