

# A BACHELOR HUSBAND

By RUBY M. AYRES

Author of "Richard Chatterton," Etc.  
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HE DID not open Marie's letter till he got back home, and he read it in the deserted drawing room where she had written it. He had never been so often at the house, he thought wretchedly. He wished never to see it again.

Marie's letter was very short:

"Please do not try to see me. I can't bear it. I want time to think things over and decide what to do. I will send for you if ever I want you."

Marie Celeste.

That was all; but it was like a death warrant to him.

If ever she wanted him! His heart told him that she would never want him again! He had had his chance and thrown it away.

During the days that followed, in his distress and loneliness, Chris felt back a great deal upon young Atkins.

After Miss Chester's funeral and the closing of the house it was Chris's suggestion that he and Atkins should go into rooms together. Chris hated the idea of his own company, and he knew that as long as he lived he would never find another friend to take Feathers's place.

He had suffered acutely over his wife's tragic death; he could not bear to speak of him. He even put away his golf sticks because they were such a vivid reminder of the happy days they had spent together.

"I never want to play the beastly game again!" he told a man who questioned him about it in the club one night.

He was at a terribly loose end in those days and young Atkins was just the right sort of companion for him—always cheery and bright and full of the optimism of youth.

He had quarreled badly with his father and had been out off with the proverbial shilling.

"Not that it matters," he said philosophically. "I've got about two hundred a year the matter left me, and I reckon I can always knock up another two hundred."

He had decided to go to America, but for Chris's sake he put it off for a day. He felt that it was doing something for Marie if he helped her husband through the dark days before him. Though he did not know anything like the whole of the story, he was smart enough to piece together the few little bits which Chris sometimes let drop.

He was intensely sorry for them both and would have been glad to deal to help and put things right. Once, unknown to Chris, he hired a motor-bike and went down to see Marie and his sister.

He found them in the garden, pacing together up and down the little lawn. It was autumn then, and the bosom of the river was covered with brown and yellow leaves from the trees on the banks. There was an acrid smell in the air, too, which always comes with the end of summer.

He thought Marie was pleased to see him—certainly the color deepened a little in her pale face when she first saw him.

But she had changed! Oh, how she had changed, he thought sadly. There was not much left of the little girl who had first of all attracted his boyish fancy.

He talked of everything under the sun, rattling on in his usual haphazard manner, and she smiled at him sometimes smiling, but hardly speaking.

He did not mention Chris or tell her that they were sharing rooms—much more expensive rooms than he could possibly have afforded alone; but Chris had insisted on paying the difference.

It was just as he was going, and Millicent had left them together for a little while, that Marie said suddenly:

"Tommy—do you know that it's a month today since Mr. Dakers died?"

"Is it? A month! How the time flies, doesn't it?"

"Yes." She was looking out across the open country at the back of the little house, and he thought he had never seen such sadness in anyone's face.

He laid a hand on hers in clumsy comfort.

"It was a fine sort of death, anyway," he said in desperation. "Just the sort of death a man like Feathers would have chosen."

"Marie—do you mind your life twice?"

He realized too late that he had spoken tactlessly, but to his surprise she only smiled—a wise little smile which he could not fathom.

"Yes," she said softly, almost happily it seemed.

There was a little silence, then he broke out again.

"It seems a lifetime since we all met for the first time at that hotel, doesn't it? You and I, and Chris, and poor old Feathers."

"It's only a little more than three months," she told him.

"Is it?" he cleared his throat nervously. "Jove! how time flies," he said again, reminiscently.

They sat silent for some minutes, then he rose to his feet, and said that he must be going.

"I told Chris I would be in at seven," he said unthinkingly, then stopped, frowning with himself for having mentioned the name he had sworn to avoid.

She looked up quickly, her brown eyes dilating.

"Chris? Are you living with him then?"

"Yes." He twisted his cap with agitated fingers. "He went back to his Knightsbridge rooms after—well, after Miss Chester's house was sold, you know, but of course you do know."

She shook her head.

"I have not seen him for a month."

Young Atkins looked wretched. He knew from the little Chris had told him that this separation had been her own wish, and therefore he could not understand her attitude now.

He did not know that she had written that last note to her husband more as a test than for any other reason. With her old childish way of reasoning, she had argued to herself that if he really cared for her nothing on earth would keep him away; and once again she had been disappointed. He had apparently agreed without a word of demur—he had never attempted to approach her.

"I know he's jolly miserable, anyway," young Atkins broke out explosively after a moment. "He never goes anywhere—he just sits and smokes and thinks. He's changed so! It's rotten! And he used to be such a cheery soul!"

He seemed afraid all at once that he had said too much, for he made another attempt to escape.

"Your sister has been so good to me," she said suddenly. "I don't know what I should have done without her. I shall miss her dreadfully when I go away."

He looked up in swift distress.

"But you're not going! You mustn't! She's ever so pleased to have you with her. Where are you going?"

She looked away from him down the dusky road, and there was a little eloquent pause before she said slowly:

"I'm going back—to Chris."

"To Chris!" he could hardly believe it. He gripped both her hands. "Hoo-

## Can Love Survive Middle Age?

Charles Shirley, more than half way through life, thought maybe it couldn't. He was frankly bored with life, with himself and with his wife Bertha.

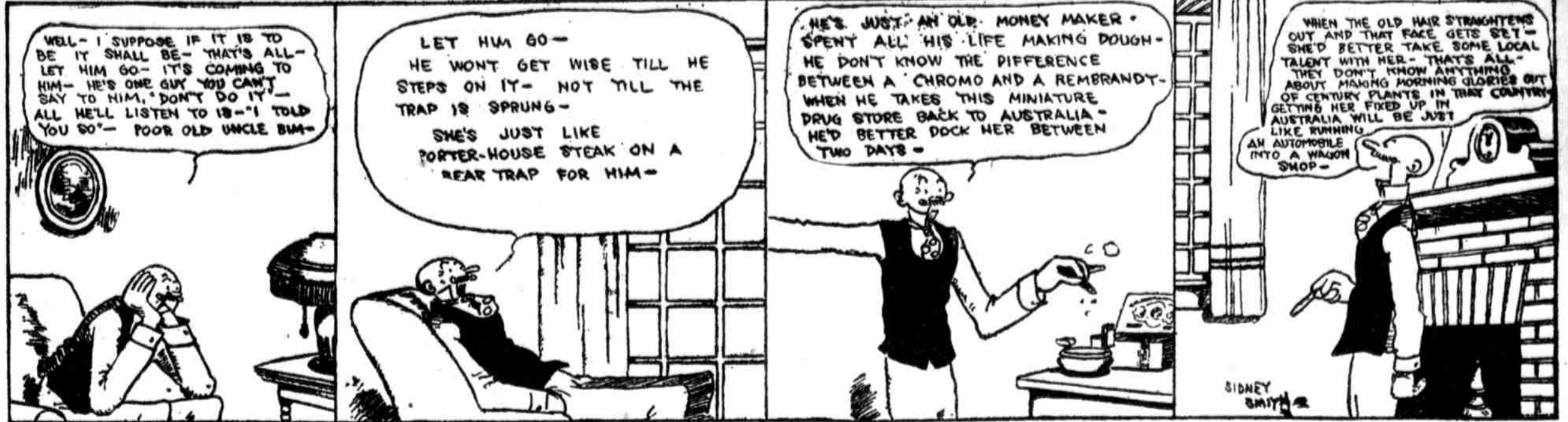
Bertha Shirley, a coy forty that tried subtraction by cosmetics and girlish ways, added to her husband's disbelief in the permanency of love by alternate archness and nagging.

If it hadn't been for Margery, thirty in years, fifteen in spirit, romance might not have stirred anew in Charles. The suburban community called her a "husband snatcher." But was she?

"THE MAN WHO WAS TIRED OF HIS WIFE" answers the question, beginning.

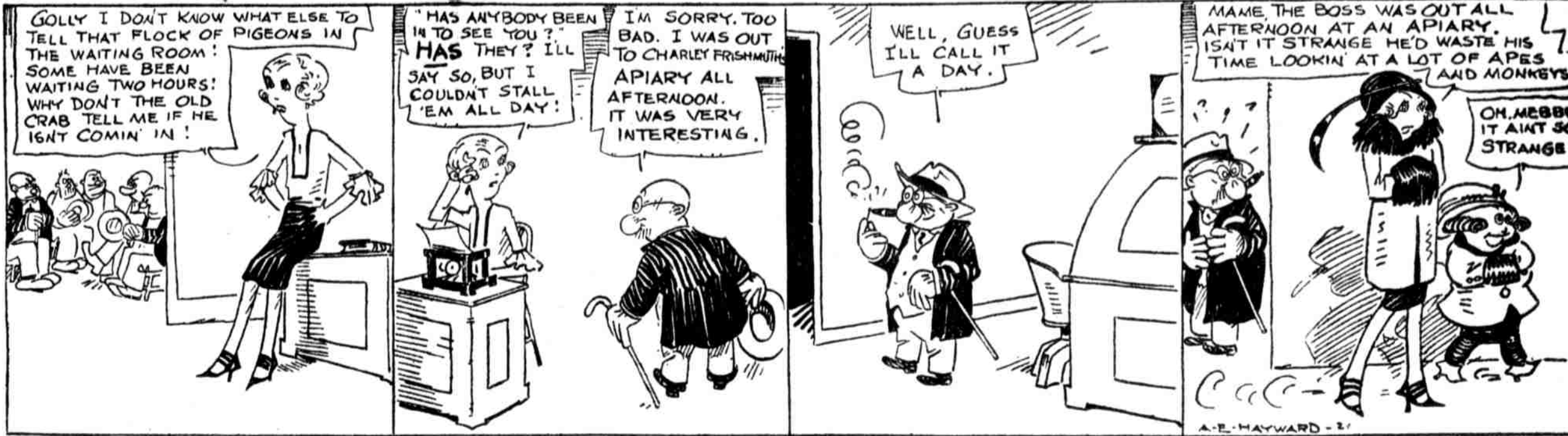
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## THE GUMPS—A Peek Into the Future



By Sidney Smith

## SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER—The Boss Is Neglecting Business



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## The Young Lady Across the Way



We asked the young lady across the way if she favored the feminine school and she said she never even heard of it and expected to go to Vassar.

## FAMILY STUFF



THE JONES FAMILY CELEBRATE ANOTHER ARMISTICE DAY WHEN SISTER CALLED OFF THE SCRAP SHE HAD BEEN HAVING WITH HER WEALTHY BEAU.

## SCHOOL DAYS



A DOUBLE EXPOSURE

## PETEY—Yes, Girls Do Change



By C. A. Voight

## GASOLINE ALLEY—Avery as a Peacemaker



By King

CONTINUED TOMORROW