

LADYFINGERS

By JACKSON GREGORY

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THIS STARTS THE STORY

"Ladyfingers," a thief but a gentleman with a sunny, merry disposition, is the object of a safe on the wall. The frame-up is planned by a gangster and crook with the aid of a wide detective and a \$5000 diamond robbery from the person of rich Mrs. Stethers, because Polly Le Brun, who is the woman he is going to marry, is hidden under a rough exterior. Haddon, the lawyer who offered the \$10000 bribe, has charge of the least of the women, and she had made inquiries of the whereabouts of a grandson. He finds the young man in the person of "Lock" who had been paying court to Evelyn Daly, the supposed heiress. He is able to get a confession from her in a form of a woman by relating to her that the grandson would inherit instead of her. A large sum of money had been promised from the estate of Mrs. Stethers's safe on the night—Haddon tells Ash he must steal this money, give him \$10,000 and then get the \$100,000. But the plan is to get a plan concocted by Haddon and Ambrose to capture and steal from him the last he stole from the Stethers to hand him to the penitentiary. Ash, watched by Mrs. Stethers, attacks the safe and is about to get away when he is confronted by Haddon and Ambrose. "I have not taken a thing from your safe," he announces.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

She went to the safe and in a little jerked open the door. Ambrose and Haddon were standing close, watching. There in plain sight was a great thick pad of bills. By them was a bit of faded note paper. The old women snatched it up with shaking fingers. While Ambrose stared blankly at Haddon and Haddon seemed like a man with the ground swept suddenly from beneath him, she read the few lines scribbled: Bobbie Ash's short, simple letter of farewell to an old woman who had been kind to him and whom he loved. And then she had thrown both of her arms about Ash's neck and was crying and hugging him convulsively. "Oh, thank God, thank God!" she murmured over and over. "Mrs. Stethers," Ash said softly. "You had better . . ."

But she held him off a little from her and the tears were running down her wrinkled cheeks as she admonished him: "Can't you call me grandma, Bobbie, dear? Can't you?"

Ambrose, his face red with fury, swung about upon Haddon. "What have you got me into?" he snarled.

Haddon found no immediate answer. Ambrose, in no mood to be baffled utterly, cried out angrily: "Mrs. Stethers, I'm sorry, but I've got to take him in. Just your calling him your grandson doesn't make him so. And, if he was foxy enough to pass up this chance to steal, he's still got that diamond charge to answer to."

"If you want to know anything about that diamond matter," she said bluntly, "you just ask Haddon there. Ask him who he picked it up when Bobbie dropped it! And now, listen to me. Both of you! Bobbie here is my grandson and what is more I can prove it. Ask Haddon about that! If you two crooks get out of here right this minute and leave me and my grandchild alone, I'll see to it you again there'll be nothing further said about that diamond. You can keep it. If you try to make trouble I'll send Haddon to the penitentiary for that and for some other crooked work. If you, Ambrose, get out and keep your mouth shut, you can make Haddon which with you. Stay here and you'll get nothing but trouble and a lot of it! I guess you know something about Rachel Stethers, don't you? Now . . . get out!"

She had forgotten them. Her arms were about him, her tear-stained face was looking up at him, her eyes filled with the hunger of love, with a blissful "I know you couldn't really be dishonest!" she laughed up at him delightedly. "Wild, maybe. All Stethers are wild. I'm wild myself!"

CHAPTER XXVII

Polly Le Brun Squares the Game

Justin Haddon, having much at stake, comported himself like an able general. With forethought and care he had mapped his attack, and now saw it being swept back. He retreated promptly. Now he must save himself; later he could strike again, from ambush, a flank movement. So far, nothing had been lost save honor.

Now, more clearly than ever, he saw his salvation in Evelyn Daly. Ash might or might not escape prosecution and an ultimate conviction. Evelyn might or might not come to stand foremost in Rachel Stethers's will. But, in any case, Evelyn was the old woman's kinwoman and so would not be utterly forgotten.

Haddon cursed himself now for his single blunder. When Ash upon the night of the attempted diamond robbery had dropped the stone, it had been Haddon's instinctive thought to snatch it up, to return it to the owner. Then a woman had screamed. He has stolen a woman and, turning to show the thing in his palm, he had seen that all eyes were upon the dark figure running through the shrubbery. He had swung quickly to the right, and his arms were upon the fugitive. It seemed at first incredible, then perfectly natural. Perhaps because he wanted it to seem natural, he wanted it to seem that no one had seen him retrieve the fallen jewel. He dropped it into his pocket.

But all of the times that inscrutable old woman had known. She had known who Ash was. She had known that Justin Haddon was a traitor to her interests. Now she would make him pay, in one way or another, no doubt in the possible ways she would exact payment from him. Unless he outwitted her now and speedily.

He withdrew swiftly and silently, trusting that his departure would be unnoticed. And so would it have been had not Lieutenant Ambrose's steady eyes followed him. Haddon, once that he was in the hallway, hurried to Evelyn's room. As he went a glance at his half-past eleven. Perhaps she had not yet gone to bed.

Nor had she. He saw the light under the door, heard her moving about restlessly. It was not meant that she should sleep tonight. There was a reason. Haddon to think about and Justin Haddon in the new role of master of her fate, yes, and the terrible possibility

of another than herself falling heir to the Stethers millions. She started at Haddon's knock. And when he rapped again she asked sharply: "Well? Who is it?"

"Haddon," answered the lawyer, his lips close. "There were voices, Rachel Stethers's and Mr. Steele's, both obviously strongly moved. And the house had been so still only a moment ago.

"What is it?" she cried anxiously. "Is that man in there?"

"Evelyn," said Haddon with quiet emphasis, "we haven't much time for talking. It's too late for that now; the time has come for action. I have already ordered our car. You are going with me into Lockworth."

"Lockworth!" She stared at him in amazement. "At this time of night! Justin, tell me what has happened? What are we going to do in Lockworth?"

"Nothing has happened . . . yet," he lied promptly. "A great deal is going to happen. In Lockworth, just as fast as I can get a couple of men out of bed."

"Married!" she gasped. "Married!"

"Yes, married," he told her steadily. "Marry me tonight and I'll save you your rightful fortune. Hesitate and you lose it. Oh, I'll explain as we drive into town. But you've got to make up your mind."

"But, Justin, I don't understand . . ."

"I do. I tell you that I am the one man in the world who can arrange matters so that you inherit your aunt's money. If I do anything for you I've got to do it now, tonight. And, doggedly, I won't turn a hand unless you marry me immediately."

"But, Justin . . . I . . . I can't! Not this way . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders and turned as to re-enter the house. She clutched at his sleeve.

"Wait! Wait, Justin, I . . . Oh, I can't think!"

"Won't you let me do the thinking, Evelyn?" he asked more softly. "You know how I love you. Everything I am doing is for your sake, dear."

Ambrose, watching them from the shadows about the porch, was in no position to understand what the undercurrent might be. But he had no intention of losing sight of Haddon just now. Haddon had already ordered the car; Ambrose had seen one standing in the road in front of the house.

It had been there when they came in. Haddon had not said when he had ordered it out. Ambrose made the natural mistake and, slipping quietly through the shrubbery, went around the house, meaning to intercept Haddon and Evelyn there and to go with them into Lockworth.

"I'll get more out of him than out of that old woman," he told himself with a measure of complacency. "I'll make him cough up the whole thing."

But before he had come to the big French car he had come upon the owner of it and the French heels. He and Polly Le Brun met face to face as each, moving quietly, came about a corner of the house, meaning to intercept Haddon and Evelyn there and to go with them into Lockworth.

"Yes," returned Polly in her most impudent manner. "It's little Me. How's trick?"

But Ambrose's face, at first showing merely the start of his surprise at finding here here when she should naturally be in the French heels, indicated now a black and blacker rage.

"Curse you!" he snarled at her. "Still stuck on Ladyfingers, are you? You've been dead stuck on him all the time, trying to get me. And you've come up here to tip him off . . ."

He lifted his hand as though he would strike her down. Polly's eyes, bright and frank now, the scorn of him which had so long lain hidden in her soul.

"Gee," she laughed at him contemptuously, "you're the swell guesser, ain't you?"

"It's the truth, then?"

"Sure, it's the truth. I don't have to lie to you any longer. It was the time, if I can't do it any other way I'll get you with my hands!"

And, as though no longer could his rage hold itself in check, his two hands shot out, gripping her shoulders. A moment he held her thus, so that her face went white and she flinched from him. Then brutally he flung her from him, laughing softly as her body struck against the house.

"You great big brute," she snapped at him. "You'd maul a woman, but you'd be scared to kill her. Scared of your own shadow in uniform dragging you away, scared of the rope at San Quentin . . . You'd be scared to kill a chicken if it was against the wall! You coward! You make me sick!"

Under the whip of her contempt Ambrose cried out harshly: "Scared, am I? Afraid to kill, am I? Didn't I . . ."

And there he stopped suddenly, and though there was just the moonlight streaming upon his face, for his hat had fallen, Polly saw the look which had come into the man's eyes.

"My God!" cried the girl, gasping out the words. "It was you!"

"What do you mean?" he challenged, again standing over her.

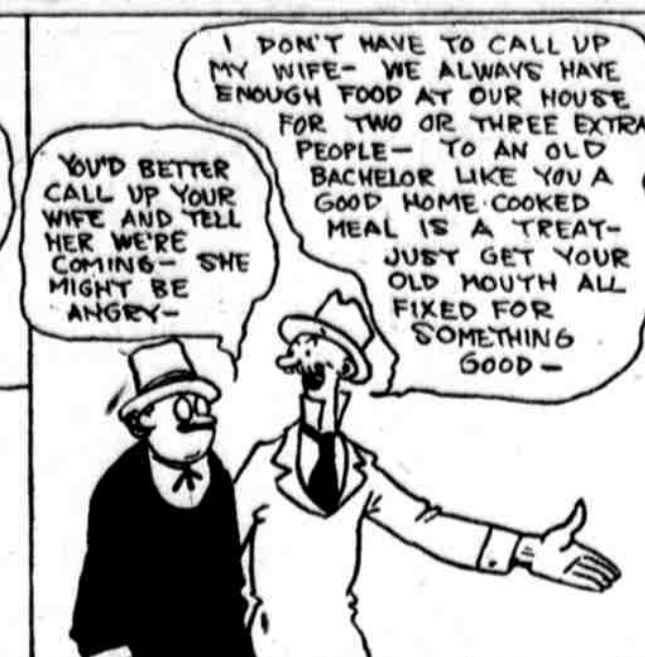
"It was you!" she repeated, half in wonder, half in horror. "It never was Tom. You killed papa!"

"You fool!" cried Ambrose, again shaking her in his whitening hands. "You little fool! Keep your mouth shut. Do you understand? It was I. I've got the evidence, he's been bound over . . ."

"Take your dirty hands off me!" she screamed at him. "You made the evidence!"

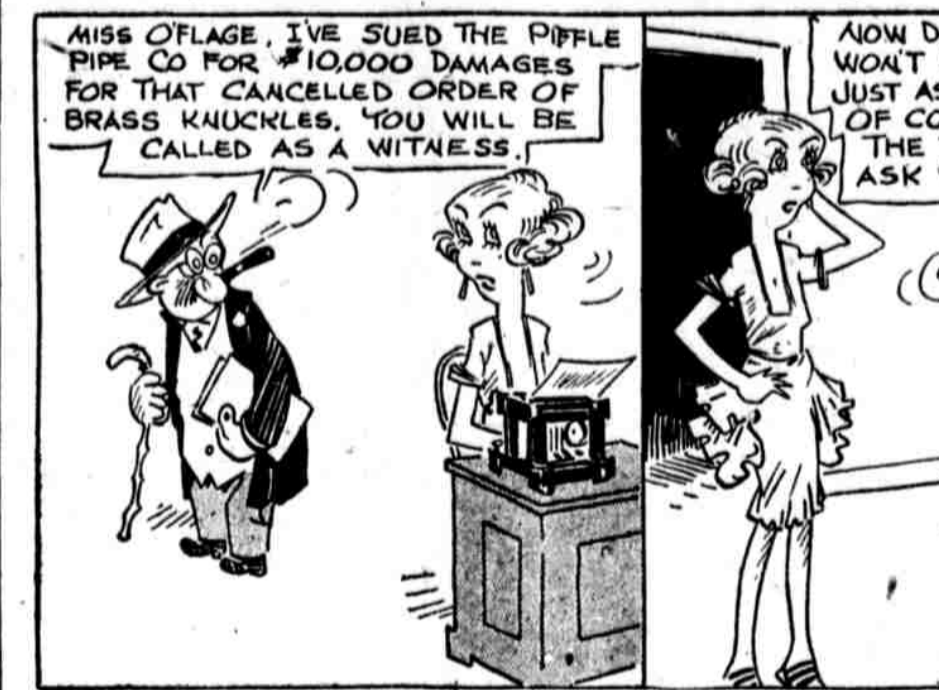
(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

THE GUMPS—Company for Dinner



By Sidney Smith

SOMEBODY'S STENOG—The Great \$10,000 Damage Case

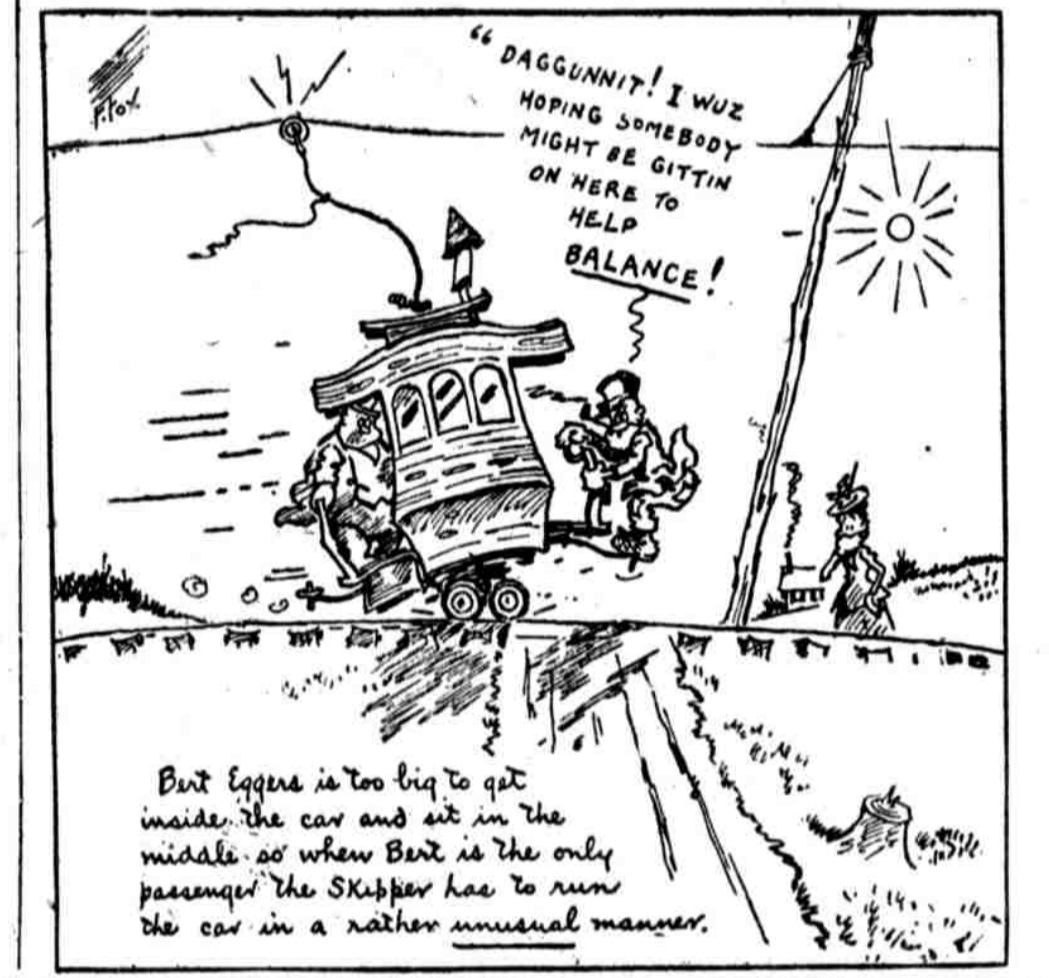


By Hayward

The Young Lady Across the Way



THE TOONERVILLE TROLLEY

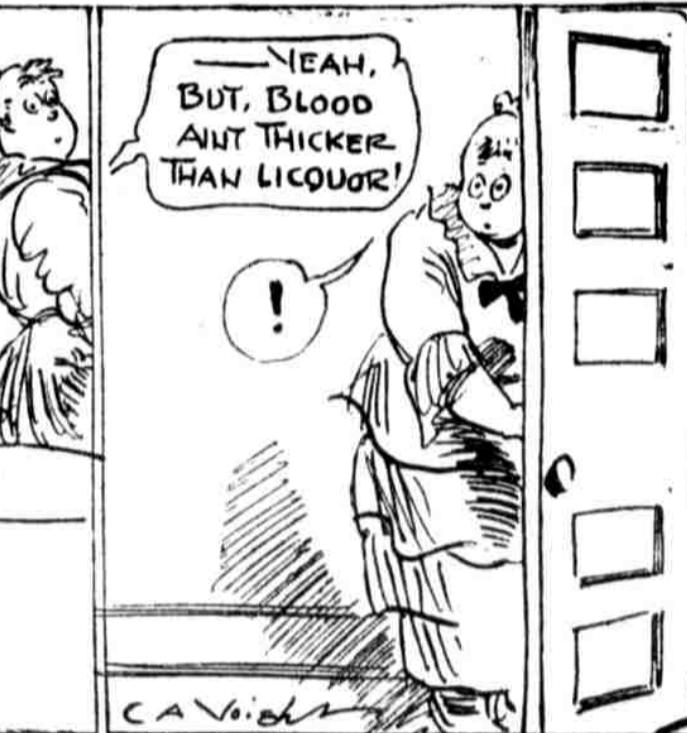


SCHOOL DAYS



The young lady across the way says many of the other signers of the Declaration of Independence have been forgotten, but the name of Abraham Lincoln will always remain green in our memories.

PETEY—Not These Days, Anyway



By C. A. Voight

THE CLANCY KIDS—S. O. No. 12, We Should Say



By Percy L. Crosby