

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 Feathers raised together, and when her father died they married; she because she loved him and thought he loved her because he thought he loved her because she could use the money the arrangement brought him. On their honeymoon she learns the truth and tells him he was living the life of a Bachelor Husband his friends expected. Chris neglects Marie and she becomes very depressed. Her love is a tremendous interference, through the intervention of a faithful friend, he comes to realize how hard he has been, but she feels she must leave him, but she feels his new tenderness she gets him another chance. Marcella Webber, a friend of both, comes to visit them.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES
Chris gave a deep sigh of relief when he reached home. He went off to the dining-room and mixed himself a strong whiskey. He felt irritable, but he tried manfully to suppress his irritation. What waste of time it all was, he thought. In and out stuffy, hot payment, in and out stuffy, interesting shops, when one might be out in the country or up on the Scotch moor.
For three days he did his duty nobly. He was away in to men's—he took Marie and Dorothy to a matinee, and to dinner at the Carlton.
"We ought to have had another man to make a fourth," he said to his wife. "I'll ask Feathers to come tomorrow." "I'll ask Feathers to come tomorrow," he said to his wife.
He did ask him, and Feathers refused. He had an appointment, he said, and would come another day.
"What about Italy?" Chris inquired over the phone, and Feathers said that he expected to go in about ten days' time.
Chris told Marie.
"We ought to ask him round before he goes," he said. "You write and ask him to dinner, Marie Celeste."
She wanted to refuse, but did not like to.
"Very well," she was looking pale and tired, and Chris' eyes watched her anxiously.
After a moment he asked:
"How long is Miss Webber going to stay?"
"I don't know. I can't very well ask her to go, can I?" Chris mused around the table.
"I wish she'd go," he said indignantly.
Marie smiled.
"I'm afraid you've had rather a dull week," she admitted. "Why don't you go for a day's golf tomorrow? Take Dorothy—she would love it, I know."
"I'll go if you want me."
"Nonsense. You know how tired I got when we went before. I shall be quite all right at home, and I do hate to know you are tied to the house all day."
He looked hurt, and she listened to add kindly: "It's been very good of you, Chris, and I do thank you."
He laid his hand on her shoulder.
"If you're pleased that's all I care about," he said.
To Marie's surprise, Feathers rang up and accepted her invitation.
She answered the phone herself, and the sound of his voice sent her pulses racing, and the hot blood rushing to her cheeks.
"Do I have to get into war paint?" she asked, and she laughed as she said that he could please himself.
"Why haven't you been to see us before?" she questioned.
"Because I knew you had company, and I haven't any company manners."
"It's only Dorothy Webber—you met her in Scotland."
"Yes."
"There was a little pause, and before she could think of anything else to say he said: "Well, I shall see you this evening."
"Yes."
Marie sighed as she hung up the receiver. She wished he had refused to come, and yet she was longing to see him. She felt painfully nervous as the evening drew nearer.
Chris had driven out into the country with Dorothy to play golf, and for the first time for a week Marie found herself with a little breathing space. Chris' attentions had been rather overwhelming. He had done his best, she knew, and was grateful to him for it, but he left her rather breathless. She could never lose sight of the fact that his attentions were forced and he was able to keep up the pace.
She never gave herself a moment in which to think. She never looked forward, but lived in the present only.
Chris had said he should be home at 6, but at 7 o'clock, when Feathers was announced, he had not returned.
Marie went down to the drawing room with a trembling heart. She had hoped that her husband would have been home before Feathers came. She knew that her face was white as she crossed the room to him and that her voice was wistfully as she said:
"Chris hasn't got back yet—I am so sorry. He promised to be in at 6; I am afraid something has gone wrong with it."
"It's not very late," Feathers said kindly. "I think I am rather before my time. He is sure to be in directly."
Marie walked over to the window and looked into the street. The stentorian evening was closing in rapidly, with rather depressing grayness.
She hoped nothing had happened to them. She said faintly, she was not at all anxious really, but she felt that she must gain time to recover her composure before she could talk to Feathers, and eyes. He had never seen her since that day on the golf links, and he took in every detail of her graceful little figure.
She was wearing a white frock of some gauzy material, cut rather low, and her soft brown hair curled into ringlets like a child's on the white nap of her neck.
"Was she any happier, he wondered? He knew that Chris had been about with her and he hoped with all his heart that things were improving between them. He longed to ask her, but was afraid. He knew that the only safe thing for conversation was to keep to ordinary topics of conversation.
Marie dropped the curtain presently and came back to him.
"What have you been doing with yourself?"
He shrugged his shoulders.
"Oh, nothing in particular. Yesterday I played golf with young Atkins."
"Did he?" Her eyes brightened. "I wish I could see him again."
"He tells me he is going to America shortly. He has been in his father's office, you know, but they don't get on, and so I think it's very wise of him to clear out."
"And are you going to Italy?" Marie said constraintfully.
"Chris suggested that we should go, too, but—but I don't think I care to."
"It's the wrong time of year to see Italy, I know."
She looked at him wistfully. No strong, such a man! Losing to know the perfect happiness of his love crept into her heart.
There would be no half measures

with him, she knew; no pretenses. He would give all or nothing.
In spite of what he had said, Feathers had struggled into evening clothes. They did not fit him particularly well, but they seemed to magnify the squareness and strength of his build. Though he was not so tall as Chris, he always looked taller, and, despite his ugly features, there was something very noble in the rough outline of his head and shaggy hair.
"Where are they playing today?" he asked, breaking a silence that was beginning to get unbearable, and Marie said:
"Where we went before—the place where Mrs. Heriot is staying."
"Oh?" There was something dry in the little monosyllable that made her say impulsively: "I suggested it, Chris has been so unselfish lately, taking us about all over the place. I thought he deserved a holiday—he likes playing with Dorothy, you know."
"There was the sound of a car driving up outside, and Feathers said, with obvious relief: "Here they are, I expect."
Chris came into the room a moment later. He looked at his wife anxiously. "I'm sorry, Marie Celeste," he said. "The wretched car broke down, and it took me half an hour to get it right. I hope you haven't been anxious about us. How are you, old chap?"
"The two men shook hands.
"Where is Dorothy?" Marie asked, and Chris looked away from her as he said, "I believe she went straight upstairs to dress."
"I'll go and tell her not to hurry."
Marie ran up to her friend's room, glad to get away for a moment. She knocked at the door, and getting no answer, turned the handle and went in. Dorothy was standing in the middle of the room, her hands over her face. She had made no attempt to change her frock, and she still wore her coat and the jaunty velvet cap with a jay's wing at the side in which she had started out that morning.
Marie gave a little stifled cry.
"Dorothy! Oh, what is the matter?"
Dorothy started violently. She dabbed her eyes hurriedly with her handkerchief and tried to laugh.
"Nothing. Don't look so worried! I'm only rather worried." She turned away to hide her face. "I've had a letter with rather bad news. No, I can't tell you now—it's nothing. Please go down and I'll be ready in a minute. I'm so sorry we're late, Marie. The silly car went wrong."
"I know," Chris told me, Dorothy are you sure there is nothing the matter—nothing I can do for you?"
"Quite sure! Run downstairs, there's a dear! I won't be a minute." She almost turned Marie out of the room.
Chris was coming upstairs as she crossed the landing, and he stopped, looking at her in quick concern.
"Anything the matter, Marie Celeste?"
"No, only—Chris, Dorothy is crying so! She won't tell me what it is the matter. She says she's had bad news in a letter."
He went to his room, abruptly.
"It's probably nothing, I shouldn't worry."
His voice sounded rather strange and unnatural, and Marie was puzzled as she went slowly downstairs.
The postman had just been and one of the servants was sorting the letters at the hall table. Marie went up to her. "Greyson, were there any letters for Miss Webber by the afternoon post?"
"No, ma'am—none! Only two for Miss Chester."
Marie's brown eyes dilated.
"There has only been the one post since the early morning, hasn't there?" she asked.
"Yes, ma'am."
"Thank you." She went on to the drawing room, with a little feeling of apprehension.
Dorothy had lied to her, then. Why? She thought of the strained note in Chris' voice as he spoke to her on the landing, and a nameless fear crept into her heart.
Chris talked incessantly during dinner. Marie had never seen him so gay, and though she tried her best to kill it, the suspicion that he knew the cause of Dorothy's distress grew in her heart.
Something had happened between them that afternoon.
"You ladies are very quiet," Feathers said, turning to her, and Marie roused herself with an effort.
Dorothy Webber was almost silent. Her head ached, she said; she thought she must have been the sun that afternoon.
"You played a fine game," Chris told her. "I shall have to look to my laurels." She did not answer, seemed not to have heard, and Marie asked, "Did you see Mrs. Heriot?"
"Yes. She and her sister had a four-some with us." It was Chris who answered, "She said she would like to give you her love," he added with a twinkle, "and to say that she should be in town tomorrow and would call to see you."
It was on the tip of Marie's tongue to say that she would not be in, but she checked the words. After all, Mrs. Heriot did not matter to her. She was no longer actively jealous.
The dinner was hardly a success.
"What's the matter with every one?" Dorothy asked impatiently as she and Marie followed Miss Chester to the drawing room. "Didn't you think we were all very dull?" she appealed to the old lady.
"I really didn't notice, my dear," Miss Chester answered complacently. "I have just worked it out in my mind, and I believe I shall finish that shawl in another three days."
Marie laughed. "And how long has it taken you to work, dear?"
"Scarcely two years, but then I worked slowly, and my sight is not so good as it used to be," Miss Chester answered. Marie took up a foot of the shawl. It was exquisite; soft and of the finest pattern.
"It would make a lovely shawl for a baby," she said, and then flushed, meeting her aunt's eyes. She got up and went over to the piano, and began turning over some music. She knew the thought that had been in Miss Chester's mind, and her heart ached. Young as she was herself, Marie loved children, and one very tender dream had gone crashing to earth with the ruins when her castle fell.
Dorothy had flung herself into an armchair, her arms folded behind her head, her eyes fixed moodily on the ceiling.
There was a softened, chastened look about her this evening. The maudlinity which was usually her chief characteristic seemed to have gone, leaving in its place something of greater attraction.
"Play something, Marie," she said suddenly, but Marie shook her head. "I don't feel in the mood for music."
She dragged up a stool and sat down at Miss Chester's feet. Across the hall she could hear Feathers' voice, and Chris' laugh, and she listened to both with a queer feeling of unreality.
"What an ugly man Mr. Falors is?" Dorothy said suddenly. "I don't think I ever saw any one so ugly before."
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THE GUMPS—Delicate Sarcasm



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—She Was Just About to Call the Police



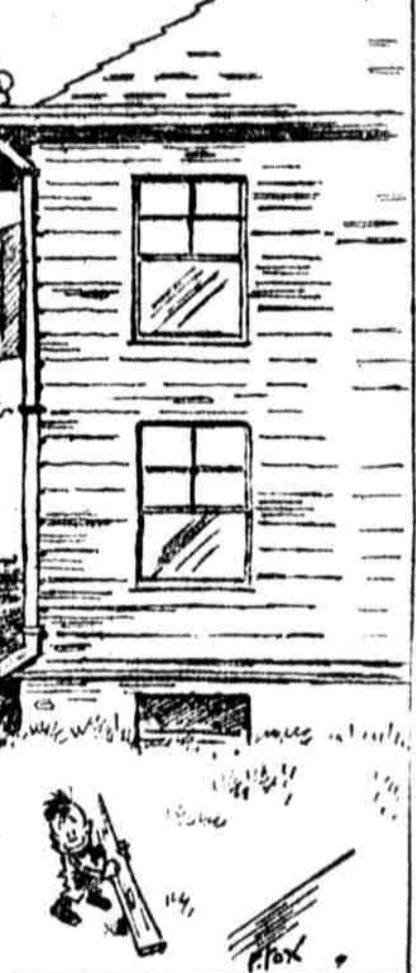
The Young Lady Across the Way



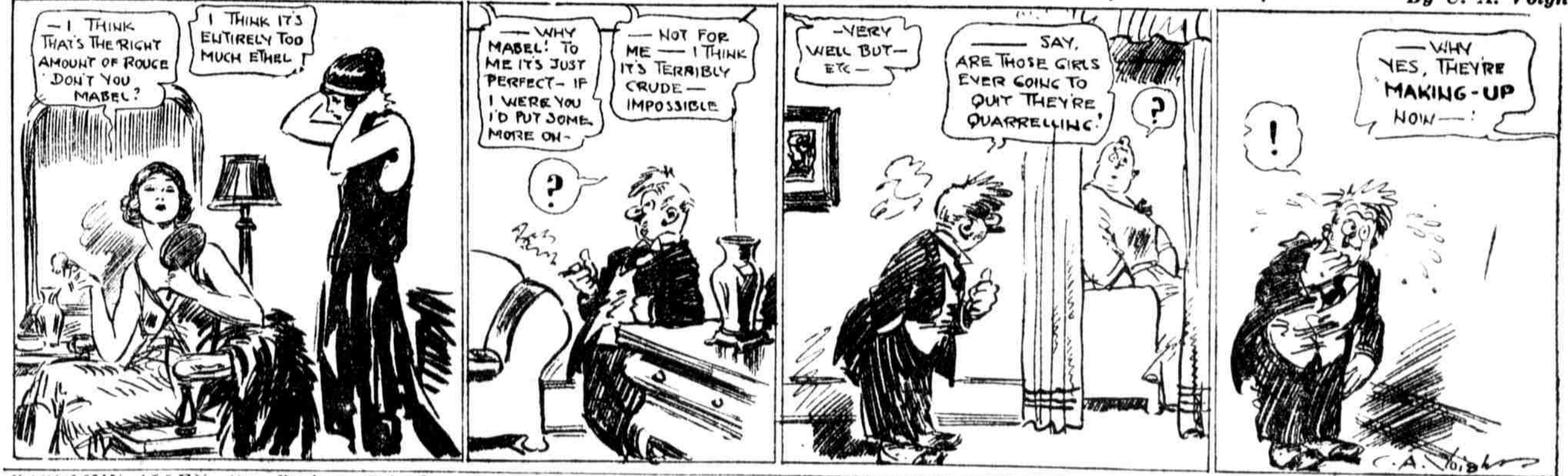
MAKING USE OF THE DRAIN PIPE



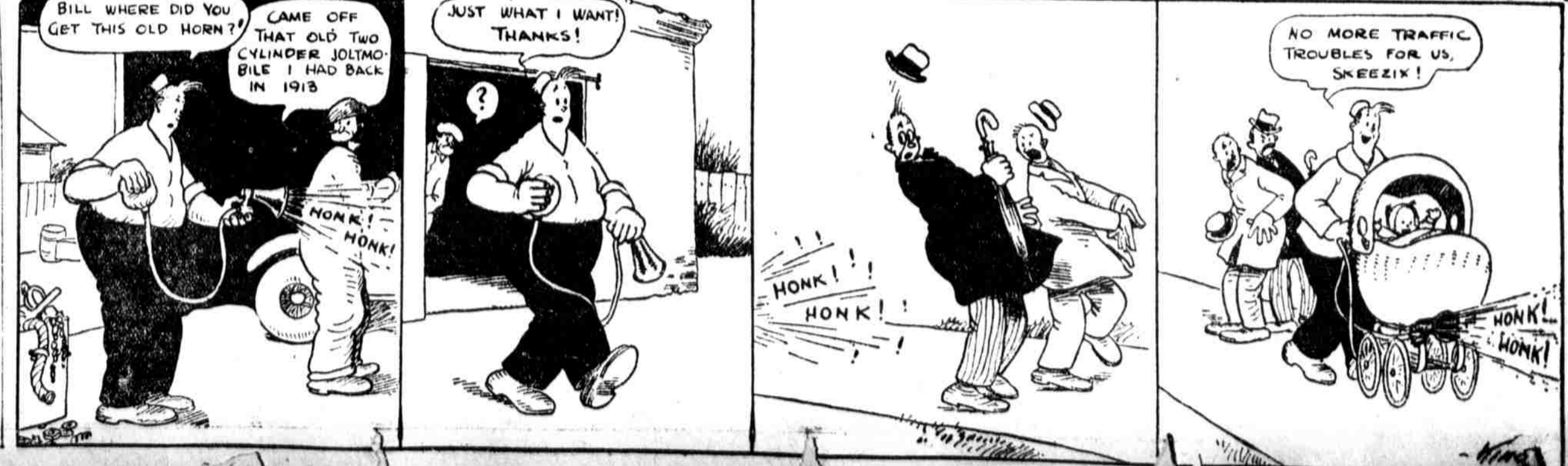
SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—Just Like the Woman



GASOLINE ALLEY—One Problem Solved



CONTINUED TO MORROW