

By Sidney Smith

THE ONE UNWANTED

By RUBY HYRES

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 baby. Recaptured and shipped up to a farm. Here she falls in love with Mark Anderson, a gentleman farmer, who proposes to her and then apparently jilts her, saying that she cannot afford to marry. In the meantime, an older man, also desirous of her, and she promises to marry him if she can get her father's property. Distressed, Sally returns home to London, escorted by Champion. Bitterly she determines to change into social purity to forget her woes.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

CHAPTER XXXII

Engaged!

WALKED into the morning room and turned on the light; there was a fire burning and the room looked cozy.

"You can bring us some supper here," I said to the maid who was hovering anxiously round. "And you must not tell any one we are coming."

She went away, and Mr. Champion sat the door and came over to me.

"Do they always treat you like that?" he asked, and then, as I nodded, he said emphatically, "It's a confounded shame."

"Oh, that's nothing," I said. "I was a fool to come home, I suppose. I thought things would be different now. I never was right. I might have known I should always be the unloved one to the end of the chapter."

There was a little silence. Then Mr. Champion said: "Marry me, Sally, and we'll show them we don't care what they think. I know you don't believe I love you, but I do. I'd give anything I owned to make you happy."

I looked at him. The tears were running down my face; I don't think I had ever felt so forlorn in my life. I had expected such a different kind of come, and the kind of kindness of his eyes was like a soothing touch on my sore heart.

Why not marry him? Why not? I asked myself recklessly. I might go on for the rest of my life long as he was impossible, hoping that some day Mark Anderson would come back into my life, and hoping in vain.

Nobody wanted me at home. Why should I refuse this chance of happiness offered to me?

"I don't love you; you know that," I said. "But if you are willing to take the risk, I'll have to take it for both of us."

"I do!"

"So we were engaged! I did not see whether that night, though, after I was in bed, she came into the room and whispered my name softly."

I pretended to be asleep, and after a moment she went away.

I was awake all night; the room seemed so stiff and unfriendly after the old-fashioned coziness of my room at the Alberts. Though I tried not to think of it, or of them, there seemed room for nothing else in my thoughts.

What were they doing? What was Mark doing? Did he know that I was never coming back any more? Did he care?

"He'll marry Nina, of course," I told myself. "And I don't care if he does."

Mr. Champion was much better looking, or so I tried to pretend. So much nicer. As his wife I should have a better time of it, and yet—nobody knows how I longed to be back in Devonshire, how I longed for the brief happiness I had known there.

I went downstairs the following morning to find my father in sole possession of the breakfast room. He looked embarrassed when he saw me, and more embarrassed still when I went over and kissed his cheek.

"Here I am again, you see," I said, and he answered, "So I see. Well, are you glad to be home?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Where is everybody?" I asked.

"Every one has breakfast in bed but me," he said rather grimly; and I said, "Oh, of course! I had forgotten. Well, always had it at 7 o'clock at Mrs. Albert's."

"So you've sent that young man to the mintabouts, eh?" my father said abruptly.

I felt the color rush to my face at the unexpected challenge.

"If you mean Mr. Anderson, yes," I answered, "but that's out of the question. I didn't care about one another, after all."

"There are plenty of better men in the world," Mr. Champion put in for instance? I asked.

He did not answer, and I went on calmly: "I dare say he'll be coming to see you this morning. We're engaged to be married."

My father stared blankly for a moment, then he said:

"Good heavens! Bless my soul! He got up and came round to where I sat and kissed me. 'Good girl! I was afraid you wouldn't have him! Thank goodness! Now, perhaps your mother will be satisfied.'"

"And," I went on, "I'm going to marry him as soon as possible, so I shall soon be off your hands for good."

He said again: "Good heavens! What will Nell say?"

I did not care at all what Nell would say.

After breakfast I went up to mother's room and broke the glad tidings to her. She called me her "darling girl," and said she was delighted. She told me how vastly I had improved in appearance.

"We must think out a beautiful trousseau for you, Sally," she said. "Something entirely original."

She talked like that for about half an hour, all I was only too glad to escape. The house stifled me with its atmosphere of artificiality. I would have given my soul to have been back in Devonshire again, in the muddy lanes and fields, in the fresh sweet air.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Swift Current of Desire

I had not seen either of my sisters, and I was not anxious to do so; so I had put on my hat to go out when a message came to say would I go down to the library—Mr. Champion was there.

For a moment I had the dreadful feeling that last night I had made the greatest mistake of my life by accepting him. Then I pulled myself together with an effort and went downstairs.

Mr. Champion was there with father, and they both were looking very pleased.

Father called me "my dear," and kissed me, and said he was proud of me, by which I knew that the marriage settlements were entirely satisfactory.

Though we always lived extravagantly and had everything we wanted, I knew I was not really a great deal of money in our family, and I realized that a blessing to every one the acquisition of a rich son-in-law would be.

Then father said that he supposed we should like to have a chat alone, and he went away and shut the door carefully behind him.

I looked up at Lionel.

"You need not have been in such a hurry," I said resentfully.

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"I wanted to make sure of you," he answered.

He put out his hand and took mine. "Do you really want to get set to work for me, Sally?" he asked. And the earnestness of his voice surprised me. He was looking very young that morning. The "man of the world" air about him seemed to have vanished.

"Like you very much now," I answered.

It was true! I did like him, but I knew how vain it would be for him to hope for anything more.

"I'll do my best to make you happy," he said.

I nodded. "I am sure you will."

It was all forced and unnatural, and against my will, my thoughts went back to the day when my voice faltered. But what was the use of thinking? I had made up my mind to look ahead—always.

"I'm your mother pleased?" he asked and I answered that I supposed so, as she had called me her "darling girl," and said I could have as many new frocks as I liked.

He frowned at my stupidity.

"When you talk like that you are like your sisters," he said.

"I want to be like them," I said hastily. "It's much better to be that sort of a girl. I think people are much happier when they have no heart, no feeling."

He caught me by both arms.

"I hate you to talk like that, Sally. I hate to see that hard look in your eyes."

"It wasn't there the first time I saw you—down in Devonshire."

I tried myself with an effort.

"Oh, but that's ages ago," I said breathlessly. "I'm much older now and wiser."

"You ought to like me better as I am now. I laughed nervously. "I remember how dirty and untidy I was that day you and father walked in! Whatever must you have thought of me?"

"It was the day I fell in love with you," he answered.

I did not like him in this serious mood; it made it terribly difficult for me to play the part I had set myself.

"Well, we're engaged anyway," he said. "And I hope you won't regret it."

"I moved so that the width of the library table was between us."

"I told mother that we are going to be married soon—very soon," I said feebly. "I hope you don't mind."

"Mind?" He laughed. "To-morrow will suit me. I can get a special license if you like."

There was a curious fire in his eyes.

"There's a hurry," I said. "Somehow I was beginning to be afraid of him."

There followed a week of gaiety that swept me off my feet and allowed me no time to think.

I spent my mornings at the dressmaker's and the afternoons and evenings being taken round to balls, parties and theatres.

Nell had gone away to stay with some people in Scotland. I supposed that her pride, if nothing more serious, had been hurt by the fact that I had taken Lionel Champion from her.

"Nell could have had him if she had liked," my Aunt Allison assured me when she came to the house. "However, there are as good fish in the sea as any that are caught."

She looked at me with resentful eyes; Nell was her favorite and I dare say she hated me for having cut her out.

"I suppose I shall have to give you a wedding present," she added nastily. I flushed as I looked at her.

"I hope you won't," I said. "If you do I shall throw it away or give it to one of my servants. You always hated me, so you need not pretend anything different just because I'm going to marry a rich man."

"She looked a little taken aback."

"I don't know that I hate you," she said after a moment. "Perhaps I never troubled to understand you."

"Well, you need not trouble now," I answered. "You'll be rid of me for ever—and a good job, too."

I turned to stalk out of the room but she called me back.

"Come here, Sally."

I hesitated, then walked across to her.

"Well?" I said defiantly.

CHAPTER XXIV

A Fairy Godmother

She held out her hand to me—a white, useless-looking hand it was and smothered with rings, but after a second I put my own in it.

"Well?" I said again uneasily. I had never known her like this before. She was always hard and unyielding.

"I have heard a great many stories about you—and a young man down in the country," she said. "I don't know the truth—no. You need not look angry, I don't want to know—but if you really care for him, don't make the mistake of your life by marrying Lionel Champion. Years ago I did something of the same sort and you see what I am now! A sour old woman!"

There! I've never told anybody else, and I don't know why I've told you. Run away, she added sharply, as if ashamed of her confidence.

But I stood looking at her with eyes that really seemed to see her for the first time.

Her voice had been so gentle when she spoke, and there was something quite sweet about her face now. It had been so hard.

Before I was aware of it I had faltered out:

"But if—if he doesn't care—for me? What then?"

"Are you sure that he doesn't care?" said Aunt Allison.

Mother came into the room and I could say no more; but all day long her words haunted me.

"Are you sure that he doesn't care?" Are you sure?

Of course. I was sure! Had he not said so himself?

But I wrote to Mrs. Albert that afternoon and told her about my engagement.

I knew she would tell Mark Anderson, and then, if he still cared for me, ever such a little, surely—but he did not care! I was a fool to try to cheat myself with such a hope.

When Lionel came that night and pressed me to fix our wedding day, I said I did not care when it was.

"In a fortnight?" he asked. I drew back.

"Oh, not quite so soon—in a month perhaps."

"A month, then," he said, and I answered, "Oh, very well."

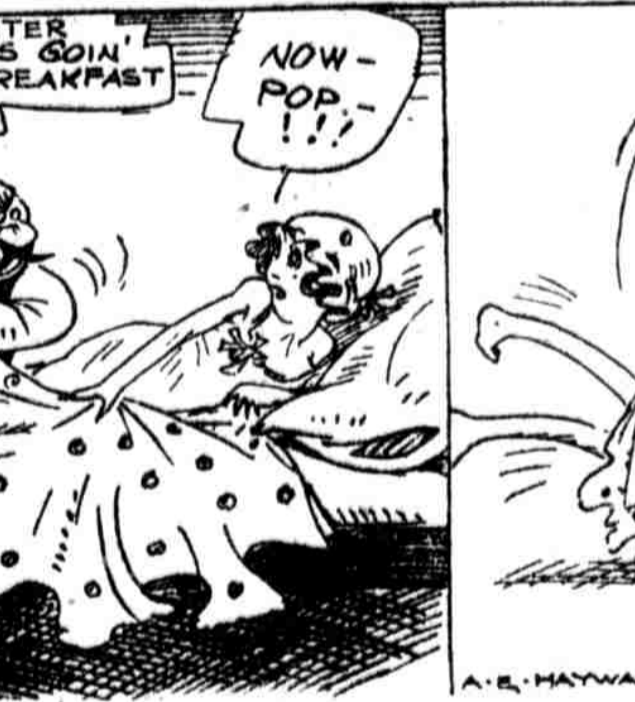
"A month, or two months? What difference does it make?"

CONTINUED TOMORROW

THE GUMPS—That's Another Story



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—A Luxurious Morning



The Young Lady Across the Way



THE HOME-MADE SIGHT-SEEING CONVEYANCE



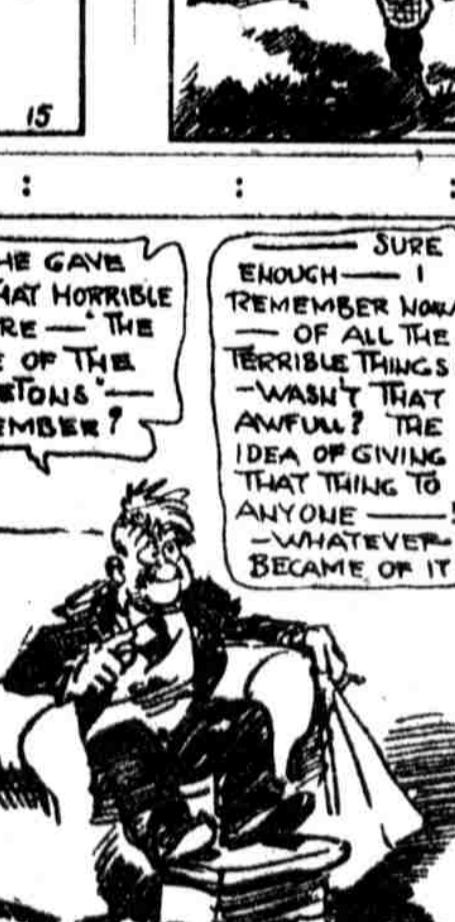
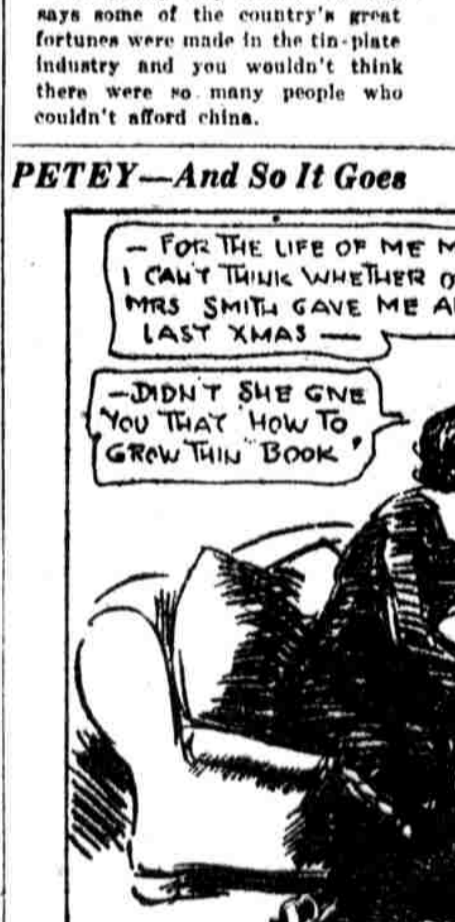
SCHOOL DAYS



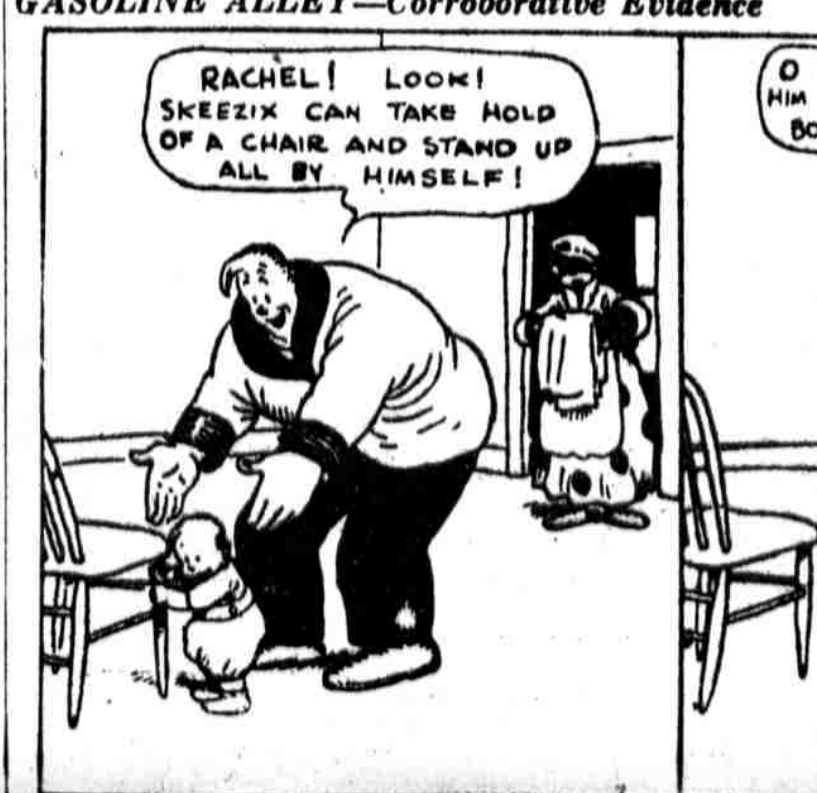
THE SPECULATORS



PETEY—And So It Goes



GASOLINE ALLEY—Corroborative Evidence



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