

The Woman Hater

By Ruby Ayres

HE offered no resistance when Greyson slipped a supporting hand through his arm. He was hardly aware of the man's presence. His heart and brain were numbed with a great agony. Together they stumbled up the narrow cliff track in the darkness. The wind whirled and screamed around them. Together they went back through the deserted village, and up to the cottage. It was in darkness, and Greyson went forward and opened the door, groping happily till he found a lamp in the little sitting room, and managed to light it.

Lester had evidently gone. The fire had burned almost out, and he made it with some logs which he found in the kitchen.

Outside the cottage were voices and footsteps. Every one had heard by this time what had occurred, and people had collected at the gate to stare and whisper together.

Faversham dropped into a chair, his hands hidden in his hands. He felt as if an almighty judgment had descended upon him to show him his own arrogance and littleness.

"Vengeance is Mine—" He had forgotten that! He had unworthily tried to take a law which is greater than the law of man into his own hands, and by so doing he had wrecked his life and dragged those whom he loved best down into the ruins with him.

"What shall I tell his mother?" The thought racked and tortured him. Her only son! Her adored, only son!

She had trusted him with something more precious to her than life itself, and that something lay out there in the darkness, staring up at the sky with ghastly eyes.

And Lillie! Miles shuddered. He had still to endure the greatest part of his punishment, still to stand and look down on the woman he loved, with the knowledge that his hand had sent her to her death.

A woman later! He had been proud of the name the world had given him! In his arrogance he had hugged the wrong of the world to his breast, and the fierceness of his wounded pride had brought the thing to life again, in order to turn her into a ghost.

The murmur of voices outside the gate grew louder. The tramp of feet drawing near broke the silence. Greyson came running up the narrow garden path and into the room; he was breathing "S!" Miles started to his feet. He was shaking from head to foot, his face was the color of ashes. He tried to speak, but no words would pass his gray lips.

"—Mrs. Dundas—they've found Faversham reeled and clutched at the back of a chair to save himself. There seemed to be a band of iron round his head that with every instant threatened to snap under the weight of his agonizing pain.

The moment of his greatest torture was here; a voice rose in his ears, a heart that he might be allowed to fall dead and escape its justice, and then— a little figure in a white gown, a ghostly form, and with brown hair tumbling about her face in wild disorder, stole into the room like a shadow and looked at him across the lamp light.

Faversham caught his breath with a gasp like that of a drowning man. She was real or was this just a mocking phantasy to drive him mad?

He was afraid to move—afraid to breathe—and then she spoke. She spoke his name in a pitiful whisper, sobbing like a child.

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Let Ruby Ayres Tell It

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can be no more misunderstandings—nothing can ever be hidden again. That night—when first met you with Philip—

I meant to part you from him. That was all. There was no other thought in my mind and when the color rushed into his face, and his eyes grew hot and ashamed—"I thought I could make my revenge double by parting you from him and by making you care for me."

She turned her face away. "It was not very difficult," she said pitifully. He went on as if he had not heard. "There was only one thing I did not realize—that I had never ceased to love you, that you had been, and always would be, the only woman in my life. When I made that bet with Philip I thought I was strong enough to resist you—Lillie—look at me!"

The honey-bee brown eyes were raised to his slowly, with infinite pathos in their wonderful depths. Faversham held them with his own. "Do you believe that I love you?" he asked. "Do you believe that I love you with all my heart and soul—better than my life?"

The white lids came down, veiling them from him. "If I cannot believe you I shall die," she whispered with white lips. He answered her hoarsely: "If you could have seen into my heart all these last hours—

—if you could see into it now—you would believe me. "Philip said that you did not care—that you never had cared," she broke out with a note of anguish. "It was not I who killed him, Miles. I saw him fall—he had followed me up on the cliffs—and I was afraid of him, and I hid— He was so strange. There was such a look in his eyes that she shuddered, hiding her own. "I saw him—"

she said again, whispering. "And I climbed to his eyes to be laid—dead, dead, I know—because I spoke to him and he never answered—and I kissed him, Miles. He answered and begged him to speak to me—"

She began to sob wildly. "I try to forget it—try to forget it," he answered her brokenly. "But in his heart he knew that neither of them would ever forget, and that in the future, no matter how happy they might be together, the memory of this man would forever lie between them—an eternal sorrow."

"I sat there all night," she went on, sobbing. "I was so lonely, nobody came—then I think I must have drifted because I don't remember anything else till a little while ago, when I heard voices—and I was frightened—and I ran away. And then I saw them come—all those people—I saw the lights they carried, and I knew they had found him—I went down to the edge of the sea, and the water came washing round my feet. If he had been brave enough I would have let it take me—"

"Kush! Kush!" he cried, and pressed her to his breast, stifling the wild words on his lips. She clung to him fiercely for a moment, then, with sudden revulsion, she tried to push him from her. "Why don't you let me go? You will never be happy with me. I only bring trouble to every one. Why couldn't I have died instead of Philip? Oh! poor Philip! poor Philip!" She began to sob again, piteously.

Faversham soothed her with words of passionate protestation. She must not blame herself. She was not to blame. The fault was his alone. "It's both our faults," she told him, despairingly. "He loved me, and he was your friend. Oh! I wonder if he will ever forgive us!"

"And his mother. Will she ever forgive me?" was the desolate thought in Faversham's heart. Greyson came knocking softly at the door. He brought a tray of coffee and sandwiches, which he had prepared with much care.

"I can't eat anything. It would choke me," Lillie declared, tremulously. Greyson looked at her with tolerant pity. "This woman was to play a prominent part in your future, and as that of his master, he knew, and already he had resigned himself to the inevitable."

He was a tactician in his way. "I beg pardon, ma'am," he said, "but Mr. Faversham has had nothing to eat all day."

She raised her tragic eyes to Faversham's face. Such a worn face it was, though he tried to smile. "Haven't you, Miles?" she asked. "Then, of course, you must eat."

She forgot herself in solicitude for him, and gradually the faint color stole back to her cheeks. "She is young. Some day she will forget," Miles told himself, with the certain knowledge of his own death. His own burden could never be lifted. He had lost his friend, and he had still to face his friend's mother and break her heart.

He tried later to speak of what he felt. Lillie was sitting at his feet, then, his arm round her, her cheek against his hand; and he leaned back in that slow way that she could not see his face as he spoke falteringly of their future.

"We've got each other—though Gou knows I don't deserve that and she would be together, and I want—want to try to make something out of our lives—you will help me. I feel myself so unworthy." He broke down, and she raised herself and put her arms round his neck, drawing his head to her shoulder.

"Thank God, we've got each other, Miles." "After all Faversham was spared the shame and sorrow of telling Mrs. Tranter the many of her son's death. When he traveled up to town the following day to break the news to her he found that the more he had to say, and his had forestalled him. Philip's mother had died in her sleep during the hours while her son lay on the windswept sands with his face turned to the sky.

The nurse who was in the house and who told him wonders at the look of unutterable relief that swept across his face. It was only afterward when she heard the whole story grossly exaggerated and badly pieced together, that she understood.

But there was an added grief in Faversham's heart as he went away from the house where he had always been such a welcome guest. He had lost his two friends, and the bitterness of his remorse told him that she alone was to blame.

There was something pathetically old about him as he went back to the hotel where he waited for him. She ran to meet him eagerly, her brown eyes filled with passionate inquiry; then she stopped. "Oh, Miles! What is it?"

He told her as considerably as he could, and she hid his own pain, but her love for him was great enough to understand.

"And it's all—through me!" she whispered with white lips. "Oh, you dear, it is," she insisted, when he would have spoken. "If I had been different all those years ago—" She broke off, realizing in despair that all her passionate love for this man could never, by him wipe out the past or obliterate the bitter waters of memory.

It was evening then and the sun was shining redly across the sky. Lillie's honey-bee brown eyes watched it mournfully.

"It's the sun going down on what might have been," she said sadly. Faversham drew her closer. "But tomorrow it will shine on us again," he answered, "and we shall be together."

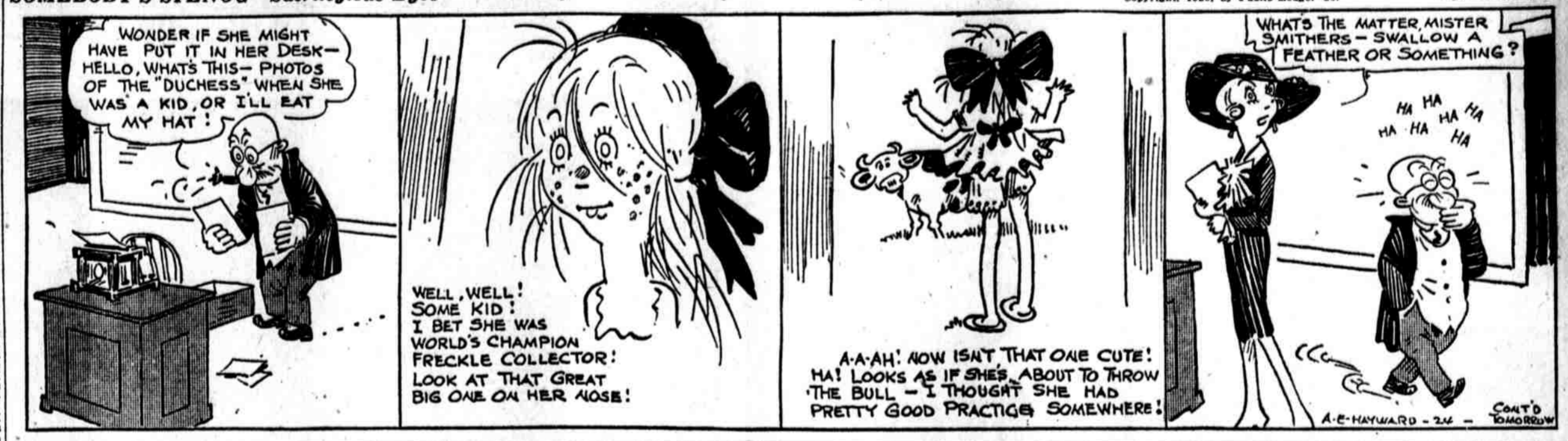
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By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Sacriligious Eyes

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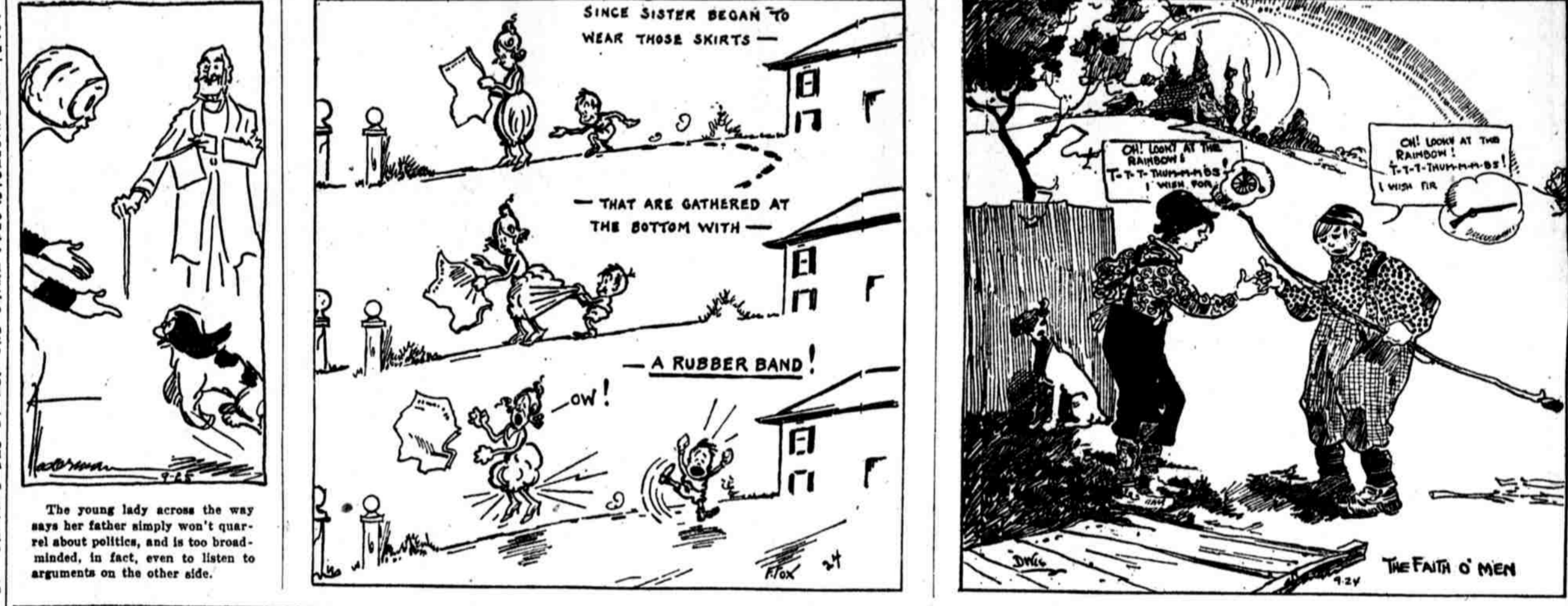
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