

By Sidney Smith

THE ONE UNWANTED

By RUBY AYRES
Author of "A Bachelor Husband," etc.
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THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Sally disappointed her family, who wanted a boy, and she was only a girl. Escapades lead to shipping her off to a Devon farm. Sally is delighted with her new surroundings and friends, particularly Mark Anderson, a gentleman farmer, who saves her when she falls through the ice, though he is gruff with her for not keeping her feet out of the water. Then he tightens the rebrake with a kiss. Her father visits her, bringing a big, good-looking man, introduced as Lionel Champion, who seems curt when Mark's name is mentioned. It seems he holds the mortgages on Mark's estates and had married his father. Mark proposes to Sally, and when the farmer's wife hears of it she is much disturbed. Mark tells Sally he is not yet in a financial position to marry. Mr. Champion comes again and suggests that he might release some of the mortgages he holds on Mark's property. He offers to do so, on condition that if her engagement to Mark is broken, she will give him a chance. Later Sally is shocked by a note from Mark stating that he loves her, but she sees him as she says it is best they forget each other. Then she is gone. Disillusioned, Sally decides to return to the farmer's house. The last day in Devon passes heavily. She meditates on her dispassionate love.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

MIGHT live for years yet! And so, why should I not have as good a time as possible? What was the use of eternally wearing the willow for a man who cared nothing for me?

But just for a minute I shut my eyes and thought of Mark as he had looked when he first kissed me; of the feel of his arms round me and the touch of his lips on mine.

But it was only for a minute. The next I was on my feet, trying desperately to think of something else, and look forward, always forward, and never look behind.

I crept into bed and lay facing the freight till I fell asleep. But I could only have slept a little while, for when I woke with a start the grandfather clock outside my door was striking eleven, and I sat up in bed and counted the slow strokes with a swiftly beating heart.

For it was not the clock that had wakened me nor any little sound in the house; but the instinctive feeling that some one had called my name.

I listened, but I could hear nothing. "A dream," I thought, and lay down again and closed my eyes.

But almost immediately I was up in bed once more, breathing fast, for I knew—though I had not actually heard any sound—that some one was near me, trying to attract my attention.

Mark! My first thought flew to him, only to be dismissed. What could he want with me? But after a moment I crept out of bed and over to the window.

The fire was still burning brightly, and as I drew aside the blind to peer out its light must have shown up my figure distinctly to any one outside.

It was a very still night, starlight, but I could see nothing down in the garden, save the queer shapely bushes beneath the window and beyond them the irregular line of the stone wall that divided the farm property from that road.

But I stood there until I was trembling with cold, and then I crept back to bed.

It must have been a dream, that was all. And by and by I fell asleep, and only woke to find my room filled with daylight.

CHAPTER XXX

One Final Encounter

Mrs. Alberty brought my breakfast upstairs that morning.

"You've a long drive and you'll be tired out," she said, when I objected. "It's early yet. There's no need to get up for another hour or more."

But I dressed as soon as I had had my breakfast, and wandered out into the farm. The sun was shining again, and I wished it had been raining, so that I should not have intended leaving the country so much. Ned, the wood-chopper, called, and came round the farm with me. I think he was more sorry than any one that I was going away. His owlish eyes were quite wistful, and when I gave him five shillings as a parting present I thought he was going to cry, as he backed away from me, shaking his head.

"I don't want no money from you, miss," he said. "Anything as I've done for you I've been real pleased to do."

But I made him take it, and we shook hands, and I felt the bearlike grip of his round my fingers for quite an hour afterward.

Mr. Champion came punctually at ten. I saw his car some distance away along the road, and my heart sank into my boots.

"This was really the end. I had got to go, and without seeing Mark."

I went up to my room and put on my hat and coat. There was a horrid lump in my throat, and my eyes were full of tears as I looked round the room. It had never seemed so beautiful, or so much like home. Even the ugly pictures on the walls became dear at a distance.

I went up to the one of Claude Duval and the countess dancing on the green and stared at the man. Yes, he was very like Mark Anderson, but I hated him because something in his face brought again that desolate feeling that I should never be happy any more.

I turned away and went downstairs. Mr. Champion was in the best parlor, where a roaring fire had been lit for his special benefit, and he looked round with a smile when I walked into the room.

"How do you do?" he said gravely, and we shook hands. "Well, are you quite ready?" he asked, and I said, "Yes, quite."

"Well, wrapped up? It's cold in spite of the sun," he said. "I replied, 'Yes, quite, thank you.' It was all terribly formal and unfriendly. Then Mrs. Alberty came in, and she said, 'I've never been so happy anywhere as I have here.' I told her, but did not add, as I might truthfully have done, 'I'm so wretched.'"

I kissed Mr. Alberty, too (I dare say neither would have been scandalized), and then I got into the car beside Mr. Champion, with my boots strapped in behind, and presently we were driving down the uneven lane to the main road below the farm.

I looked back when we reached the end of the lane, and Ned with the two dogs, and I only saw them as a blur for the tears in my eyes.

Then the car jerked over a deep rut in the lane and into the main road.

I clasped my hands tightly in my lap. We had to pass Mr. Anderson's house before we were quite out of the village, and I felt the blood rising to my face, and I did not dare to turn my head as we sped by.

A moment—and it was over! And I gave a long breath of relief. I hoped wildly that I should never see him again, and yet all the time there was almost a prayer in my heart that I might see him once more before Langton was left behind, perhaps forever.

Well—I did, for Mr. Champion, it appeared, had left something at the hotel in Langton where he had stayed overnight, and he stopped the car to fetch it, and I was left outside alone.

Langton was only a small, straggling sort of town, but the Alberts always spoke of it as if it were of great importance, and I was thinking how enormous London would seem by contrast when I heard the clop-clop of a horse's hoofs, and half turning in the seat I saw Mark Anderson riding up the road behind me.

He did not see me till he came abreast with the car, when he casually turned his head and our eyes met.

I nodded, I could not trust myself to speak for home, as he said lightly. "I know for a fact," I said, "I saw the blood on your face as you lay hand over hand on the steering wheel, and I gave no acknowledgment, and the next moment he had passed on."

Mr. Champion came out from the hotel, climbed in beside me, and turned the car about.

"Now for home," he said lightly. "I'm a bit of a ghost, I know, and I saw the blood on your face as you lay hand over hand on the steering wheel, and I gave no acknowledgment, and the next moment he had passed on."

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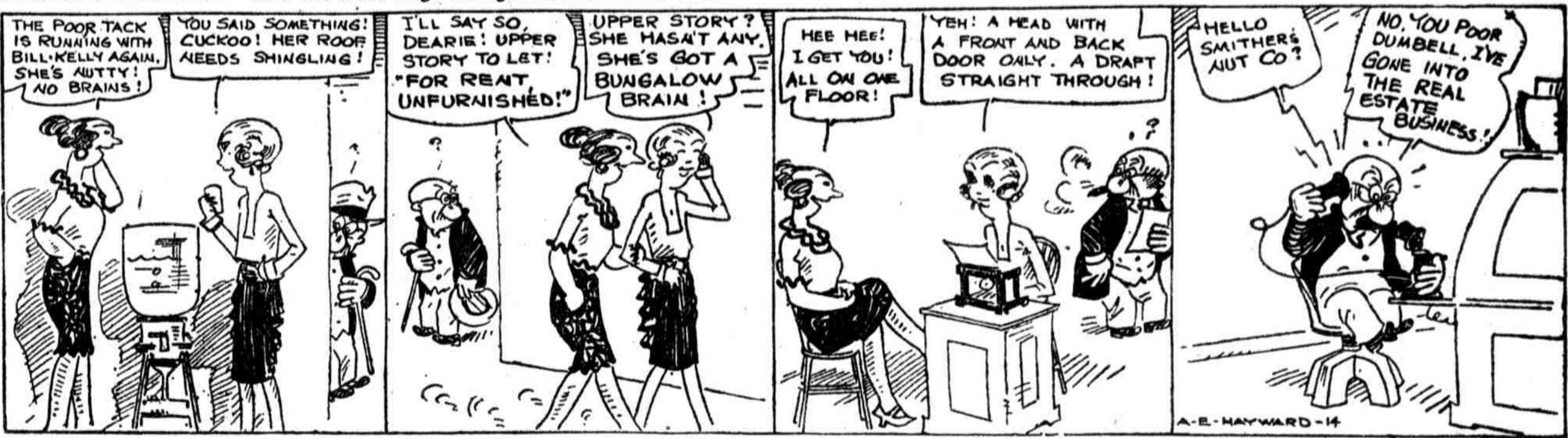
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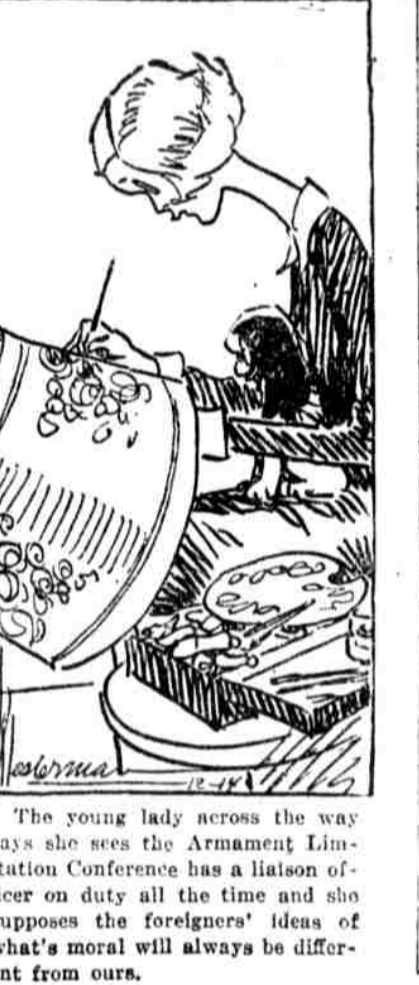
THE GUMPS—Ho! Hum!



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—And the Boss Pays a High Rent for This Talk



The Young Lady Across the Way



NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—Something Went Wrong on the Receiving End



GASOLINE ALLEY—The Wise Old Bird

