

A BACHELOR HUSBAND

By RUBY M. AYRES
Author of "Richard Chatterton" Etc.
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THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Marie Chester and Christopher Feathers were raised together, and when her father died they married; and because he loved her; he because he thought she didn't love anybody else, and could use the money the arrangement brought him. On the wedding day she learned the truth and told her friends the life of a Bachelor Husband his friends expected. A Mrs. Heriot throws a party for Marie, and Marie experiences a "grouse" when she is asked to give a party for a friend of her husband. Marie is saddened by the fact that she is not loved as she is loved by her friends. Her loneliness is lessened a little by the courtesy of Feathers, but she feels the neglect and isolation as a result of a party in which Chris goes with Mrs. Heriot and Marie accidentally discovers Feathers' secret. He tells her he is going away.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

She felt very much as she had done that morning when he saved her from drowning—a terrible feeling of hopelessness and despair, until the moment when the grip of his strong hands caught her.

He had saved her life then. Was he going to let her drown now in the depths of her own misery?

Once he went away it would be the end of everything, she knew. He would never come back any more, and on the rest of her life she would have to go on trying to make the best of things, trying to get used to having a bachelor husband.

She knew that the silence had lasted for a long time before Feathers said anything. "There are some people coming, Mrs. Lawrence!"

She looked up then with fiery eyes. "Well, you haven't gone yet," she said defiantly. "Ever so many things may happen before you do."

The day had been a failure, and Marie sat beside Chris as she had done before, but she was very bright as she looked steadily ahead of her down the road.

It was like looking into the future, she thought, as London drew nearer and nearer, and the many lights were symbols of the happiness that lay in wait for her.

She refused to believe that Feathers really would go away. Her whole heart and soul were bent on keeping him near her.

She was very young, or she would have seen the impossibility of the whole thing as he did. Reaction was the power driving her. She who had hitherto had nothing found herself all at once with full hands, and she clasped her treasure to her desperately.

Chris put her down at the house and drove around to the garage with Feathers; he was a long time gone—and when he came back he was alone.

Marie peeped over the banisters when she heard his voice in the hall below, and a faint chill touched her heart when she saw the light in the window.

She had changed her frock to please Feathers. There was somebody at last who cared how she looked. Though he would have said nothing, perhaps would hardly have glanced her way, she would have known that he liked to see her look pretty.

Now that he was not coming she had lost all interest. Her face was listless as she crossed the landing to go downstairs.

As she did so the door of Chris' bedroom opened, and he called to her: "Marie, Marie, Marie!"

Marie hesitated.

"It's nearly dinner-time; what do you want?"

"I want to speak to you."

"One of the servants was coming upstairs, and more for appearance than anything Marie obeyed.

"Yes," she stood in the doorway waiting.

Chris had made no attempt to change for dinner, though he had been in some time. He stretched a hand past her as she stood there and shut the door. Then he said abruptly:

"I'm going away tomorrow, Marie. I'm sick of London." He did not look at her as he spoke, but he had a quick breath she drew, and knew it was one of relief.

His voice was hard as he went on. "I don't want you to come with me."

"No," she was hardly conscious of having spoken the word till she saw the sudden change in his face, but he kept himself under admirable control.

"Why not?" he asked.

She looked away from him.

"I would rather stay here—that is all."

"But I wish you to come."

She looked up.

"You have never wanted me to go anywhere with you before."

"I know—perhaps because I was a damned fool. Anyway, we won't argue. You will come with me tomorrow."

"No, Chris, I shall not."

There was a tragic silence.

"Why not?" Chris asked again hoarsely.

Her lips trembled, but she answered quite gently: "Because I would rather stay here—with Aunt Madge."

She saw the hot blood leap to his face, and quite suddenly he broke out in his passion.

"With Feathers, you mean! Speak the truth and admit it! You want to stay here with him and knock about with him, as you did when I was in Scotland! I'm not such a blind fool as you think!" It's Feathers who has changed you so! Do you think I can't see the difference in you when you're with him and when you're with me? Do you think other people can't see it, too? You heard what that woman, Mrs. Heriot, said at lunch today? "

Marie's face turned crimson, but she would not let her heart be roused and she was as white as a ghost.

"Mrs. Heriot!" she echoed disdainfully.

"And every one else, too!" he raved on. "It's got to stop, I tell you. You're going away with me tomorrow. Do you think I want my wife talking about a party in which she goes with a man but Marie neither spoke nor raised her face out from the corner of her eyes, and the coldness of her averted face cut him to the heart. He caught her by the shoulders roughly.

"You used to love me, Marie Celeste," he said hoarsely.

"Did I?"

The brown eyes met his now. "You never loved me," she said, very quietly.

He broke out again into fresh anger, knowing what he was doing. He hated himself for his blindness, hated her more because she could stand there so unmoved.

"You'll come away with me tomorrow," he said hoarsely. "I insist—just by my wife!"

"Yes—unfortunately," she said, white-lipped.

He stared at her with hot eyes. "Is that how you feel about it? You

hate me as much as that? I know I haven't treated you as well as I ought to have done—I know I'm a selfish chap—but you know that when you married me—you've always known it."

She gave a little weary sigh.

"I'm not complaining; you've always been free."

"I don't care! I don't care at all!" "I don't care! I don't care!" she was saying over and over again in her heart.

"Oh, Chris—please."

He took her hand.

"Can't we start again? I'll do my very best — I swear I will. I know you're too good for me—you always have been. Don't deserve that you should ever have married me, but it's not too late, Marie Celeste. Come away with me, and I'll show you that I can treat you exactly as you like."

Some one knocked at the door.

"Please, sir, Miss Chester sent me to say that dinner was ready half an hour ago."

Marie drew her hand away quickly. The interruption was very welcome. "Let me go—please! Aunt Madge will think it so strange."

"In a moment, Marie. Will you come with me tomorrow? We'll go where you like; I'll do anything in the world you wish . . ."

She shook her head.

"I'll think it over. . . I can't decide now. . . When will you tell me?"

"I don't know; tomorrow—yes, tomorrow morning."

She made the terms of escape from him and went to her room and stood for a moment with her hands hard pressed over her eyes.

The storm had come so suddenly. She wondered who had been responsible for it. Had Mrs. Heriot said anything more—or could it have been Feathers himself? She could hardly force herself to go down to dinner, as she was shaken to the depths of her soul.

Chris talked ceaselessly during dinner. He drank a good deal of wine, and his face grew flushed and his eyes excited.

"You're not going out again, surely?" Miss Chester asked him when afterward he came to the drawing-room for a moment in his overcoat.

"I am just for a stroll; it's so hot indoors," he looked at Marie. "Will you come?"

"I'd rather not; I'm tired—I think I'll stay with Aunt Madge."

But as soon as he had gone she went up to her room and sat down in the darkness. A lifetime seemed to have been crowded into this one day. She felt that she had aged years since they started out in the morning.

Feathers loved her! The knowledge stood out like a beacon light in the darkness. She knew what her life would be with him—happiness and contentment, and she did so long for happiness.

He was a good man, and a strong man; all her empty heart seemed to "stretch out" to him in passionate gratitude and longing.

But she was married . . . She felt for her wedding ring in the darkness and held it fast.

She had married the man she loved, believing that for love her whole life would be his. She was his wife in name only; would there be any great harm if she snapped the frail tie between them?

She sat there for a long, long time, tortured with doubts and indecision. What ought she to do?

Miss Chester came up presently to say good-night. She knew quite well that there had been some trouble between Chris and Marie, but she asked no questions.

"Sleep well, dearie," she said as she went away, and Marie smiled bitterly. How could any one sleep well, torn as she was by such mental indecision?

Did she love Feathers? She could not be sure. That she loved him as a dear friend she knew; that she was always happy with him she also knew; but there was more of the romance and wonder in it that had thrilled her when Chris asked her to marry him.

She wrung her hands in the darkness.

"I don't know—oh, I don't know!"

Chris cared nothing for her. His outburst this evening had been partly anger and partly outraged pride. His was a dog-in-the-manger affection; he did not want her himself, and yet he would get anybody else to have her.

She got up presently and unlocked the door between their rooms, groping along the wall for the switch.

She looked round her husband's room with a tenderness flowed back into her heart.

She had loved him for so long, her life and his were irretrievably bound together. How could she take this step that would sever the tie once and for all?

She wandered round the room aimlessly, picking up little things of his, looking at them, and putting them down again, and all the time the same unanswerable questions were going on in her mind.

If she stayed with him what was there for her in the future? She could only see more disillusionment and tears and sorrow, and if she went with Feathers . . . Marie laughed brokenly, the tears running down her cheeks.

How could she go with Feathers when he had not asked her? And suddenly she remembered the look in his eyes as he said good-night to her an hour or two ago.

She had tried to believe that it was not farewell and renunciation that she had read in them, but she had known that it was. He was stronger than she was. He would not let her go, but he would not dishonor his friend. He would walk away with a smile on his lips, and nobody would ever know what he suffered.

If she tried to break down his strength she was not worthy of his love, and suddenly Marie Celeste hid her face in her hands and broke into bitter crying, which yet brought tears of healing to her heart. She would be worthy of him—she would not be a coward, snatching greedily at the one hope of happiness offered to her; she would go on, trying to be brave, trying to make the best of things.

She went back to her room, leaving the door ajar so that she could hear when Chris came in. He was very late—she heard the lock strike twelve, and then half-past, but still he did not come; and then—at twenty minutes past one she heard a taxi drive up to the door and voices on the path outside.

She pulled aside the blind and peered out, but it was too dark to distinguish anything. Then the cab drove away, and she heard the front door opening below and the sound of steps in the hall.

She crept out onto the landing and looked over the banisters. She could see Chris, his hat pushed to the back of his head and the top of a cigar stuck jauntily into the corner of his mouth, laughing immoderately, and swaying a little on his heels, as he resisted the other man's attempt to help him off with his coat.

THE GUMPS—Those Eyes; Those Lips; Those Nose!

JUST A MOMENT
DEAR READERS TILL WE THROW THE SPOT LIGHT ON FAR AWAY

HE IS NERVOUS AND IRRITABLE - HE WANTS TO BE ALONE - AWAY FROM FRYING EYES -

ASSURED THAT ALL IS QUIET AND THAT HE IS ALONE HE SOFTLY TIPTOES TO A VAULT IN THE SIDE OF THE WALL - HIS NERVOUS FINGERS FINALLY SOLVE THE COMBINATION

HE GROPE FOR A MOMENT - AN! - EAGERLY HE GRASPS THE TREASURE AND BRINGS IT FORTH - 'TIS THE PICTURE OF A WOMAN - A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN - A BLONDE

HEAVEN EYES - YOU DIDN'T WRITE TO ME THIS WEEK - IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW THIS POOR HUNGRY - ACHING - STARVING HEART YEARNED FOR YOU - YOU WONDER WOMAN - WHAT AN INSPIRATION FOR A MAN - OH THAT I WERE WORTHY OF A WOMAN LIKE YOU - NO DECEIT IN THOSE EYES - THEY MUST HAVE BEEN BLENDED WITH VIOLETS AND BLUE BELLS -

THAT WILL BE ALL FOR TONIGHT - NOTHING MORE FOR THIS EVENING JAMES -

POOR UNCLE THE SAME OLD STORY - GOING - GOING -

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SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER???

THERE'S ANOTHER "CUCKOO" - ALMOST AS BAD AS THAT OLD GUY WHO WENT BY YESTERDAY!

SMITHERS & CO. NUTS

?

CONTINUED TOMORROW

THE YOUNG LADY ACROSS THE WAY

The young lady across the way says she wonders how the best college hallback's salary compares with Ty Cobb's for instance.

THE TERRIBLE-TEMPERED MR. BANG AND THE ARMFUL OF KINDLING

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SCHOOL DAYS

HOW TO MAKE A WILD WOMAN

PETEY—No Duck Soup

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GASOLINE ALLEY—It Always Is, Said the Adjuster

GOSH, WALT! SOMEBODY'S COPPED MY SPARE TIRE!

WHAT ANYBODY'D WANT TO STEAL IT FOR IS BEYOND ME - IT WAS AN OLD FABRIC THAT HAD DONE 8000 MILES. I MUST CALL UP THE INSURANCE COMPANY!

I'M THE INSURANCE ADJUSTER I HEAR YOU HAD A TIRE STOLEN

YES, TAKEN RIGHT OFF THE BACK

WHAT KIND WAS IT?

A BRAND NEW CORD THAT HAD NEVER BEEN ON THE WHEEL!

By C. A. Voight

WASN'T IT NICE OF MR. RODEGUN TO ASK US OUT HERE FOR THE DUCK SHOOTING?

I DON'T CARE MUCH ABOUT IT BUT, I LIKE DUCK-SOUP

WE'LL SEPARATE NOW BUT, REMEMBER, BE CAREFUL, DON'T TALK.

- IF THEY'RE REALLY WILD DUCKS THEY WON'T KNOW WHAT WE SAY ANYWAY -

BANG! BANG!

WHO DID THAT?

MY DEAR FELLOW WHAT IN THE WORLD MADE YOU SHOOT AT THAT WOODEN DECOY? - NOW YOU'VE SCARED AWAY ALL THE DUCKS FOR THE REST OF THE DAY -

WHAT DECOY?

- HOW STUPID, UNCLE PETEY!

CONTINUED TOMORROW