

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 Ardent 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, she decides to marry a "husband for convenience," to tend off "the harpies," and pick up the pieces.
HARRY CARMICHAEL, World War veteran, man of personality, an engineer who has invented a new kind of motor, which he agrees to finance 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.
RANDAL, younger daughter, a beauty.
AL HOLT, big, good-natured chap, helpfully in love with Rosemary.

away from her and in the flesh, that same young man whose dream image had all the morning haunted her mind. Her husband, Harry Carmichael!

For an instant she thought it must be part of the dream; an hallucination, a haunt. But no. There was no mistaking him; there was time to look well and truly at him as his boat made its way along on the outside of the pack of boats, back toward Henley Bridge and the island in the river.

That punt contained three extremely cheerful looking young men in worn blazers.

The third leapt forward bawling. His blazer was that of the Old R. F. C.; his pipe stuck out between his teeth, and the sun blazed arrogantly golden upon his uncoerced hair.

Oh, yes. It was Harry.

Clover's eyes fastened upon that gleaming head of his; they followed it as he slid past, backed by the greenery and roses of the Henley bank, until parasols and Panamas and awnings and punt-poles came between, and he was lost in a flash in that colored, rippling current of the river.

Then, again, Clover saw nothing more of the crowds, the races, the excitement and the stir.

It seemed to her as if she would never see anything again but those shoulders leaning forward, that golden-flashed head under sunlight, sliding past, slipping away from her.

Harry—! If only—!

Meantime what about Carmichael himself? He had not even seen his wife. He had been too much occupied. And for the next three days he was still occupied chiefly with that punt of his.

A striking contrast was she to the two quick and snappy punts of the Hotel party. No dazzle-rushions, no unseasoned, no bubbles for the boat, no picnic contraptions from Aspreys. Just an old tub of his pre-war holidays. Carmichael had betokened himself of her, early this summer; he had run down to the boat-house where she had lain for years forgotten, had found her dilapidated but water-tight, and had put her into commission again. She was now his summer home. A couple of posts, stem and stern, could be erected in a few minutes, a light rig-pole lay in the slings, the canvas covering was neatly folded behind the locker, and there was his roof.

The dining-room was unadorned; its table a pair of benches. The scullery was forward, the larder an old hamper, and the beer was kept cool by hanging it outboard in the river. The whole craft seemed to fall up as a gipsy's court with distaff, kettles, knit-lanes, rugs and blankets, white-enameled mugs, tinned foods, and terrier dogs—but there were three striking enough looking men in it.

Warmest Glow of Passion
EACH punt, skiff, canoe, was blossoming with the sunlit roses and yellows and whites and oranges and scarlets of sunshades, summery hats, blazers, chintz frocks. This, remember, was the summer chintz frock; half the girls on the river wore the gaudiest fabrics ever designed for our sins and our consciences; rickshaws, beret-covered, pictured with birds and boats and fishes of every shape and shade impossible. The effect, sown on the gray of the stream and bordered by willow green, was that of one ever-moving rainbow jizz.

"Why do they say that as a nation you British have no color?"

Clover heard that question put by some girlish American voice in a neighboring punt of the gay flotilla around her. She caught some other stranger's answer.

"It's because of our climate. That subtle veil of inland mist is drawn over the green garmenting of our crowds on our brightest summer day. Don't you realize how that's repeated in the British voice and the misleading British manner? Always that tinge of restraint, above wildest splashes of gaudy; warm-glow of passion—"

Clover's unuttered comment, "Was Harry's manner so 'misleading'?" Could he have been passionate? But why do I think of him all the time like this—I will not. Not once again today—"

That voice within her seemed to whisper, "Not once today? Shall he drop out of your thoughts?"

Voices of hawkers in barges cried "Program? Official program and guide?"

"Bubbles, ere bubbles, ere bubbles; buy a bubble for the boat?"

"Fruit, any fruit? Fresh morning gathered, strawberries and English cherries, very pretty bubbles?"

"Choicest! fresh morning gathered—"

Again Clover did not hear them.

Voices of minked "Saxophone; waltzes; and a kitchen where the rambler-roses twine. I'm gettin' tired of playin' second fiddle, playin' second fiddle to you. By your leave, ladies and gentlemen! The oldest singer on the course! Sing you The River of Years! Tin Gee-gee! Love's Old Song! The oldest singer—"

Clover did not hear.

"Bang! Another pistol-shot. More noise. Again the launch going by with the amusement of which crew had men by what lengths.

Then with banjo-twang and piano strumming there struggled down slowly in and out among the punts the counter-party's barge with the banner lettered:

"The London Hospital. Help us to Keep Afloat!"

A hoarse voice, "Spare something for the hospital, ladies and gentlemen! (Play up, Saunders!)"

"Oh, ye'll tak' the high road."

Clover did hear that. Four Clover! There was the chinkle of coins in an outstretched fishing-net thrust here and there among the throng. The net jingled across her lap.

"Thank you, madam? Something for the hospital?"

"I've no more money," said the young woman who had been Elphinstone Brothers. "Jim, will you put in another sixpence for me?"

And she thought of a pound-note that she had once crushed into the palm of her hand, and which she had found in a pocket of a coat in a room at the Regent Hotel. Harry had been there to hold her then.

"Good luck!" the cry rose as a trolley crew moved on toward the starting-point. "Good luck!"

A brown face or so turned from the boat's prow toward the well-wishers in the boom; there was a flash of white teeth, a quick grin of thanks as the trolley went by.

Clover, watching, felt senseless tears rise to her eyes and to her secret heart these senseless thoughts:

"What those boys' mothers must feel to see them in their boat! I shall have been so handsome with such exquisite golden tinct! He would have loved at Henley! If only—if only—"

Voices of the Eternal Jim: "I say, what about lunch?"

This thought had evidently struck many punting-parties at the same moment.

Scarcely was the 1.20 race over than there broke out a far-spread commotion, bumping, reshifting of boats.

"Are you going on now, sir?"

"Well, take their place. . . . Ware skill! . . . they don't come on till three. . . . I beg your pardon. . . . Catch hold there. . . . Oh, sorry. . . . It's quite all right. . . . Ware skill! . . . Ware skill! . . . Oceans of room over there. . . . Jolly well stay where we are, I think. . . . Now then. . . ."

It broke out a clatter of cutlery and glass being unpacked; the rustle of paper, the soft popping of corks. The comforting smell of food mingled with the river-smells of pleasantly dank weed, of collins from the launches, of rose-scent drifting down from the sunlit lawns of Phyllis Court. People leaned amid a prattling hail of—

"Coming over?"

"Is this ham?"

"Oh, that's heaps for me, thanks."

"What's this? Leander cream?"

"Thanks, could you lend us a corkscrew?"

"Most awfully, most kind of you. . . . catlons sold in it. . . . Here, let me try. . . . Can you cut it?"

"None, you've got to drink to."

Where's Clover's glass?"

Clover was now making one final desperate effort to cast away from her face the white river hat no one would have guessed how violent was her inner struggle, and how proudly she was protesting. "No! I won't be the only thing creature among all these crowds!" This delightful party, this wonderful day, all this pagantry. They shall not seem just background to one miserable girl who's fool enough to keep eating her heart out for a man she'll never see again—

At that moment it happened.

All unprepared, she lifted her eyes from the cardboard plate full of cold pie and salad on the table and threw

CONTINUED TOMORROW

GUMPS—Sentimental Uncle



SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER—Who's Running This Office



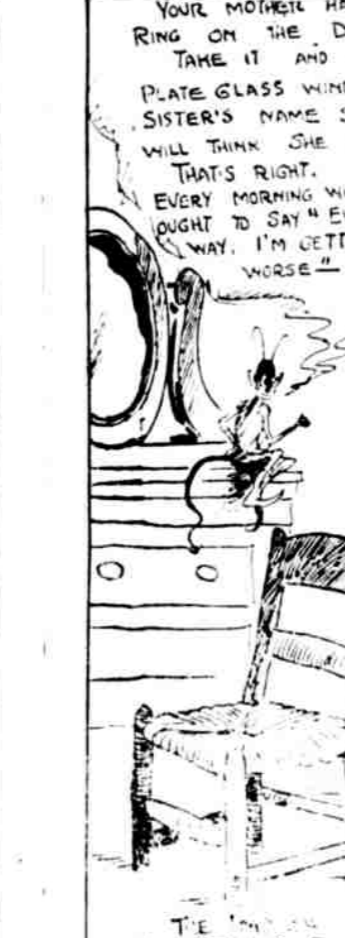
The Young Lady Across the Way



Christmas Excitement in Toonerville



FOUNTAIN FOX



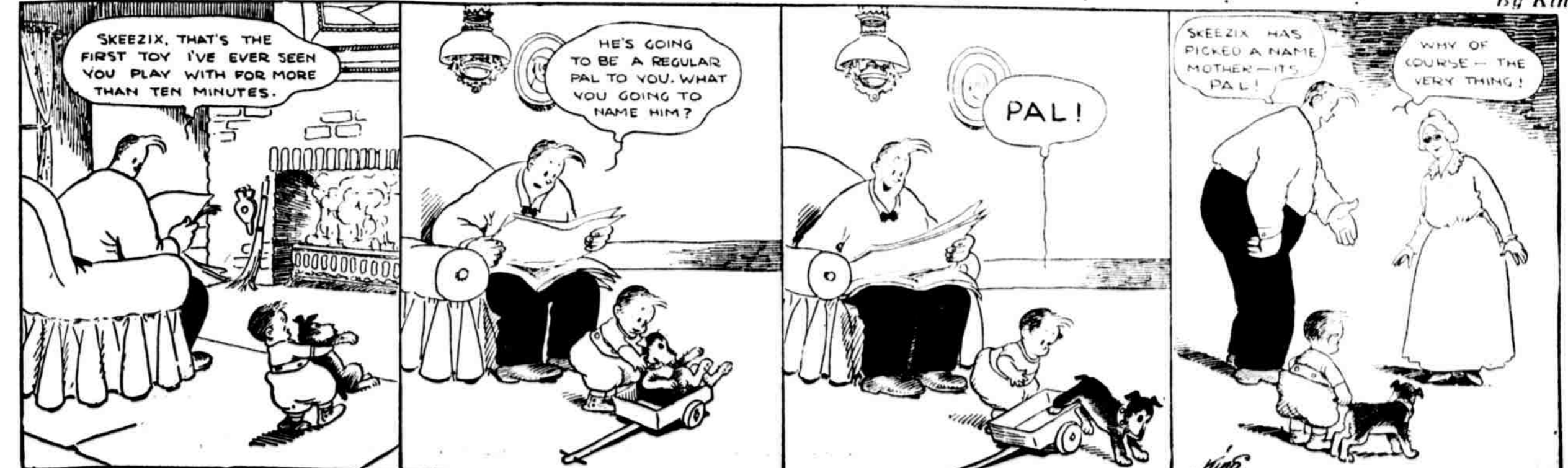
SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—That Makes It Thirty-three and a Third All Around



GASOLINE ALLEY—Labeled



CONTINUED TOMORROW