The Woman Hater

By Ruby Ayres

THIS STARTS THE STORY

Ten years prior to the opening of the story Miles Faversham suffered a disappointment in a love affair from which he emerged a woman hater. His friend, Tranter, is in love with a beautiful woman — a widow — Lallie Dundas, who prives to be Faversham's old sweetheart. A lot of unkind things are said about her, but are not verified. Mrs. Tranter, Philip's mother, implores Miles to prevent the marriage. Miles calls on Parry, a club friend, and they wager together that Faversham will prevent Philip from marrying Mrs. Dundas. Miles calls on Lallie and she tells him she still loves him. He leads her on until she dislikes Tranter; and he delights in his vengeance. She breaks an engagement with Tranteer to lunch with Faversham. Parry seeks out Philip and tells him of seeing Mrs. Dundas and Faversham in the cafe. Tranter tries to force a confession from Lallie, but she grows angry and evasive. Philip—unhappy — seeks out Lallie, but she puts him off and then phones to Faversham to call and see her. Faversham tells her she must choose between him and Philip. Again she tells Faversham that she loves him. He expresses the wish that she leave New York. She writes him a clever letter that she will go to the little seashore hamlet where they spent so many happy hours together years ago. And prior to leaving she writes Philip that she cannot marry him. He learns that Faversham was at the station with her in the early morning and frantically searches for him. Faversham, fearing Philip in a jealous rage will go after Lallie and cause trouble, starts for the seashore. His valet telephones him to return to town at once. Lallie sees him off on the train and when returning home she encounters Philip. A scene ensues, and he tells her of the $100 bet Faversham made with Parry "that within a month he would make you throw me over for him."

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

"I don't believe you!" The words were almost a cry. "I don't believe you! I've known Miles all my life." Her voice caught on a sob. "Oh, I've known him all my life, and he wouldn't—he couldn't do such a thing!"

"All your life!" Tranter stared at her incredulously. "You don't know what you're saying! You never met him till that night at Marnio's."

"I've known him all my life," she said again, a throbbing note in her voice. "He loved me years ago, and I was such a poor fool I could not see how well worth having he was. I threw him over and broke his heart, but now—" her brown eyes shone through their tears as she looked at Tranter's white face—"now I'd lie down gladly and die to save him a moment's pain."

Tranter caught her by the arm; his fingers bruised her soft flesh through the little woolly jacket, but she hardly felt it. He peered down into her exultant face uncertainly, and there was a poignant silence; then he said in a stiff, hoarse voice:

"Then it was you—you!—the woman he told me about years ago! The woman who made him hate all others—Lallie!"

Her head sank.

"Oh, I know, I know," she said in a shamed whisper. "I ought to have told you. I wish now that I had, but that night when he came to dinner I never thought he cared, and I didn't know how much he was going to make me care. Don't be hard, Philip. Try to forgive me. I can't help loving him—try to forgive me."

Tranter laughed.

"Forgive you for letting him fool you as he has? I tell you he cares nothing for you. You think he means to marry you. I tell you that he never will; that he's just playing his own game, and that when he has made sure that you'll never come back to me he'll turn and walk away. Where is he now? I was told he was down here with you. Where is he now? Tell me that."

"He had to go back to town—on business, he said. He had a telegram——" She stammered and broke off.

"Business! Have you ever known Faversham to have any 'business' that mattered more than his own pleasure? He's gone, I tell you. You'll never see him again. It's the end of the story as far as he's concerned. Lallie, for heaven's sake——" She was striking at him with impotent hands.

"Oh you liar! You cruel liar!" she gasped, sobbing in her pain. There was a very real terror growing in her heart—or had it always been there and only been brought to life by this man's words?

"Oh, I hate you, I hate you!" she said frantically. "Let me go—oh, let me go——" She broke away from him and fled down the road in the darkness.

Tranter stood looking after her stupidly for a moment. Then he followed and caught her by the arm, holding her in spite of her struggles.

"Lallie, listen to me—listen to me just for a moment! Oh, my darling, don't cry like that!" She was sobbing wildly. "He's not worth a tear—not worth a thought. I swear to you on my word of honor that all I have told you is true. He cares nothing for you. It's the truth about the bet. Parry let it out in front of me one night. He was frightened afterward; he did his best to recall it, but it was the truth, and I made him admit it."

She repulsed him fiercely.

"I don't believe you. It's a cruel, wicked lie to break my heart!"

"It's the truth—I swear it! Forget him—he's not worth a thought."

"He is your friend," she said brokenly.

Tranter flushed.

"He was my friend," he said in a harsh voice; "but if ever we meet again——" He broke off, drawing a hard breath.

"If ever you meet again, he will tell you to your face that they are all lies, what you have said," she broke in passionately. "I don't believe you——"

"It's the truth."

She began to walk on rapidly, hardly knowing what she did. Her limbs were shaking, and there was a terrible fear at her heart.

Was it the truth? Would she, indeed, never see Faversham again?

No, no, she would not believe it! It would kill her if she were forced to believe it.

Her steps were leading her away from the village and toward the sea. The soft sound of the waves reached them through the chill evening, and she broke out again in despair.

"Oh, I will kill myself if what you say is true!" She turned on Tranter fiercely. "Why have you come? How did you know where I was?"

"Lester wrote to me——"

"Lester!" Her voice was broken, incredulous. After a moment she said again, sobbing: "She never liked Miles. He always said so. Oh, how could she have done such a thing!"

"She knew that Miles was fooling you. She is fond of you. She wanted you to be happy, and she knows that I worship the very ground you tread."

"I never want to see you again," Lallie cried. "Even if what you say is true—and I don't admit that it is—there will never be another man in the world for me—never!"

"But listen, Lallie," Tranter urged, "Faversham told my mother, years ago, that if ever he had a chance he would be revenged on the woman who had spoiled his life. I saw her yesterday, and she admitted that she had begged Faversham to try to break off my engagement with you."

"I was never engaged to you."

"You would have been but for Miles. We should have been married now if he had never come to Marnio's that night."

It was the truth, and she knew it. She tried desperately to think, to look back over the past happy days, to find corroboration of this man's story.

It was she who had been the lover—never Faversham! The thought was like a knife turned in her heart, but she went on ruthlessly.

It was she who had sent for him to come to her that night, not he who had asked to come. It was she who had pleaded with him, not he who had been on his knees to her.

"Some day some man will break your heart as you have broken mine!"

The words stole unbidden into her brain.

The prophecy had come true. She was being punished for what she had done in the past. Faversham had won her love in order to fling it away as, years ago, she had flung away his.

"Forget him, Lallie, and come back to me. I love you—I adore you. I'll make you forget him. I'll take you away." The man beside her began his broken pleading all over again, but she was not listening.

The presentiment that had racked her when they parted had been right, after all. He had gone out of her life forever.

And she had to go on living——. Oh, but she need not do that. There was no power on earth that could force her to live, now all hope of happiness had been taken from her forever.

In one month, he had said, he would make her love him. One month—one day had been long enough!

"I will not live, I will not live without him." She spoke the words aloud unconsciously, and before he could stop her she broke away from Tranter's detaining hand and ran from him into the darkness.

—

That the woman was light is very true;
But suppose she says—never mind that youth—
What wrong have I done to you?'

Faversham reached New York in the early hours of a pouring wet morning. He was tired and irritable, and as there was not a taxicab to be had he was forced to walk to his rooms.

Greyson was up and a cheerful fire was burning.

"How did you know I should be on this train?" Faversham asked, irritably.

"I knew it was the only one, sir, as you did not come in the afternoon," the man answered.

He busied himself bringing coffee and breakfast.

Miles kicked off his boots and sat down by the fire.

"Well, and now I'm here, what's the news?" he asked. "What's happened to Mr. Tranter?"

He asked the question casually, but his heart was heavy with dread. Tranter had always been an excitable fool. He was just the sort of man to put a bullet through his brain.

Greyson began to pour out the coffee.

"Mr. Tranter went down to the country yesterday morning, sir," he said, complacently.

"What?" Miles sat up stiffly, his hands grasping the chair arms. "What the hell are you talking about?" he asked, hoarsely.

Greyson changed color in puzzled confusion.

"Mr. Tranter called in early yesterday morning, sir," he said. "Very upset, he seemed. He said that he knew where you were. You and Mrs. Dundas," he said, "begging your pardon—"

"Well, go on!"

"He talked a lot of nonsense, sir, about shooting you, and things like that. Very strange he seemed in his manner, and so I thought the best thing I could do was to wire you to come back. I was afraid what might happen if you and he were to meet, sir."

Faversham got to his feet slowly. His face was the color of ashes.

"You fool!" he said, thickly. "You damned fool! You've brought me back here, to save my precious skin, when all the time—" His self-control gave way. He cursed Greyson passionately from the depths of the despair that was clutching at his heart.

Tranter was down there with Lallie—Tranter in the frantic condition that Greyson described.

For a moment Faversham went mad. How much did Tranter know? How much by this time had he told to Mrs. Dundas?

Faversham thought of his last glimpse of her. Of those tragic brown eyes above those resolutely smiling lips; and he struck his forehead with his clenched fist.

"I've got a feeling that something horrid will happen if you go—that I shall never see you again—" That was what she had said, and all the time perhaps she had been right. Perhaps they had said their good-by—and she had not even kissed him.

"Oh, my God!" said Faversham dully. His own helplessness appalled him. What could he do, all these miles away, separated from her by a seven hours' journey. He could have killed Greyson in his rage and despair. For he knew as he stood staring at that man's white, dumfounded face, that Fate had turned the tables on him once again with bitter irony, and that, now it was too late, he loved Lallie Dundas with all his soul.

There was a chill wind blowing, and a gray, angry sea lashing the shore when Faversham got out of the train at the little village late that afternoon. He looked haggard and unkempt. He had not eaten anything for twenty-four hours in spite of Greyson's frantic appeals. He had not once closed his eyes during the interminable journey.

Greyson was with him. He had not the remotest idea in what way he had failed in his duty, but in spite of his master's savage wrath he had refused to be left behind in town. He followed close at his heels now as Miles almost ran up the street from the station.

The sunshine of the past week had gone; the little village looked entirely changed. Even the cottage seemed to have assumed a deserted aspect as Faversham strode up the tiny path and hammered at the door.

Nobody came, and after a moment of fevered impatience he beat on its wooden panel with his clenched fist.

In the next cottage a curtain was drawn curiously aside and a woman peered out. After staring for a moment, she came to the door and addressed Miles across the low paling which divided the gardens.

"There's something strange there," she said suspiciously. "But the maid's inside all right, if she chooses to open to you."

"If she doesn't, I'll smash the door in," said Miles fiercely.

He would have suited his words to action had the door not been opened that instant from inside, and Lester stood there, pale and disheveled, an eager hope in her eyes, which turned to terror when she saw Faversham.

She fell back from him with a low cry of fear as he pushed past her into the cottage.

Greyson followed. He was at his wits' end to understand what was happening, but he meant to stand by his master, whatever came of it.

"Your mistress?" He heard Miles jerk out the words from between his gray lips, and saw the girl crouch away from him as she answered in a terrified whisper:

"She hasn't been home all night——" and then she screamed, as Miles seized her roughly by the wrist.

"What happened? Tell me—and tell me everything. It's no use screaming and making a scene. What happened—after Mr. Tranter came?" His voice was labored.

"I don't know. I don't know." She was sobbing with sheer fright. "He went along to the station to meet Mrs. Dundas. I knew which way she would be coming back——" She screamed again as Miles shook her in his impotent rage.

"You she-devil, you," he said hoarsely. "If it was only money you wanted I could have paid you as well as he—— Well—go on! What happened?"

She shook her head from side to side, moaning over and over again.

"I don't know. I don't know. They haven't either of them been back since. I waited up all night. When you knocked just now I thought it must be Mrs. Dundas come home."

Miles flung her away from him.

"See she doesn't get away," he said to Greyson, and he went on up the steep, narrow staircase to the rooms above.

There was a desperate hope in his heart that Lester was lying, and that he might yet find Lallie somewhere in the cottage. But every room was empty. One, which he knew most be hers, was evidently exactly as she had left it on the previous day to go with him to the station. A little pair of slippers were kicked off and lying against the fender; her silver brushes were on the dressing table. A coat of hers hung behind the door; and the whole room carried the faint perfume of violets. Faversham remembered dully that he had been with her the afternoon she picked the big bowiful standing now on a table in the window.

She had not been home all night. He looked out of the little latticed window on to the gray, angry sea, and a sharp terror shook his very soul.

He went downstairs again into both rooms, and then back to Lester. Greyson stood guard over the closed front door.

Faversham went straight up to the girl. His face was set in hard lines of pain.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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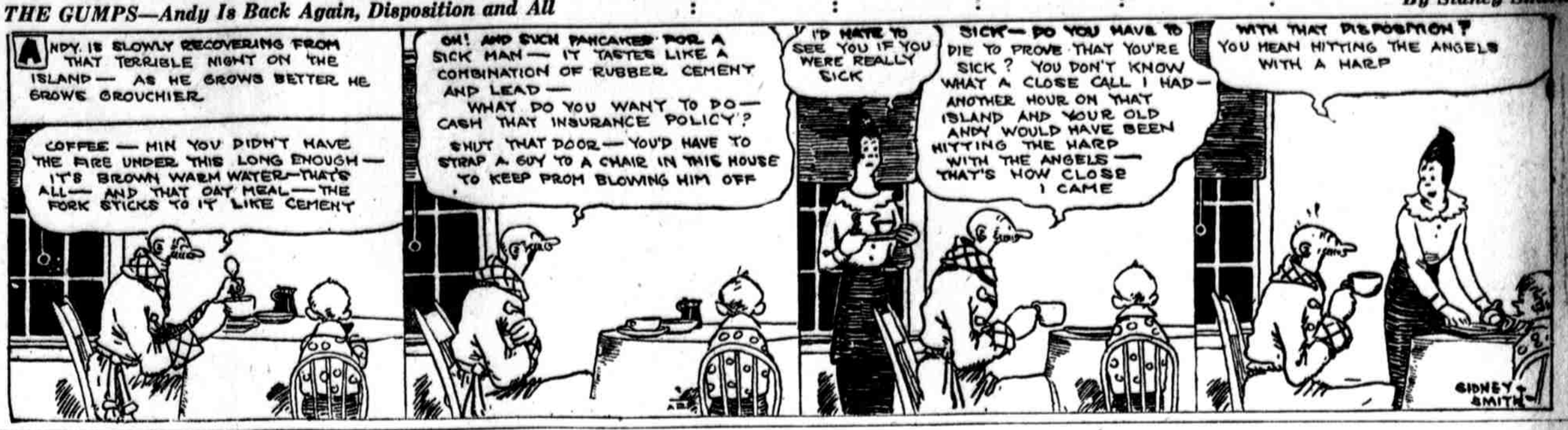
THE GUMPS—Andy Is Back Again, Disposition and All

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Cam Was a Lady of Fashion

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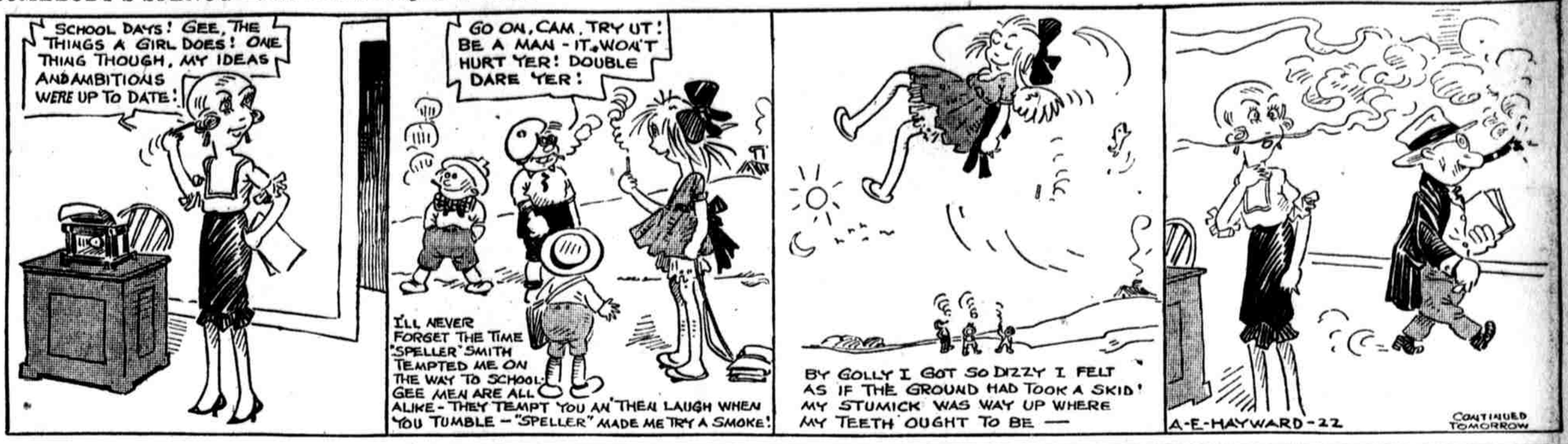
By Hayward



The Young Lady Across the Way

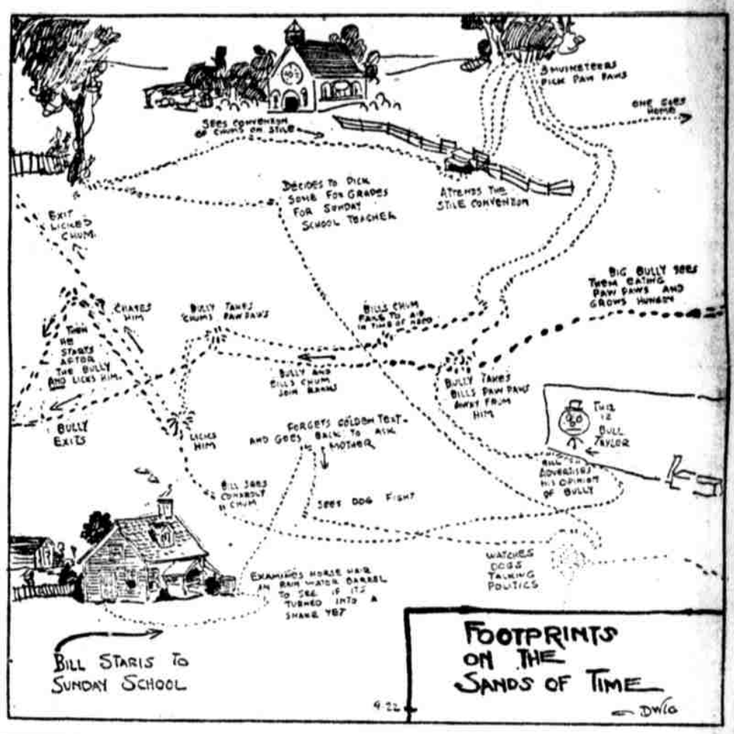
The young lady across the way says some people never seem to realize the danger of writing letters and she notices that in almost every divorce suit a correspondent is mentioned.

THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR

By FONTAINE FOX

SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG



PETEY—He Ought to Raise the Landlord

By C. A. Voight

"CAP" STUBBS—You Bet He Did!

By Edwina