

# LOVELESS MARRIAGE

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...into my room and sat down in the darkness with my hands pressed tightly over my eyes. What was Richard thinking? What could he be thinking? That was the only thought in my brain—nothing else seemed to matter.

## CHAPTER XIII

By and by I forced myself to go back. The young fellow who had come with Richard had already had too much to drink; he paid me absurd compliments. I looked at Richard appealingly, but he only laughed, as if he enjoyed the joke. Father and Mr. Furnival were used to it—they let both men say what they liked.

Presently I was left alone with them for a few moments. Mr. Belden was half asleep in an armchair—Richard and I stood facing one another in the silent room. Suddenly he took a step forward. "Marjorie!" "Don't—don't!" I said hoarsely. I felt broken and ashamed; this man for whom I had wished to appear at the heart and soul of my tragedy.

I was in love with him, you will say. Well, of course I was! I think I had been in love with him ever since I was twelve. After Richard and his friend had gone that night, both Furnival and my father were in a bad temper. "Temper," snarled a rat, "my father said irritably. 'I don't altogether trust that fellow. Where did you pick him up?'"

I met Richard the next day. He told me how he found out about me and the life I was living. It appears that Seldon had known Furnival for a long time, and heard all about my father's house. "Temporarily," he promised to take him there one night, and Seldon, who could never keep his own counsel, told Richard, and inadvertently mentioned that he was my daughter, a "dashed pretty girl named Marjorie"—those were his words.

Richard said he seemed to guess straight away that it must be me. "I remembered," he said, "your refusal to tell me your address, and so I guessed the truth for myself." And then we sat silent for a long time.

There was a long silence this time, and somehow I felt as if the summer days were mounting steadily still, waiting for something—for what? I hardly knew—or was I afraid to know? But I was conscious of my racing heartbeats.

Then Richard said—and his voice was not quite steady: "You're such a kid. If only I were five years older. He broke off jaggedly, and the silence fell again. Such a kid! I suppose I was—in a matter of years, but at heart—at heart I was a woman, as I sat beside him and waited achingly for the words which I knew then he would not speak. He went on stammering again after a moment.

"I haven't any prospects—Heaven only knows when I shall have. At present I can hardly keep myself. It sounded as if he were making an apology for not asking me to marry him. I felt as if something in my heart caught fire and flamed up into angry passion.

He was sorry for me—he pitied me, for the life I was forced to live. This is a poor offering when one's heart and soul is crying for love, my cheeks felt burning. "I shan't have to put up with it much longer," I said in a hard voice. "I am going to be married."

"Married!" "I shall never forget the tone of his voice, the blank incredulity. "Well, and why not?" I asked lightly. "Is it so very surprising? I'm going to marry Francis Furnival!"

I have wondered so many times during the twenty years that have passed since that day when Richard and I sat together in St. James' Park, what difference it would have made in my life if he had not told that lie about Francis Furnival.

Perhaps it would have made none; sometimes I think nothing can alter one's destiny; that it is just clean-cut and arranged for each of us from our cradle; but a girl of eighteen is not a fatalist, and my feelings that lovely afternoon were a mixture of rage and pain because I thought I had let Richard see that I expected him to ask me to marry him, and he had not done so.

The first time I met Richard was after a lapse of seven years. I was in my heart I knew that this was the man I should always love; that nobody else could ever be to me what he could. There was a little silence after my deliberate lie; then he rose and went to his feet. He seemed to have changed in some imperceptible manner, and I was suddenly afraid as I looked up at him, my eyes were smarting with the tears I was too proud to let fall.

He took out his watch and glanced at it, but I doubt if he really noticed what time it was. "I think we ought to be going home," he said. "I got up quickly. "I was going to say the same thing." "We hardly spoke on the way home; my heart was with conflicting emotions; what should I do? Should I tell him that it was a lie about Furnival? Or should I let him go on believing it? I turned the question over in my mind, but no old cow did it again. I remember that he knew what sort of home I had come from—that he could only feel contempt for the tool my father made of me! He was sorry for me, and I did not want his pity. His firm mouth was set, his eyes stared straight ahead of him as if I no longer walked by his side. Something in his attitude reminded me of that day years ago when he had turned his back on me as I sat weeping by the stream and walked off through the meadow grass.

He had snubbed me when I was twelve; he would do it again if I gave him the chance. So I reasoned in my blind pain; and yet—something seemed to whisper that if I let him go, he would walk—not only down the road, but into the life of my future. I moistened my dry lips; in another moment I should have spoken, but he said suddenly: "I think this is your bus; it will take you right to the corner of the road; I will say good-by." He had hailed the driver and taken my hand in farewell before I had time to speak; for a moment I clung to his fingers. "When shall I see you again?" I asked. He glanced at me, and away. "I don't know; we are sure to run up against each other somewhere. I am leaving London tomorrow—I meant to have told you. You will miss the bus if you are not quick." The conductor was already shouting to me to hurry up. Richard drew me toward the step; in another moment I was seated, the bus was rumbling away through the sunshine, and Richard was striking off down the street. He never once looked back—he had not once looked back that day when he left me weeping down by the stream.

CONTINUED TOMORROW.

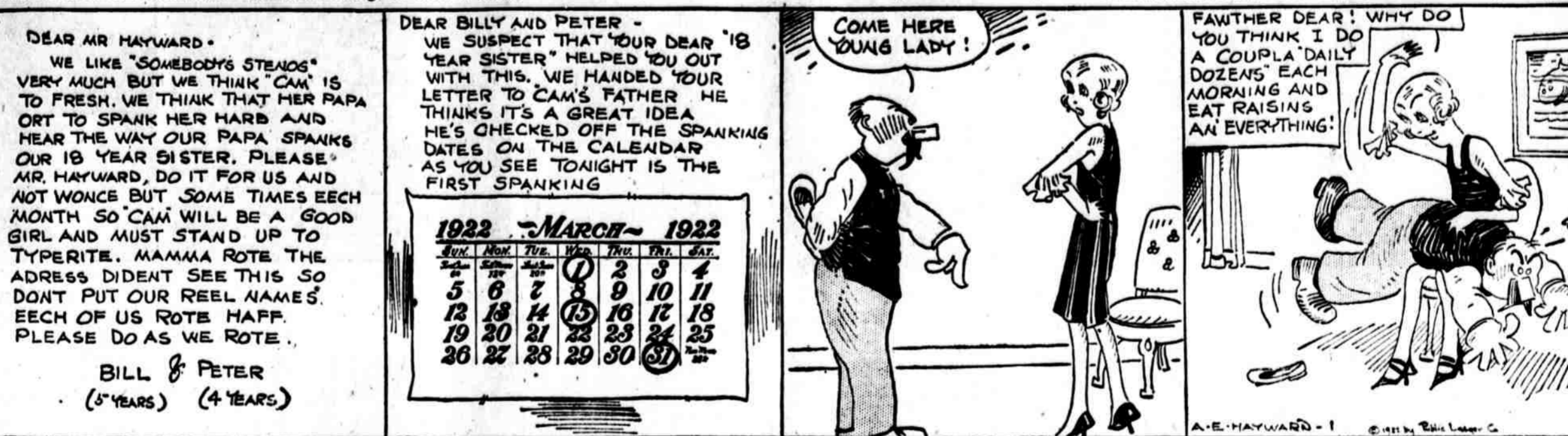
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By Hayward



# The Young Lady Across the Way



# THE TERRIBLE-TEMPERED MR. BANG



# THE TERRIBLE-TEMPERED MR. BANG



# SCHOOL DAYS



# SCHOOL DAYS



# PETEY—At Palm Beach



# GASOLINE ALLEY—Avery Wants In



CONTINUED TOMORROW.