

THE FORTUNE HUNTER

By RUBY M. AYRES

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Another Ruby Ayres Serial

Admirers of this popular writer of love stories will find one of her choicest in "A Man's Way"

Begins tomorrow on this page.

"AN OLD, old man!" Fernie found the words echoing dimly through his mind as he went on his way.

"I shall never see him again," old Fernie thought, and his dragging step came again to a standstill, and once more he looked back at the house behind the trees.

He knew in his heart, what neither Mr. Harding nor Anne had guessed, that in the morning the Fortune Hunter would have gone—vanished from their lives as strangely and suddenly as he had entered them.

Then he looked up at the house, there was a light in one window and out of the moonlight until he reached the gate of Cherry Lodge garden.

Well—he could wait. That was all. He had been up all night more times before than he could remember, and tonight the game was well worth the candle.

Then the church clock on the river struck twelve. Old Fernie coughed nervously, ruffled the tobacco further down into the bowl of his pipe, but he never moved or altered his position against the gate.

Some one else besides old Fernie had kept watch during that long, misty night, and when the Fortune Hunter dropped from his window into the garden below, Anne saw him steal away across the lawn through the breaking dawn.

She had not closed her eyes all night. In her heart she had known that this would happen, and without a moment's hesitation, she caught up a wrap and went out on to the landing.

There was no sound in the house, but as she went swiftly down the stairs one moved in the shadow of the study door and Mr. Harding came toward her.

"Anne! Where are you going?" She stood quite still, warning him off with shaking hands. Her voice was wild when she answered him.

"He's gone; somehow I knew he meant to, and I am going with him. Let me go—oh, if you ever loved me—"

She broke in passionately: "I love him, and he loves me. If he goes, I shall never be happy again."

"The man's worthless. He's taken the best way out. Ask any one what they think. My dear, I'd give the world to see you happy, but this way is impossible."

"You're keeping me; you're wasting time. Oh, I don't care what you say; it makes no difference." She flung his hand off when he would have detained her.

"Let me go, unless you want me to hate you. You've all been against him ever since he came—you and Tom—yet you've both tried to ruin my happiness."

Anne dragged the door open and fled into the garden, the white wrap flying around her like misty wings.

She reached the gate breathless and sobbing. It was shut, and for a few seconds she banged with the latch.

Which way did he go? Which way? Was she too late already? She started to run down the road away from the village, then stopped, sobbing, trying to wipe her hands.

There was no sign or shadow of the long, barren road, and half-distracted with dread, she had turned to go back toward the village when she saw a man.

His old face looked faded and pale in the morning light, and there was something pathetic in his eyes as he approached her, his hand on his forehead.

Anne broke out in pity: "Oh, which way did he go? Which way?" Old Fernie pointed up the road with the stem of his pipe.

"He thought I didn't see him go, Miss Harding," he said hoarsely. "But that's the way he went." He laid his hand on her arm. "Bring him back, my dear," he implored; "bring him back."

Anne could not answer. She did not go up the deserted road and through the little village.

Too late! Too late! Something seemed to speak the words mockingly at her heart. Why had she not been quicker? Why had she hesitated a moment? What did anything else in the world matter if she had lost him? Her love was strong enough to forgive the past, strong enough to face whatever was waiting for her in the future.

"John!" The Fortune Hunter did not move for a moment, then he turned round slowly, almost as if some one had laid hands on his shoulders and compelled him against his will.

His face was drawn and haggard; all its gray carelessness had gone, and he looked years older and sadder, she thought broken-heartedly, as she lifted her arms and put them around his neck.

"I said if you left me I should follow you to the end of the world," she said, and her voice was quite steady now, her eyes met his unflinchingly. "I love you; there is no happiness for me without you."

He laid his hands on her wrists, trying to unclasp the arms that held him. "It's impossible—think what they will all say—what the world will say! Think what I am—what I've been. Let me go—let me go!"

"If you can say truthfully that you don't want to be with me, then I'll go. She began, then her voice broke. "Oh, my dear, do you think I care what any one says? I've thought of it all, and it means nothing to me—nothing. I can forgive the past, it's nothing any more, because I love you."

"I've nothing to offer you; it's impossible. Do you love me?" He tried not to meet her eyes, but they seemed to draw him against his will; he tried desperately to deny her even then.

"Love isn't everything—if I— Then suddenly he broke down; his head fell forward till it rested on her shoulder, and she turned her face and kissed his hair.

For a long time neither of them spoke, then the Fortune Hunter said hoarsely: "Anne, you must go home; you shouldn't have come—if any one saw you follow me—if any one saw you follow me—"

"They did see—uncle and your father—"

"She spoke calmly, she even smiled into his troubled face. "What can they say? I am not a child, and I have chosen for myself; I have chosen you. Wherever you go I shall go with you. You tell me to go home; I can only do that if you come with me, for my home is with you."

She stood back from him a little, looking earnestly into his face as if willing him to understand that every word she spoke was spoken from her heart, and not on the impulse of the moment.

"You say you have nothing to offer me. I don't mind that. I have some money—no, dear, don't turn away. I want you to be glad, not sorry, because it means that we can go away together—somewhere—"

She broke down into sudden weeping. "If you choose to sweep a crossing I shall be only too happy to stand beside you rather than be left alone!" she sobbed between tears and laughter. "And after that don't you dare to tell me I must not come with you!"

He stood for a moment not answering, his eyes on the barren field and the horizon in his mind. He seemed about to change to a strong determination and resolution.

Then he turned and took her in his arms, looking down into her tear-wet face with something like adoration in his eyes. "I'm not worth it, I ought to be down in the dust at your feet, but I can't send you away, my dear, I can't. We'll go away together and begin life again, and you shall never regret it as long as you live."

He took her back presently to Cherry Lodge, but he would not go in with her, and she smiled a ready assent when he said he would go down to Long End Cottage.

There was no longer a doubt of him in her heart; the last cloud and misunderstanding had been swept away forever; she knew that he loved her as she loved him, and that nothing could separate them again.

She went into the house with such happiness in her eyes that Mr. Harding could find no words with which to greet her when she met in the hall, but she went up to him at once.

"Ucle, I'm going to be married. Soon, I think—in a day or two—and we're going abroad somewhere."

Clem Harding gave a stifled exclamation. "Oh, my dear, I beg of you—for your own sake—I want your happiness, heaven knows, more than anything on earth."

She lifted her face and kissed him. "If you do, then you will come and see me married," she said. "There is only one man in the world for me, and I don't care about the past; I think I've forgotten it already, but I know—and he knows too—that the future is going to be all right."

Old Fernie was on his hands and knees trying to coax a smoky fire to burn in the kitchen at Long End Cottage, when the Fortune Hunter lifted the door latch and walked in.

For a moment his son stood watching him unheeded; then he went forward and took the bundle of chips from the old man's wrinkled hands.

"I'll do that," he said. "I'm used to lighting fires." Old Fernie did not start; he just rose stiffly to his feet and stood watching while the Fortune Hunter coaxed the fire into a blaze and added some pieces of coal. He looked a little dazed, but after a moment he drew his armchair up to the fire and touched the Fortune Hunter on the shoulder.

"Sit down and warm yourself," he said. "We've both been up all night. I'll make some coffee."

THE END

THE GUMPS—Sic 'Em, Tige!



"YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WHIP THAT CHILD - I DON'T CARE WHAT HE DID - HANG THAT STRAP UP - I'LL LOOK AFTER HIM - JUST BECAUSE HE SAYS HE WON'T GO TO BED -"



"YOU'RE NOT GOING IN THERE - THAT'S ALL - HANG THAT STRAP UP AND SIT DOWN AND READ YOUR PAPER - I'LL TAKE CARE OF THAT BOY - IF YOU WHIPPED AN ELEPHANT WITH A STRAP LIKE THAT THE HUMANE SOCIETY WOULD PUT YOU IN JAIL FOR CRUELTY -"



"WHY DON'T YOU GO OUT AND GET A STICK AND PUT SOME NAILS IN IT TO WHIP HIM WITH? TORTURE HIM - PUT A WHIPPING POST UP IN THE HOUSE -"



"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO WHIP HIM WITH? A COUPLE OF OSTRICH FEATHERS? THAT'S THE KIND OF PARENTS TO HAVE - NICE AND GENTLE - ONE OF THOSE KIND PARENTS WHO GIVE THE KID CHLOROFORM BEFORE WHIPPING HIM -"

By Sidney Smith

SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER—Ah, Ha! A Romance!



"WHY - IT'S THE HANDSOME RECEIVING TELLER AT THE BANK WHERE I DEPOSITED MY \$ 3000 !"



"ISN'T THE WIND GLORIOUS! SO MY MONEY IS SAFE AT YOUR BANK MR. ROYAL?"



"YES! BUT YOU KNOW I'M NOT RECEIVING TELLER THERE ANY MORE OH NO INDEED!"



"I OWE THE BANK NOW! TAKING THIS TRIP FOR MY HEALTH! HOW FORTUNATE TO MEET YOU! YOU MUST TELL ME WHERE YOU STOP AT PALM BEACH. WE WILL HAVE A GLORIOUS TIME TOGETHER!"

"OH - HE TALKS JUST LIKE - LIKE WINE!"

"CAM SPENDS A SLEEPLESS BUT HAPPY NIGHT. SHE MINDS NOT THE TOSsing OF THE SEA FOR IT IS IN KEEPING WITH THE RYTHMIC DANCING OF HER HEART. (OH BOY, WHAT A POETS!) CONT'D TOMORROW."

By Hayward

The Young Lady Across the Way



The young lady across the way says that even if it should turn out to be true that the Germans have learned how to make synthetic gold and they manufacture it in such large quantities that it wouldn't be worth anything any more, we'd still have paper money, which is more convenient anyway.

THE TOONERVILLE TROLLEY



WITH SO MANY COUNTERFEIT BILLS FLOATING AROUND, THE SKIPPER WONT TAKE ANY CHANCE ON PAPER MONEY HANDED TO HIM AFTER DARK UNLESS HE CAN EXAMINE IT BY A LIGHT A GOOD DEAL STRONGER THAN THE CAR HEAD-LIGHT.

By FONTAINE FOX

SCHOOL DAYS



GREAT GOSH, MAW, WHATCHA WANTA SPILL OUR SLIME FOR? WE BEEN ALL DAY GITTIN' IT SUCKED UP! GEE WHIZ!

LADY BOUNTIFUL

By DWIG

PETEY—Nothing Up the Sleeve



"WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM? HE'S A NICE GUY OR I WOULDN'T HAVE INTRODUCED HIM TO YOU - BRAINS - GOOD LOOKS - EVERYTHING"



"I KNOW UNCLE PETEY BUT, HE WIGGLES HIS EARS AND I CAN'T STAND THAT - HE'S IMPOSSIBLE."



"BAH - YOU GIRLS NOW-A-DAYS ARE LOOKING FOR IDEALS - YOU'LL NEVER FIND EM - NOW IN MY DAY THE GIRLS"



"- EXPECTED ORDEALS - AND GOT EM."

By C. A. Voight

GASOLINE ALLEY—Walt Doesn't Know It's an S. O. S.



"NOW LET'S SEE WHAT THE RADIO FANS ARE DOING. MAYBE I CAN PICK AN EARFUL OF MUSIC OUT OF THE AIR"



"O MISTA WALT -"



"SH! RACHEL! SH!"



"I CAN HEAR SOMEBODY'S BABY BAWLING - JUST AS PLAIN!"

By King