

**A LOVELESS MARRIAGE**

**By RUBY M. AYRES**

Author of "A Man's Way," "The One Untraced," "A Bachelor Husband," "The Girl Who Came Back," "The Boy Who Went Home," "The Girl Who Stopped at Pinehurst," "The Girl Who Came Back Again," "The Girl Who Came Back Again."

**THIS BEINGS THE STORY**  
Richard's mother, who had been killed in a fire, was the one who had neglected to tell me of the fact that she had a young son, Richard, who had been adopted by a woman in London. I had never heard of Richard until I was told by a woman who had been married to his father. I was shocked to learn that Richard was the son of a man who had been the lover of my mother. I had never heard of Richard until I was told by a woman who had been married to his father. I was shocked to learn that Richard was the son of a man who had been the lover of my mother.

park-I wrote and told you that they were trying to force me into marrying my husband, and-and I asked you to forgive me for having told you a lie that afternoon. I wasn't engaged to him, I never meant to be. I had refused him and again and again. "Marjorie!" He caught my hand hard, but I did not feel the pain; time and place seemed to be forgotten and rolled away. I was eighteen once more, and he was my first lover.

**CHAPTER XXVIII**

I don't think I should have resisted had Richard kissed me; but he did not, he just held my hand hard. "I never got any letter from you," he said in a strange voice. "I have never heard from you from that day in the park until now. You are sure you wrote—sure?" "I gave it to Miss Linnie, and she promised to give it to you herself," answered tremulously. It seemed to matter tremendously all at once. My fingers shook.

"She never did, I swear to God that she never did," he said solemnly. "If I had had it!" He choked. "If you had had it?" I echoed. He laughed and let my hand go. "He can't bring back the past, can he?" he asked. "No, only go on, on, Marjorie, do you know that it's time for me to be doing?"

My moment had gone; he would never say the words I had hungered all my life to hear, never tell me that he loved me. I was a married woman and a mother—Tears started in my eyes as we went back to the house. I had never admitted to be ashamed to admit it. I suppose a mother of a beautiful son and a little daughter ought to be ashamed to admit that she has ever given a thought to any man who is not her father; but I was not very old, and I know I would have given anything I possessed that night to have heard Richard say he loved me.

But it was comforting to know he had never had my letter, comforting to know that he had not gone away because he felt he could not reply to it, as I seemed to expect.

I told one of the servants to bring his horse and trap around to the front of the house, and I went to the door to see him off.

He was driving to a village seven miles away, he told me, where he was staying with friends.

"Then—then perhaps I shall see you again?" I faltered. "If—if you care to come over."  
For a moment he did not answer; he absently patted the silky neck of the cob, with his stamping impatiently, longing to be off.

"Thank you—thanks very much," he said. But I knew he did not mean to come.  
We stood for a few minutes in desultory conversation; we talked about the weather, and the prospect of a good harvest, and the cultivation of flowers, and such ordinary topics, while all the time I felt as if my heart were stretching imploring hands to him, and crying, "Don't go! Oh, don't go!"

Then all at once, as if in answer to my unspoken words, he turned. "I must get my good-bys," he said. "It's getting late, and—"  
I felt his eyes on me in the moonlight, but I could not meet them; then he took my hand, and, raising it, kissed it very gently.

"Good-by, and God bless you!"  
I stood still where Richard left me, listening to the sound of the trap wheels dying away down the road; then I went slowly back to the house. My heart felt cold and dead; in vain I looked myself to task; called myself wicked and unfeeling. I loved Richard Tempest; I had always loved him from that moment of our first meeting by the stream. I knew that I should always love him.

"He never had my letter," I told myself. It sent a wren glow of comfort to my heart. "He never had my letter."  
I could go no further along that line of thought; so many forbidden dreams lay there.

I went upstairs to my boy's bedroom and sat down beside his bed. He was fast asleep; I could hear his deep, even breathing, and once the little sighing sound he made as he turned on his pillow.

I had told Richard my children were all I had, but I had not told him how much they were to me, how much! Perhaps because no words of mine could describe the love which was almost adoration which I had given to Richard since that first moment they laid him in my arms.

While I had him nothing else mattered greatly; he was mine—my very own. Once again life went on uneventfully; days grew into weeks, and weeks into months, and then—then came the day when Richard went to boarding school. With all my will and determination, I had striven to put it off, but Francis was adamant.

Boys who did not go to a boarding school were usually and molly-coddled, he declared. It would be the making of Richard. It was too much tied to his mother's apron-strings; he wanted to find his level.

I suppose it was substantially true; but the thought of parting with him was like tearing out my heart. I begged and implored; I even wept, but it was no use, and one day I sat looking at my boy's boxes packed and corded and labeled, ready to go.

Richard was delighted, though I knew he did not show it much for fear of hurting me. He talked about the holidays, and "half term," when I could go down and see him; he had given me strict instructions what sort of "stuck" to send him. He told me that he would bring home some of the "chaps" to spend the holidays with him.

He was growing up so fast; my baby had long since vanished, and now I was losing the child into which the baby had grown.

Richard had even smoked his first cigar! I had caught him with the cigar's end in the old barn trying hard to imagine they were enjoying themselves.

When he saw me—and, I suppose, my shocked expression—he looked a little ashamed, but, after a moment, offered the much-chewed end for my acceptance. "It's ever so nice," he said engagingly.

He was thirteen when he went to boarding school; I took him to London myself, and saw him off with a lot of other boys. "Don't cry in front of all these chaps, mother," he whispered to me when the time came for parting. But he was very near tears himself as I kissed his dear brown face; "I'll write every week—promise me."

**THE GUMPS—I Love the Cows and Chickens**

By Sidney Smith



**SOMEBODY'S STENOG—She Objects to a Current Idea**

Registered U. S. Patent Office

By Hayward



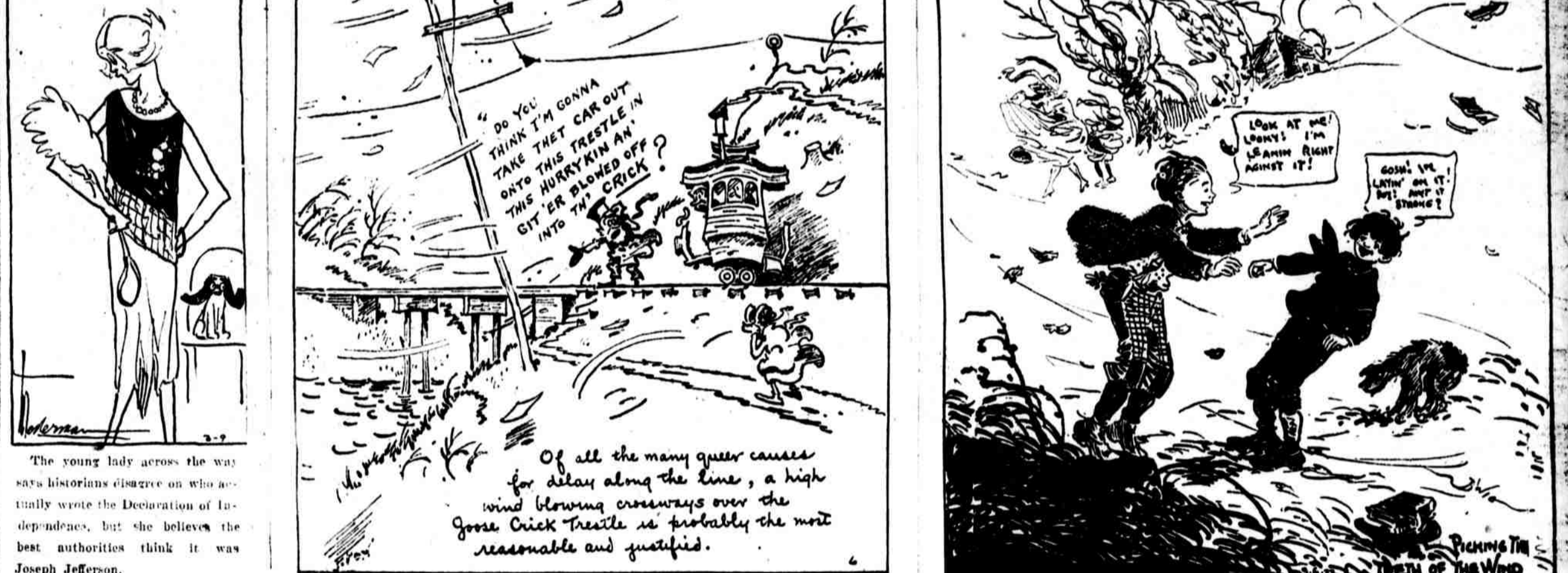
**The Young Lady Across the Way**

**THE TOONERVILLE TROLLEY**

By FONTAINE FOX

**SCHOOL DAYS**

By DWIG



**PETEY—Next Stop, Pinehurst**

By C. A. Voight



**GASOLINE ALLEY—An Awful Disposition**

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