The Subconscious Courtship

A modern woman's extraordinary scheme to keep suitors from interfering with her life is told in this fascinating novel

By BERTA RUCK

Author of "The Wrong Mr. Wright," "The Arrant Rover," Etc.
Copyright, 1922, Dodd, Mead & Co.

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

CLOVER ELPHINSTONE, charming young widow, who has inherited a big business. Harried by relatives and friends who want to spend her money, and suitors who want to marry her for it, she decides to marry a 'husband for convenience,' to fend off "the harpies," and picks

MAJOR HARRY CARMICHAEL, World War veteran, man of personality, an engineer who has invented a new mast, to finance which he agrees to Clover's "strictly business" proposition.

ROSEMARY MEADOWS, Clover's cousin, a pretty girl of the period.

MRS. MEADOWS, aunt, who has befriended Clover in adversity and is showered with favors.

SANDAL, younger daughter, a flapper.

JIM HOLT, big, good-natured chap, bashfully in love with Rosemary.

"GOOD morning," she said as casually as she had said it on every other morning.

"Good morning," said Carmichael in the same tone.

"Are you," said Clover, "going out?" This, too, she said casually. She hardly admitted to herself that she wanted, yes, really wanted to know what this show-husband of hers would answer to this. She had no engagement for that morning; she did not intend to go to the city that day. She had no hat on.

But Carmichael had hat and gloves in his hand. "Yes," he said; "I am going to my office."

"Oh, yes. You'll be busy there all day, then."

"Probably," agreed Carmichael. Before he meant to say anything further he remarked, "You are going out too, I suppose."

"Not yet," said Clover. On an impulse, she looked up at him and announced: "I shall be lunching all by myself at home today."

There was a second's pause. The words hung in the air; an invitation, if he chose to take them so.

She thought defiantly, "he can if he likes! I believe I shouldn't mind. Why shouldn't we be quite friendly? I don't see why he shouldn't come back."

There she stood, dainty and desirable. Any man might have considered himself in luck. Carmichael thought simply, "Well, why not?" A lightning picture flashed before him of himself and her at the luncheon table, with the extra leaves taken out, and the servants told they could go. He would talk to her, all to himself; she would smile at him; things would come different. But instantly he pulled himself back. "None of that," he thought. "The less I see of her alone, after last night, the better. She only said if for something to say."

All this in that second's pause before he replied in a noncommittal way: "Oh, well, good-by."

"Good hunting," said Clover lightly. She turned toward the housekeeper's room and was gone before he had opened the front door.

Carmichael's "Office" seemed to him now such a different place from what it had been in the old days not so long ago. Then it had seemed a den where one had waked up hoping against hope; had worked all day under the deadening handicap of the conviction that work alone achieves very little in this world. One had finished up by thinking that probably here was another day wasted, and that everything one did was about as useful as the nut which the squirrel dropped down the chimney of the empty house imagining that it went to swell its hoard.

Now, however, the Euston road place was the beating heart of his whole enterprise. From its two dingy little rooms flowed forth power that was going to turn a hundred wheels. It was the engineroom of his ship of Ambition. One doesn't expect much spit and polish in an engineroom.

Certainly there was none here. The two windows looking out on London's most cheerless road were so grimy that one could hardly see out of them, and the whole place seemed to have "gone jungly" since his reluctantly taken trip to Paris. Mrs. Bates, the chauffeur's wife, who "did for" him as a bachelor, had been told to come in and "tidy" daily, but an incredibly thick layer of dust lay over everything, over the long drawing table, under the green-shaded electric lights, over the wide, shallow drawers for plans; over the leather top of his tall stool, usually as shiny as glass from use; over the tee squares and the French curves hung on nails to the walls and over the small rack with the score of books on engineering. To touch the long rolls that cluttered the shelves brought down an unclean shower. There is nothing like paper for attracting and accumulating dirt. Altogether, his absence had left the place in a horrible state.

He summoned Mrs. Bates.

"Can you spare me a couple of hours this morning?" he asked her. "If so we will have a good clean-up."

He threw off his hat and coat, rolled up his sleeves and set to work to clear the long table, rather to the astonishment of Mrs. Bates. She had read about the grand wedding, she knew about the Green street establishment, and she saw no reason why a gentleman that had done so well for himself, as you might say, should trouble to set foot again inside a place like this.

This she thought as she took her broom to sweep dust and tea leaves toward the door.

Carmichael, slapping books together and wiping his weights and rulers, rejoiced that this little spring-cleaning was all in the service of his mast. Things wouldn't be allowed to slide there now, he knew. General Hervey was not the man who let things slide. Already Hervey had forced necessary measures upon even the Government. Hervey would keep Cox up to this. It was only a matter of days before the interview that would get things going. Experiments? One's days full of fruitful work, shutting out everything else.

Here the amateur "housemaid" smiled grimly as a contrast struck him. His office—and hers. This dingy dugout—and that vast board-room of a place where the proposal had been first made to him in effect, "Marry me and I will see your mast through."

Well, she was keeping her word, he was keeping his, and all other thoughts must be shoved right out.

"What about a bunch of flowers, Mrs. Bates?" he suggested presently. "Some violets—no, not violets——"

"Narciss', sir?"

"Something to freshen us up and smell nice. I might be having some people in here presently."

"Here, sir?"

"Yes," said Carmichael succinctly, looking up from his blackened hands. "Here."

Provided the place was moderately tidy and decent, he didn't care, now, who saw the eccentric little dugout where he worked. Cox had realized that the glitter of Green street matched his own and would not imagine that these were Carmichael's only lodgings. A snobbish thought; but does it not sometimes seem as if the world were run on snobbish lines?

"And the other room, Major Carmichael?"

"Oh, the bedroom," he glanced into this cheerless little box where he had eaten, slept, broken his heart for so long.

"I had to go around three times to those laundry people after those clean sheets o' yours," complained Mrs. Bates. "I've only just got them! But you won't be wanting the bed made up now, will you, sir?"

"No: I shan't." Thank goodness he need never again turn in on that little green Willesden canvas camp-bed or wash his hands in that odious little bucket. The small folding service chair could now be packed up. As for the rubber-bath, Mrs. Bates could take it. The mast (not Clover, but the mast) should pay for a very different abode!

"I might sublet the whole place, presently," he told Mrs. Bates.

Suddenly, into the sound of her broom knocking against the corners of his room, there broke the sound of the telephone bell in the garage below.

Carmichael, as on the foggy morning when he had been summoned from his shaving, hastened down the wooden stairway and took up the telephone receiver from the clutter about it.

"Hello."

"Hello, this is O'Brien speaking." O'Brien, Cox's right-hand young man. That was good. "Oh, good-morning, O'Brien."

"Good morning; I say, are you doing anything for lunch?"

"No, I am free today."

"Are you? Splendid. Will you lunch with me, then? I shall be alone," called O'Brien. "I should be glad if you would. One o'clock then at the Clematis; I have got a table."

"Right-o; thanks very much."

Five minutes to one found Carmichael waiting at the Clematis.

Now the Clematis is a place where you can meet an extraordinary variety of people. Actors and actresses from the small theatre just across the street, artists, politicians, financiers, all meet at this little restaurant where the cooking is excellent if not exactly cheap. You need not be surprised at meeting anybody there; in fact, sitting down at one's table one instinctively looks round to see what notabilities and notorieties are there.

And the man who was planting a mast on a more or less grateful Government met the man who (also neat as a new pin and also a servant of the Empire) was pointed out as "'Batman,'—look, you know, the man who wrote the play."

"Well, feeling all right this morning?" O'Brien remarked, as the men made their way to their table.

"Perfectly, thanks," smiled Carmichael, "I hope you got home in good—"

He didn't finish the sentence. He left off to stare at some one.

Now the Clematis Restaurant originally began with one room, at the back of which Carmichael and O'Brien now stood. Later it had been found necessary to take in the room behind. It was into this room behind that Carmichael now stared.

For, in its farthest corner a young man and a young woman had their heads close together over a menu.

Carmichael waited for that menu to drop.

It dropped.

Ah; yes. It was.

He thought he recognized that hat, the little toque thing made of soft drooping feathers which covered her dark hair, made her look as if her hair were a shock of gray over her young, fresh face. It was his wife, and the man with whom she was lunching was Mr. Bobby Llewelyn.

The Silent Storm

At the sight of this, Carmichael's face darkened to storm.

That was, for one moment. The next moment it was clear again, outwardly. But, under that control, blood surged and pulsed to the hottest, most jealous wrath that he had ever known.

That fellow again!

How many times in the last twenty-four hours did that make? Last night at Clover's At Home. Then, after the At Home, Clover coming in to telephone to the fellow. Then, this morning. Only three hours ago she had told Carmichael that she was lunching at home that day! Now here they were; he found them together in this clandestine place.

He didn't stop to examine these incidents; only too well they fitted in. That sickening fellow above all others! Carmichael remembered that dance where he had claimed his, Llewelyn's, partner.

He had thought that was going to be the end of Mr. Bobbie Llewelyn.

Why had she bothered to get married at all if this lunch-and-ringing-up-and-bunch-of-freesias business was to begin all over again? He would ask her that presently. Presently he would have all this out with her, he would say exactly what he thought, straight from the shoulder. There would have to be an end of this.

"Hello," said O'Brien's cheery voice, as the waiter put the chairs, "somebody over there that you know, isn't there?"

"Oh, my wife, you mean? Yes," said Carmichael perfectly cool. "They seem to have decided on this place after all. I thought they were going to make it the Ritz Grill. Well, we will have a word with them presently. You got that train of yours all right, last night?"

Over the well-chosen little lunch they went on talking pleasantly. Of what Carmichael could hardly have told you.

For under everything that flood of anger had its way with the man.

A coldly planned assignation! That was how he saw it. Even that conversation over the telephone last night was part of it, probably. Yes, it was probably on purpose that she had asked her husband not to leave the room while she telephoned. Dust in his eyes, the sort of tactfulness she had employed when she fibbed to Cox about where she had got the frock.

Her explanation why that fellow was in the house at all, to introduce his friend, the singer—all that seemed lame. But above all, why had she said she was lunching at home that day? Of course she lunched where she pleased; why should she have lied about it? Anybody would resent being lied to. He would tell her all that without any beating about the bush at the first opportunity.

All this while he was chatting to O'Brien about train services.

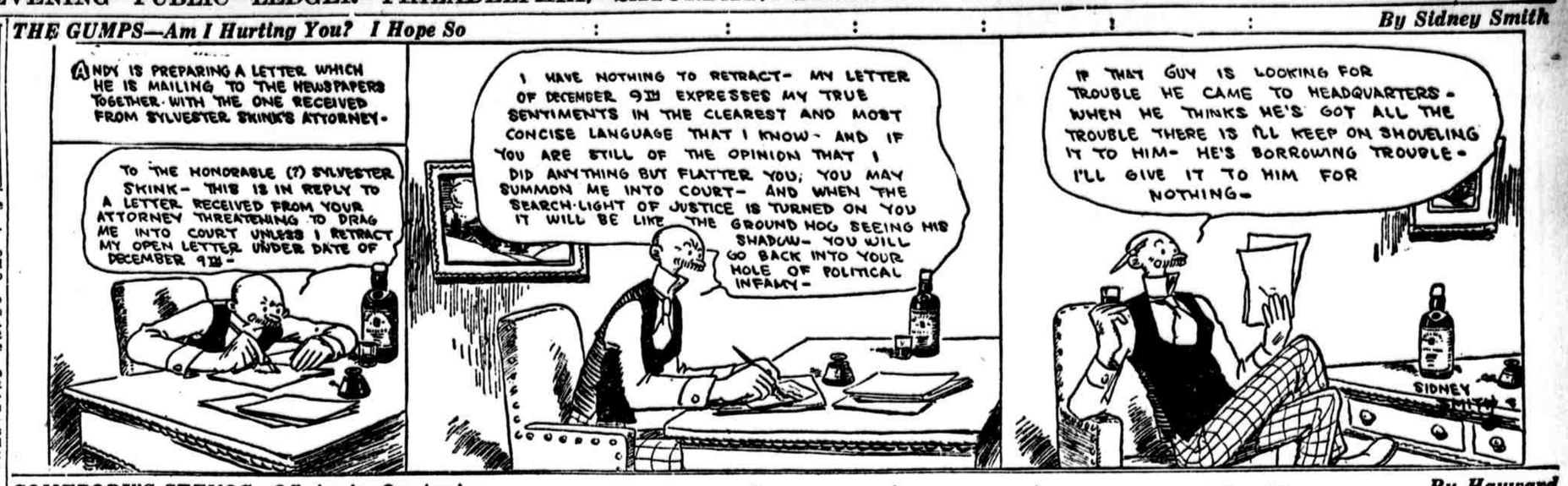
From where Carmichael sat he could have seen Clover in a mirror. He moved his chair a little so that he could see her no longer. He was not going to watch her unobserved, and he had seen all he wanted to for the moment.

Then, although his back was to her he felt in his bones that she had seen him too, and he knew he was right when a moment later O'Brien leaned forward, bowed and smiled.

CONTINUED MONDAY

THE GUMPS—Am I Hurting You? I Hope So

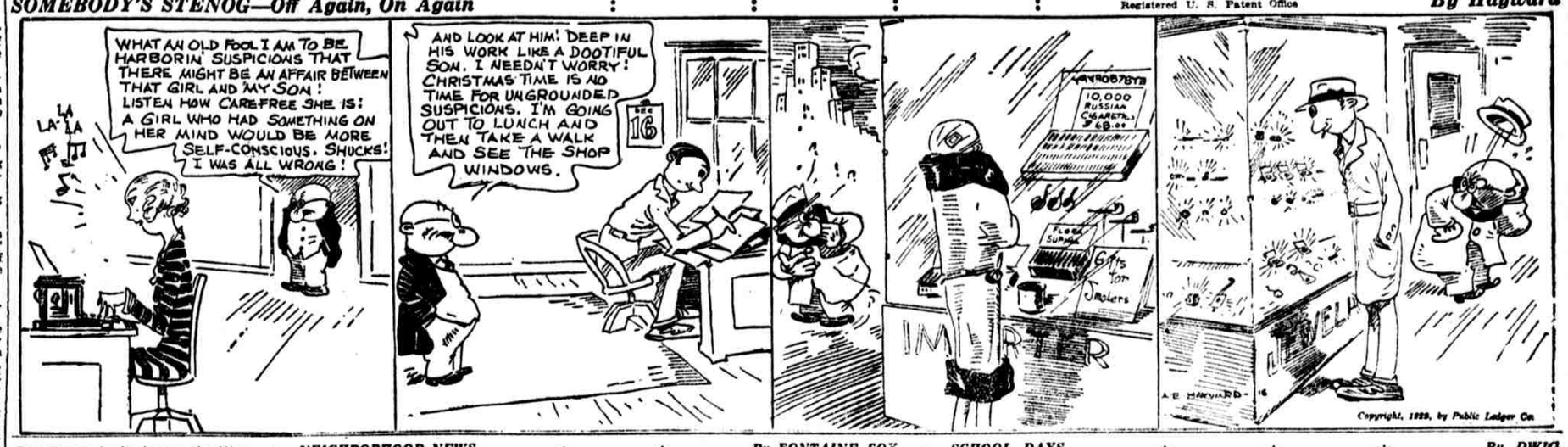
By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Off Again, On Again

Registered U. S. Patent Office

By Hayward



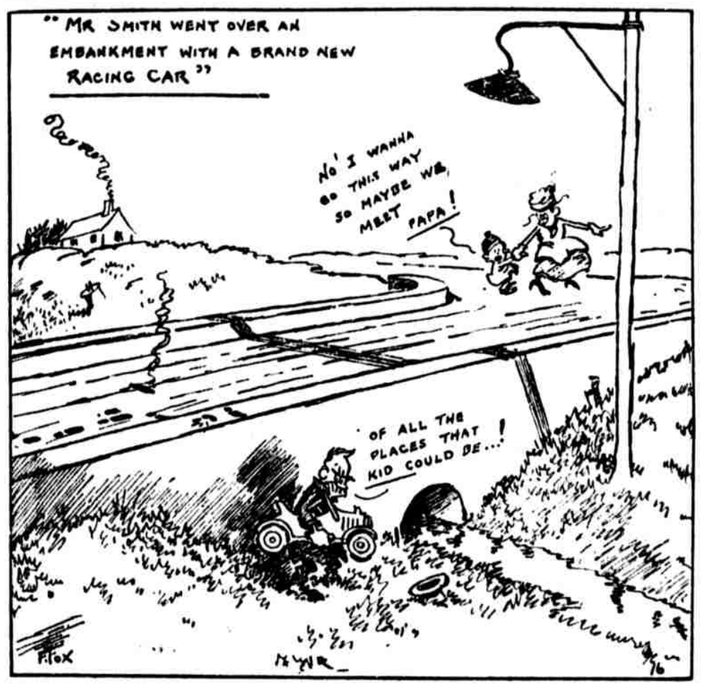
Copyright, 1922, by Public Ledger Co.

The Young Lady Across the Way

The young lady across the way says that as fast as government bonds fall due they are refunded and thus we are gradually wiping out the national debt.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

By FONTAINE FOX



SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG

PETEY—Then He Found Out Different

By C. A. Voight

GASOLINE ALLEY—I Told You So

By King