

By Sidney Smith

SISTERS

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

Author of "Josselyn's Wife" (Copyright, 1919, by Kathleen Norris)

"I THOUGHT you were going to walk?" Peter said, nervously. He had mumbled up to them with an air of indifference.

"Shall I?" faltered Cherry. She looked at Alix, who had not yet climbed into the car, and was pulling on her driving gloves. Alix, toward whose face the dog was making eager springs, did not appear interested, so Cherry turned to Martin. "Walk with us, Mart?" she said.

"No," Martin said, comfortably, not stirring.

"I'll be home before you, Pete, and wait for you," Alix said. She looked at him irresolutely, as if she would have added more, but evidently decided against it and spoke again only in reference to the dog. "Keep Buck with you, will you, Peter?" she said. "He's getting too lazy. No, sir!" she retorted. "You shall not ride! Well, the dear old Bucky-boy; does he want to come along?"

And she knelt down and put her arms about the animal and laid her brown cheek against his head. "You've got to stay gently to and fro," she said, shaking him gently to and fro. "You've got to stay gently to and fro."

Suddenly she was on her feet and had sprung into her place.

"Hold him," she said, "Good-bye, dear. All right, Martin?"

The engine raged, the wheels slipped. Cherry stood looking at each other. "Give them a good start, Bucky," she said, straining dog. But to himself, she said, "Alix knows!"

With a sense of shock, Alix knew that Buck was off like a rocket when he finally set him free, his leaping tail disappeared between the columns of the car, and Peter started after him.

"And Peter started after him," Cherry said, after a few minutes, "there seems to be nothing to say. We've said it all."

"Nothing to say," Peter echoed. "Alix knows," he said in a low voice. "Whatever we do it all seems so wrong," Cherry said with watering eyes.

"Whatever we do is wrong," he agreed, soberly.

"But we go!" she said on a fluttering breath.

"We must go," Peter answered. And again, like the omnibus full of a heavy bell-tongue, the words formed in a heavy mass. "Alix knows," Alix knew.

He thought of the afternoon, only a few weeks ago, when Cherry's beauty had made so sudden and so irresistible an appeal to him, and of the innocent delight that had been theirs together, when she had first confided in him, and of the days of secret and intense joy that had been theirs, and the knowledge that he had seemed so fresh, so natural as entirely their own affair, until the tragic day of Martin's reappearance and the hour of agonized waiting at the boat for Cherry who did not come, when Cherry's rarely displayed passion had wreathed from him his last vestige of doubt.

But this was the culminating unhappiness, that he should know, from Alix's eye and gentle and generous look as they parted, that Alix knew. He had, in the wild rush and hurry of his thoughts, at that time, not seen what their love meant to her, but it hurt him to see on her happy face those lines of sternness and anxiety, which he had never seen shadowed with that new look of pain.

It was too late now to undo it; he and Cherry must carry their desperate plan to a conclusion now, must disappear—and forget. They had tried, all this last dreadful week, they had both tried, to extinguish the flames, and they had failed. But there was no comfort in forcing thought anywhere. Wrong would be done to Martin, to Alix, to Cherry—and worse than even that, wrong to himself, to the ideal of himself that had been his for so many years.

"If I had it all to do over again, I should not come here," Cherry began, breathlessly.

"Ah, if we had it all to do over again! Looking back half a dozen years, how simple it all seemed! How uncomplicated life was, in those old days when the doctor and his girls had teased him, and consulted him, and made him one of themselves. What a web, of love and hate, had been raised, you must have stayed in England, simply because you couldn't well have done anything else."

"And if I had been with Martin, this horrible business of that girl's letter would not have happened," she added, bravely. "Oh, what a quiet true life!" he interrupted him, as he interpreted a bitter protest. "Mart has no particular principle about it, but he never would have got in with that once more," she began. "So that once more," she said, "I can't say that I have made a mess of things. Listen, that's what she interrupted herself, as the dog's loud and violent barking reached them from beyond a turn in the twisting road. "He didn't catch them, then."

The next instant a woman came up the road, running and making a queer, whispering noise that Cherry never before had heard.

"She was a stranger to them, but she ran toward them, making the odd, gasping noise with much dry mouthings, and with wild eyes.

"Horror was in her aspect, and horror of her aspect, and horror of her aspect, but as she saw them she suddenly found Cherry's face, and she screamed that Cherry's name, and she fell headlong and sprang forward with a shout.

"He gripped the woman's arm and her frantic eyes were turned to him. "Oh, my God!" she cried in a hoarse, catching voice. "My God! They're over the bank—they're over the bank!"

"Who?" Peter shouted, his heart turning to lead.

"Oh, my God—the automobile!" the woman mouthed. "Oh, my God—I saw them—oh, God, don't let them suffer that way!"

They were all running now, running with their heads down the long road, about the curves, and on toward the frantic noise of the dog's barking, and toward another noise, the sound of a human voice twisted and wild with agony.

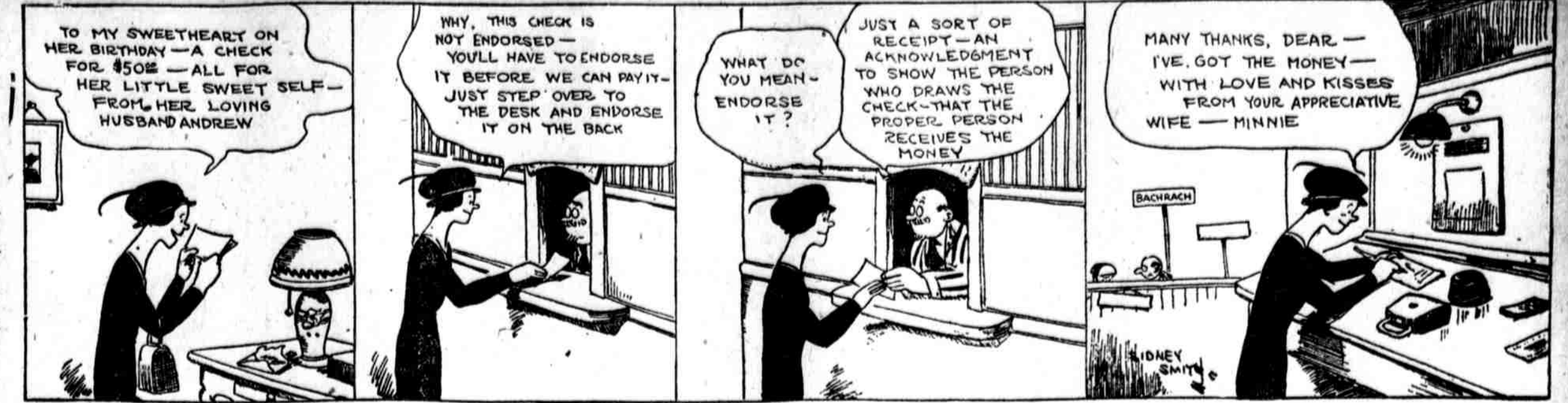
"A strange woman was crying out Peter, without knowing that he spoke at all, was repeating over and over again the words: "Not, Alix—my God—it cannot be—she has never had an accident before—not Alix!"

A last curve, and they knew. Over the edge of the sharpest and ugliest of the through the saplings, crashing down and striking the trunk of a score of fallen like a boulder, and with a great cry he sprang over the bank and, slipping and stumbling, followed. He made down almost to the dry creek-bed, where the huddled figure of the man, and in his striped blue gingham, had been. Alix only a few short minutes ago, and almost every bone in her face, except for a deep cut where the brown hair met the tanned forehead, was untouched. And as he caught her bitterness of death stopping his own heart, a soft, faint cry came from his heart, and it seemed to him that in the closed and fast shadowing eyelids he caught a glimpse of Alix's old smile.

He held her close to him and the pale face against her face, and perhaps she had never so truly been his when the quiet autumn woodland, shot with long shafts from the sinking sun, rang with his bitter cry: "No, Alix—not dead! My wife—my wife!"

There were other men and women gathering fast now, and the whole little valley was beginning to ring with the

THE GUMPS—From Andy to Min



PETEY—A Man After Our Own Heart

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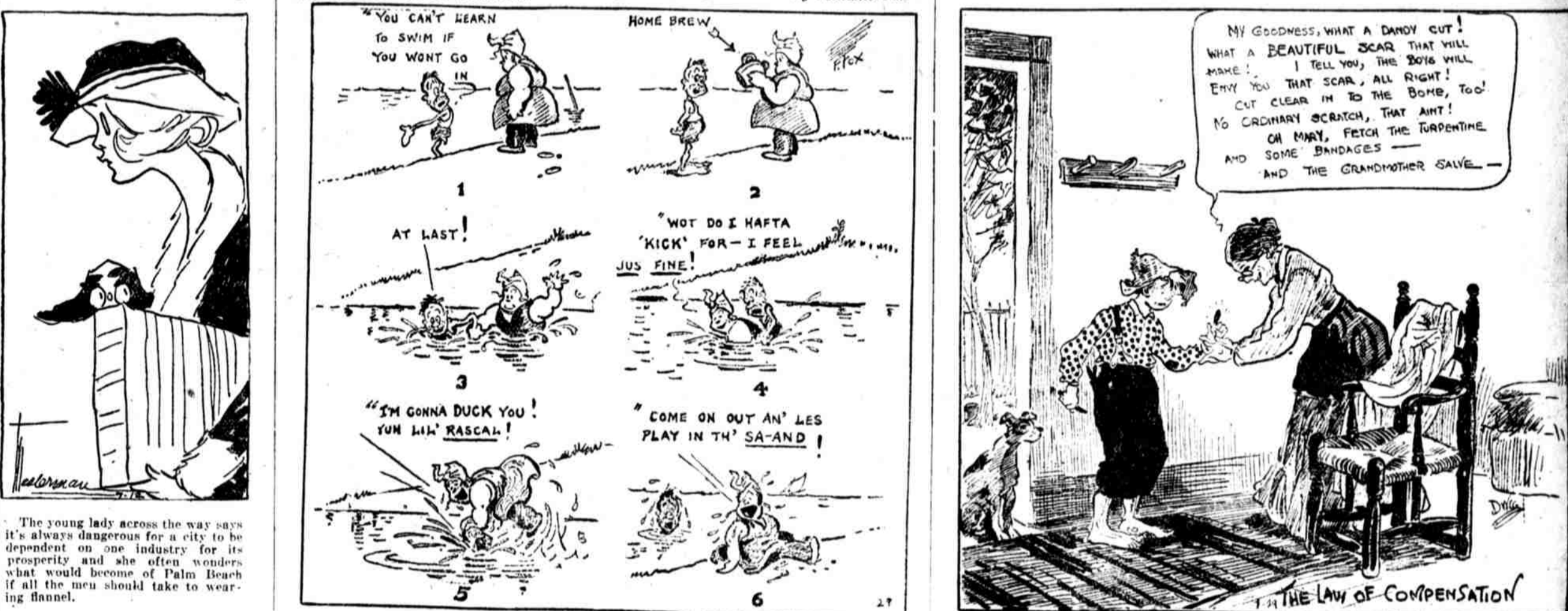


The Young Lady Across the Way

HE GAVE HIS TIMID WIFE A DRINK OF HOCH SO SHE WOULDN'T BE AFRAID TO TRY A SWIMMING LESSON

SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG



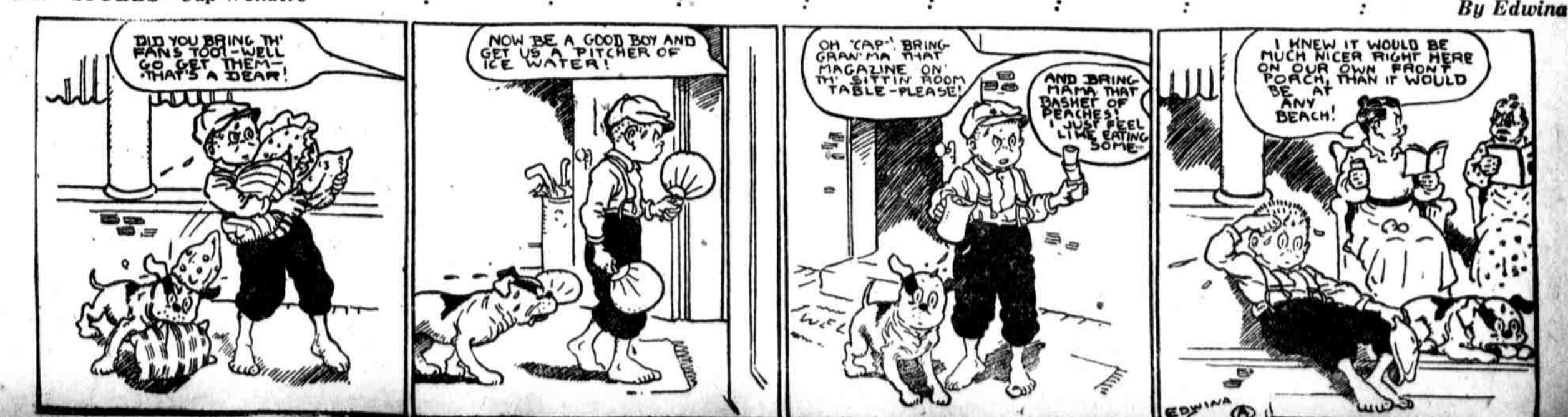
SOMEBODY'S STENOG—All Alone in the Woods

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"CAP" STUBBS—Cap Wonders

By Edwina



(CONTINUED TOMORROW)