

The Phantom Lover

By Ruby Ayres

"BECAUSE I'm so ashamed," Either said in a stifled voice. "I'm not worth loving—I've . . . oh, you don't know how I've treated him!"

June was silent for a minute, then she said gently—

"But Micky will forget all that—Micky never remembers a mean thing against anybody in his life." She forced a smile to look at her. "Tell me one thing, and then I'll go and leave you in peace." "Do you—do you—do you know?"

"In this instance, at least, a verbal answer was not necessary."

June kissed her rapturously.

"Oh, you darling," she said. She blew out the candle, and sped up to her own room again like a ghost in the moonlight.

"Was there anything else you were wanting, sir?" Driver inquired stolidly. He stood on the platform looking in at the first-class compartment—where Micky sat alone in durance ville, waiting for the train to start.

He frowned, and pulled his soft hat further down over his eyes as he answered—

"No, nothing . . . I'll see you at Dover."

There were many people on the platform; in the next carriage a pretty girl was seeing a man off—looking up at him as he stood on the footboard with eyes that told their story eloquently.

"I could have told her," he thought, "but I would have given her a little of my own life." "Here he is—Micky, Micky!"

Micky started to his feet.

"June!" he said. For a moment he thought something must have happened—something was wrong—Either?—her name was trembling on his lips, but June rushed on impetuously before he had time to speak it.

"We thought we'd come and see you off—George told me you were going and I guessed you'd be on this train. . . . I'm so glad we found you—it's rotten seeing oneself off, isn't it?"

Rochester came up, laughing and red in the face; he took off his hat and mopped his hot forehead.

"I can't keep pace with her; she's like a whirlwind," he said whimsically. "She sneaks me off here before I could say a word."

"It's kind of you to come," Micky said. "He wanted to see me; he felt decidedly less ill-tempered than he had done a moment ago. He looked down at June's radiant face, and a little doubt went through his heart.

"I hope you'll have a good time," she said cheerily. "Have you got anything to read?"

"I shan't want anything—I'm not in a reading mood."

Micky was longing to ask about Either, but pride prevented him.

The guard was blowing his whistle; doors were slamming; June gripped Micky's hand.

"Be a good boy, and have a good time," she said. There was a furious excitement in her eyes.

He made a grimace.

SUNNY DUCROW

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"I'm not expecting to have a good time," he answered.

The train was slowly moving; June ran a few steps to keep up with it. Micky blurted out his question at last—

"Miss Sherstone . . . Either . . . is she all right, June?"

June smiled.

"Oh, she's first rate," said said airily. "She's going away for a holiday. Good-by." She fell back laughing and waving her hand.

Micky met his head out of the window till a cloud of smoke from the engine blown backward shut out all light. He saw her new in, dragging the window up with a snarl.

June went away for a holiday, had she? Then stopped dead, staring as if he had been struck. Either was sitting there just behind him, looking up at him with scared eyes.

For a moment Micky did not move; he was like a man turned to stone. The blood rushed to his face in a crimson tide; he broke out into stammering speech.

"You . . . you . . . What . . . what . . . I thought . . . He swayed forward a little and caught her hand. "You are real—I thought . . . I thought I was just imagining it all; I thought . . . oh, wait a moment . . . He sat down and leaned his head in his hands.

Either stretched a timid hand to him; her voice shook as she said—

"Oh, I thought . . . I thought perhaps you'd be glad to see me—just . . . just a little glad . . ."

"Glad?" Micky echoed the word with almost a shout. He got up and went over to her; he looked down at her with an agony of doubt and fear in his eyes.

"Why have you come?" he asked hoarsely. "If this is only a joke—It's any nonsense of June's . . . by God, it's the sweetest joke you could have played on me . . ."

Either covered her face with her hands.

"If that's all you've got to say to me," she began trembling.

He drew her hands down; he forced her to look at him; for a long moment his eyes searched her face disbelievingly, not daring to hope.

Her cheeks flamed, but she met his eyes bravely.

Micky drew a long breath; he passed a hand across his eyes as if to awaken himself.

Then all at once he seemed to realize that this was in very truth the woman who was here and for his sake; that he was alone and unhappy no longer; and that after all the weeks of hunger and restlessness to find out her true face and her eyes of passionate tenderness.

"Is this my wife?" he asked hoarsely, and Either answered—

"If you will want me."

"Wait a minute," Micky caught her to him. "I haven't always wanted you."

"Either . . . when did you . . . when did you first . . . think that you liked me . . . just a little?"

Her head drooped; he could not see her face.

"I don't know," she said in a whisper. "In Paris," he urged, "or before. Tell me."

"I think it was in Paris—after . . . after I saw that . . . Raymond. You were so kind . . . so different." He laughed ruefully.

"I was never, hating you then than ever in my life."

THE GUMPS—Grooming the Hair Apparent

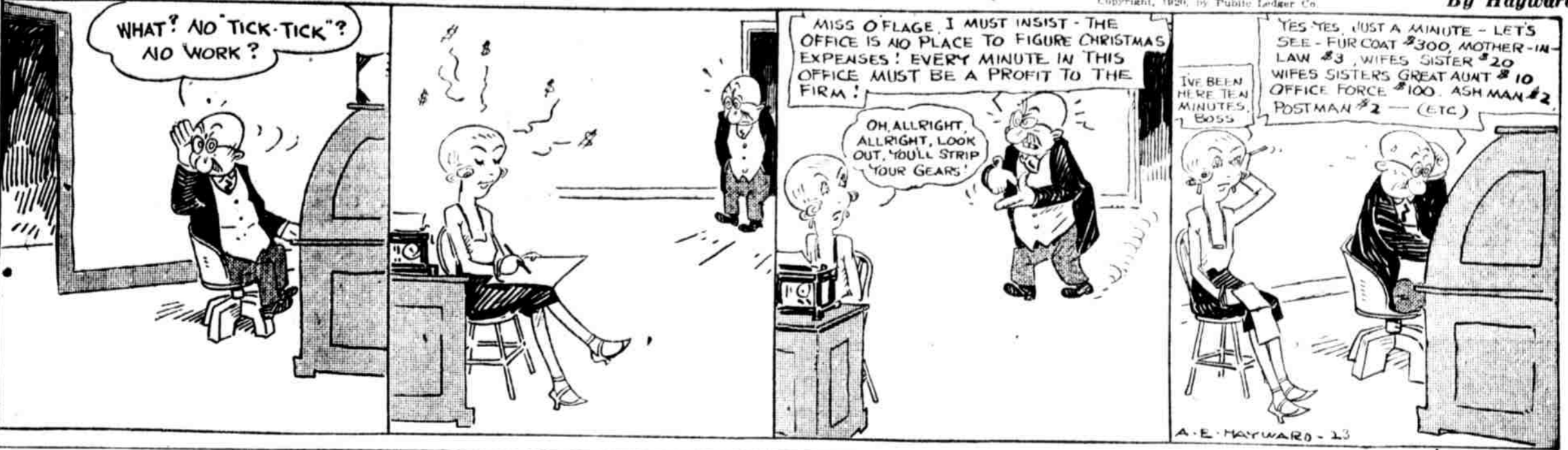
By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Figuring Time at a Profit

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By Hayward



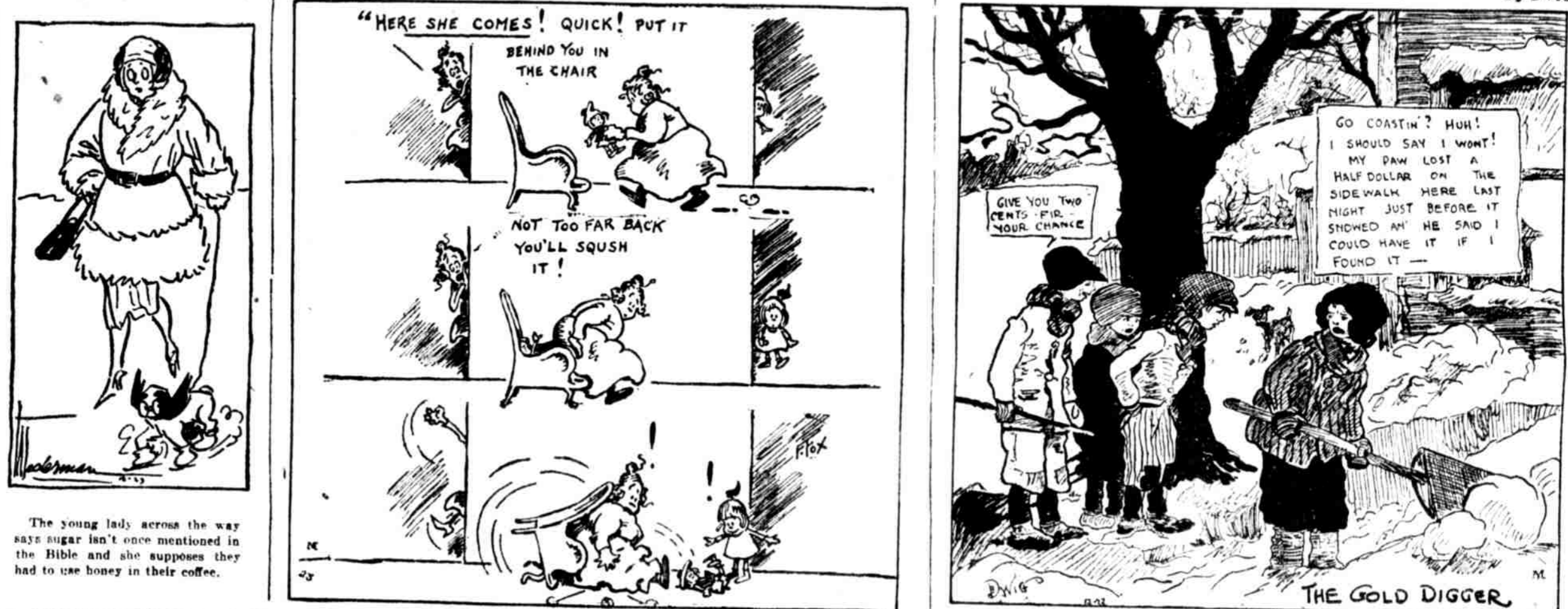
The Young Lady Across the Way

Miserable Failure of the Attempt to Hide the Doll

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SCHOOL DAYS

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PETEY—Ain't That Fair Enough?

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