

LADYFINGERS

By JACKSON GREGORY

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THIS STARTS THE STORY

A safe has been cracked and the thief has escaped. Ambrose, a gangster, calls on Joe Le Brun, a panger, and demands to know who did it. Le Brun tells him that "Toby" and "Frank" know nothing about it, and denounces Ashe, offering a reward of \$5000 for the criminal. He agrees to fasten the crime on him, and Polly, who is a daughter of the law, is disgusted. At this point, Polly, who is a daughter of the law, is disgusted. Ambrose has a scornful regard for Polly, but is suspicious of her. Ambrose has a scornful regard for Polly, but is suspicious of her. Ambrose has a scornful regard for Polly, but is suspicious of her.

standing in a position such as she knew his to shoulder a word of it! The gates of a penitentiary were yawning for him and Polly, knowing it, felt that Ashe must be as poignantly aware of it as himself.

"Hobbie Ashe," she said very soberly, "you've got to cut out this funny business and come alive. They're after you and they mean business this time. If it was just Ambrose I wouldn't be scared; I guess you can be one too much for him most any time he stacks up against you single-handed. But papa's in cahoots with him, and Joe Le Brun never went after a man yet he didn't get."

Her words jarred against the lightness of Ashe's mood. He frowned, then laughed carelessly.

"They can't get me, Polly," he told her with youthful assurance. "If your worthy father gets obstreperous I've got a certain magic word to whisper into his ear and he'll drop the business like it's a hot brick. As for Ambrose, he'll lift his shoulders in a contemptuous shrug. 'I've been playing tag with him for half a year.'"

Polly, while openly admiring, shook her head. Maybe Ashe knew what he was talking about with just Joe Le Brun and Ambrose opposing him; Polly doubted it, for no one knew better than she the resourcefulness and stubbornness of her father when once he sought to run down a man. But there was the third person, the goggled stranger, the Unknown Quantity, clothed with a real terror to her chiefly because he elected to be cloaked in mystery. Polly had come to speak of him, to tell Ashe what she knew and what she feared, her suspicions that he was the enemy of a powerful enemy or perhaps some high-up of the secret service. She knew enough to sense a "frame-up." And her experience and observation were large enough to tell her that a frame-up, into which a police officer, a gangster and an Unknown Quantity entered was a terrible thing with which to cope.

All of this and more was at the tip of her tongue when Ashe quite inadvertently opened a new vista for consideration and so sealed for himself one avenue of escape.

"You are a good kid, Polly," he said. Polly caught hungrily at the words, her heartbeats quickening. But the heartbeats came only the slower with the realization that while sincerity lay back of the words, there was utterly lacking that deeper emotion which had prompted his speech, would have made her heart leap with the great joy.

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AND HERE IT CONTINUES

HE TOSSED away the book, still laughing.

"Roy is the West.

Ross is the South.

Roses are her cheeks.

And a rose in her mouth."

And she happily. "Sounds like Mother Goose, doesn't it? But it's old father Tenyson, just feeling foolish and happy. The rest might just as well be."

"With a merry ding-dong.

Happy, gay and free.

With a merry sing-song.

Happy let us be."

"I tell you, Hobbie," expostulated Polly, seeking to be serious. "And I tell you, Polly," he cut in upon her evident homily, "that it's bedtime. What say you to this, Miss Polly?"

"The year's at the spring.

And day's at the morn'.

Morning's at 7.

The hillside's dew pearled;

The lark's in the wing;

The snail's on the thorn;

God's in his heaven * * *

All's right with the world."

"And then," he continued with no sense for the waiting impatience of Polly, "Behold, said 'God's in His heaven.' Do you hear that? And I say, 'All's right with the world!' That's a triumphant line, Miss Polly Le Brun."

"Humph!" was Polly's sniff of a comment. "Is it? Maybe the guy that wrote that didn't crack safes for a living and didn't know a cop named Ambrose. You're a funny sort of fellow, Hobbie Ashe."

"Polly, put Polly! You mean I'm crazy? You're wrong. I'm just mad. An inspiration has come to me, Polly. I'm inspired. If you like, obsessed, if you prefer. I'm glad you came. I was about to try to write the morning paper but you've stopped me. I'm going to keep in tune with the morning by living it! Living is better than writing, eh, Polly? I'm going for a reaction. Where's my hat?"

"What do you mean, stringing me out, the shadow of uneasiness in her eye. 'Are you just stringing me? Where are you going?'"

The words were accompanied by a quick flourish of the car-free brightness of his wide smile, the brightness of his eyes.

"I'm going where a fellow can chase cool butterflies and run races with his shadow," he informed her with an assumption of gravity. "I'm going to visit the Lady Springtime in her own name. I'm going where I can satisfy certain lifelong curiosities. I've always wanted to know if there really are such things as big, mossy boulders with thin streams of clear, cold water trickling out from between them. I've always had a hankering to learn first hand a lot of things about lettuce and onions. I've always been consumed with curiosity about * * * pumpkins!"

"Pumpkins?" said Polly.

"Exactly," he nodded back at her. "What kind of a bush they grow on, you know? I * * * I have never told you before, Polly * * * but I am not sure they don't dig 'em, like potato, you know."

"Do pumpkins grow this time of year?" she asked the practical Polly.

"We could telephone the grocery man at the corner," he suggested. "But, no; he'd be about it. I've always come to the telephone prepared to lie about their goods, and can't help it. No, I'll go find out, Polly."

"Then, a look of frank admiration in her eyes. 'You've got the coolest eye of any man I ever saw, Hobbie Ashe.'"

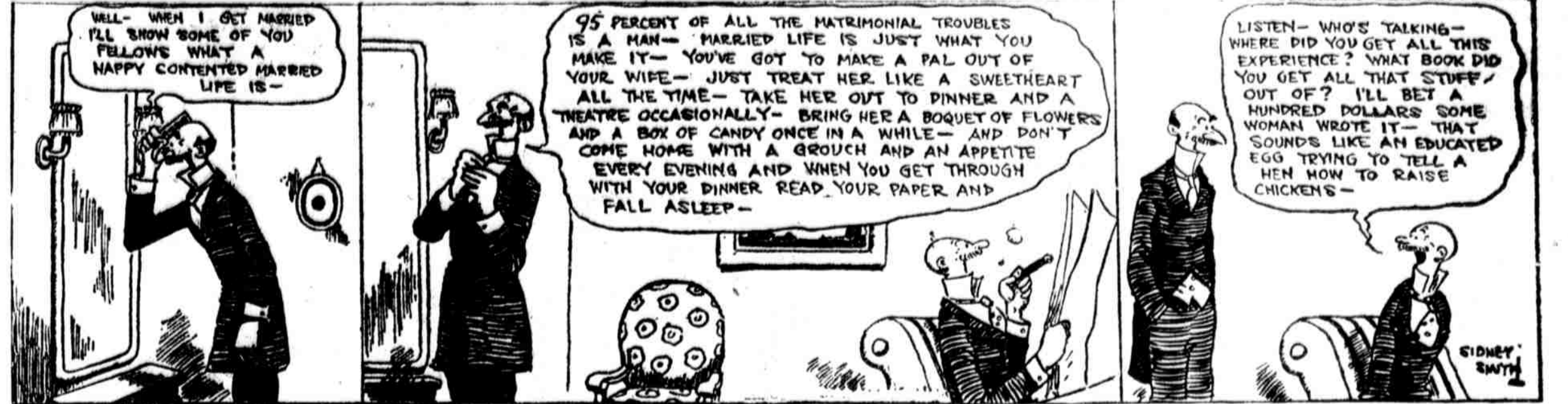
"Here you look a safe less'n two days ago and the whole mob of cops is after you. On top of that you've bled a safe for a million dollars * * * Oh, Ambrose told dad and I'm not asleep all the time I'm snoring! * * * And what you carry it off like a man that can't ever even broke a speed law, and talk to me about going to pick pumpkins!"

She looked at him severely. Although she did not know it, Polly was quite as much as this morning was Ashe. No doubt the springtime, triumphant in a march down cobbled streets and cement sidewalks, had something to do with the matter in her case, too. Polly was consumed with the warmth of her desire for mother something, to mother the thing she loved most in all the world. In her old young eyes Hobbie Ashe was utterly boyish just now with his rumpled hair and dancing eyes; more than that he stood alone and many men, Ambrose, her father, the goggled stranger, were so many crouching, hungry voices, ready to spring out of the shadows upon him and drag him down. It was Polly's own affair how she had learned of what was afoot; while she did not know everything she suspected much. The knowledge and resultant suspicion combined had brought her in state to Ashe's room.

Now, a man may have the light so strong in his eyes that he cannot see clearly. Had Ashe not been, as he was, so divinely mad this morning, had his soul not been killed with the mysterious and beautiful of such things as moss-covered boulders and yellow-bellied pumpkins, he must have seen that which stood bright and naked in the girl's look.

As it was he saw in Polly Le Brun not only the pretty girl who had been his friend as any boy had, but never dreamed of thinking sentimentally. She was giving him a frank look which would have sent a fierce shiver through Lieutenant Ambrose; in the girl's mind a picture was taking form of a face, chewing at the top rail of a fence, watching a comfortably grunting pig, watching a greedy lot of pigs, watching a used to Ashe's flashing words, catalogued them as "joshing only," and refused to take them seriously. No now. Not yet had she realized how much he meant of what he put into his bubble of pumpkins and butterflies. How could a man,

THE GUMPS—Old Know-It-All



By Sidney Smith

SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Fire! Fire! Fire!



By Hayward

"I always seem to take your kindnesses to me sort of as a matter of course, I'm afraid," he smiled at her. "I believe that I forgot half of the time that Joe Le Brun is your father, that his fortunes are yours, that you are doing a wonderfully unselfish thing in siding with me. I don't know that I ought to let you come to me this way. One of these days it's going to make positive trouble between you and your father."

Polly's hard little laugh startled him. "Hobbie, did you say? It burst wide open last night. Papa and Ambrose and the other guy were cooking up their dirty mess and I'd Polly to take a chance on changing sides. Ambrose's big ears wouldn't miss the noise the fog makes scraping along the alley walls; he yanks the door open and there's me, looking fussed and getting red. Her, Joe, he sneers, dragging me in. 'Here's Polly getting thirsty again!' And before we're through I slap Ambrose's face so my hand hurts and papa gets fresh and I slap his face. I was for yanking off No Name's goggles in the mix-up, to get a better squint at him when they throw me off stage and shut the door and don't talk so loud."

"I didn't want it to come to this," said Ashe gravely. "I didn't want you to quarrel with Le Brun. Nor with Ambrose. You must make up with them some way, Polly."

"Make up?" she stared out angrily. "I'll see the whole crowd in hell first! If they think I'm going to stand by and see 'em double cross you. * * * She broke off abruptly, biting her lips. Her breast was suddenly tumultuous with her quick breathing.

As Ashe looked wonderingly at her she stared back in a queer sort of defiance, stared until her two cheeks went as red as red blood could make them, until she dashed her hand across her eyes as she grew hot with a new sort of shame and a fierce anger at him, at herself, at the world in general.

God knows Polly Le Brun was no prude; conventions were for her insignificant obstacles which might clutter the path for another but which she thrust aside with an impatient foot. But deep down where the real Polly Le Brun existed, deep down under the hardness of her eyes and the boldness of her stare, she was the pure womanliness which, she suddenly, writhed under that look in Ashe's eyes. And Hobbie Ashe, professional thief, gifted none the less with that wonderful quality, a rare, innate delicacy drawn from his father's blood, suckled from his mother's milk, instilled in an infant in which body and brain and soul expand so swiftly, absorb so intimately, understood. Understood, almost clearly, that which Polly herself could not grope after blindly. His finer nature saw the beauty of the instinctive emotion which had set the girl trembling. Even while he was painfully at loss for the thing to say or do he knew that the poem in his book were not so fine as the love in the soul of poor little Polly Le Brun.

"Polly," he said softly, "I'm a crazy little fool," she cried, dabbing angrily at her eyes. "I—Oh, I'm a fool."

"Polly," he said.

Again she flung up her head defiantly. But in her eyes was something more than challenge. There was hunger unhidden, yearning, not to be disguised no matter how bravely Polly struggled with it. And, so many things may crowd into one swift, tragic look, there was something there probing deep, seeking eagerly, striving to find that need not be ashamed of her shame. And in the end she laughed a trifle uncertainly and hysterically and dabbed at her eyes again and turned away.

"You've always been mighty good to me, Polly," she boy said slowly. "I've always liked you better than anybody else I knew, too. But I didn't quite understand. Polly."

"I understand!" Polly jerked her head up, her wet eyes hard upon his, her voice hard. "Understand what?"

It was hard to frame the words in reply, but he saw the futility of evasion and procrastination.

"That you felt—like this. . . ."

Polly's little sniff, a familiar weapon, was something of a failure. But at this moment of high tension it did as well as another.

In a general way Hobbie Ashe wished well to every fellow voyager bound down the great stream of life. He could rob the merriest heart in the world; it is very much to be doubted if, though a golden reward were offered him, he would have borne to have wounded the feelings of a little child or of the old woman who sold paper at the corner of Kearney and Market. He was original but no vandal; he was a thief, but none the less a gentleman.

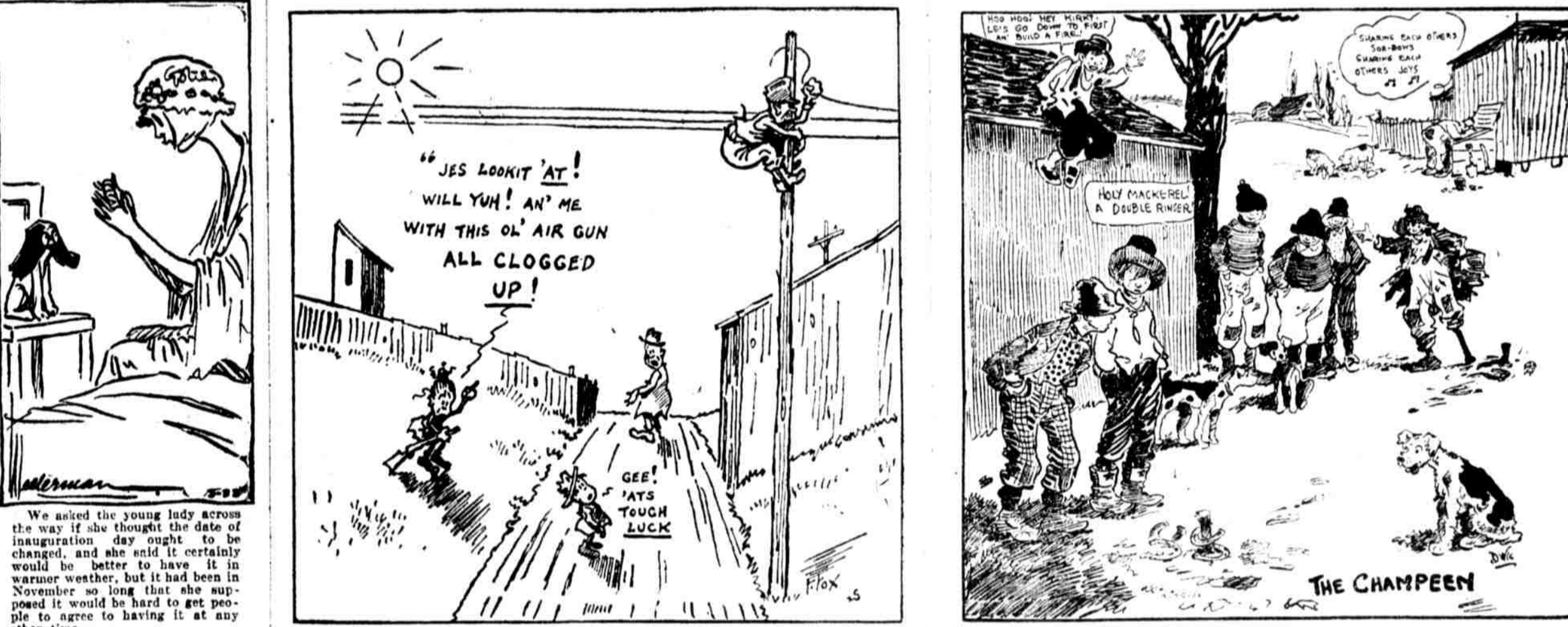
The Young Lady Across the Way

TOMMY TAYLOR

By FONTAINE FOX

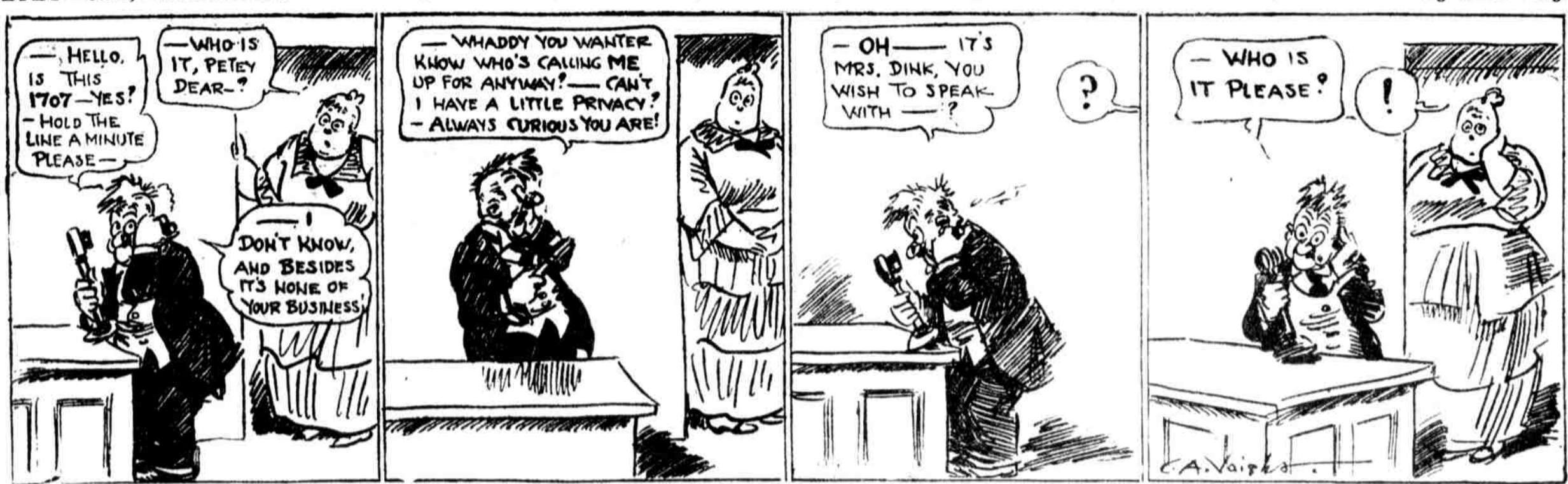
SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG



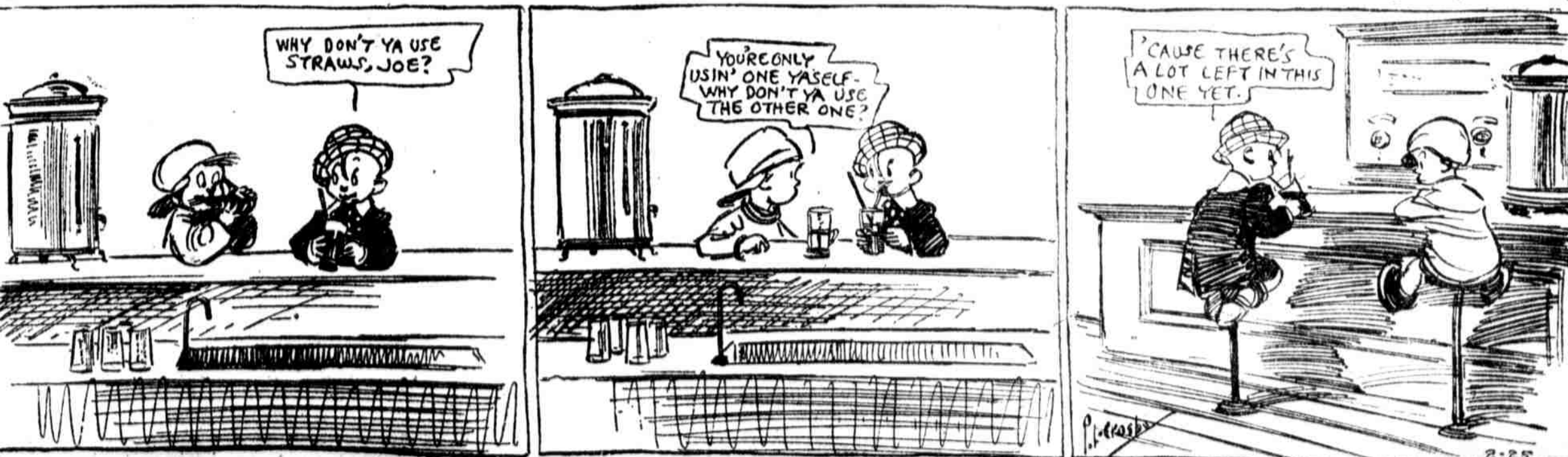
PETEY—Sure, He's Different

By C. A. Voight



THE CLANCY KIDS—That's Why, Joe

By Percy L. Crosby



"I'm going where a fellow can chase cool butterflies and run races with his shadow," he informed her with an assumption of gravity. "I'm going to visit the Lady Springtime in her own name. I'm going where I can satisfy certain lifelong curiosities. I've always wanted to know if there really are such things as big, mossy boulders with thin streams of clear, cold water trickling out from between them. I've always had a hankering to learn first hand a lot of things about lettuce and onions. I've always been consumed with curiosity about * * * pumpkins!"

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(CONTINUED TOMORROW)