

TARZAN THE TERRIBLE

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CHAPTER XXI

The Maniac

The last bar that would make the opening large enough to permit his body to pass had been removed as Tarzan heard the warriors whispering beyond the stone door of his prison. Long since had the rope of hide been reeled. To secure one end to the rebarbed bar that he had left for this purpose was the work of a moment, and while the warriors whispered without, the brown body of the ape-man slipped through the small aperture and disappeared behind the wall.

Tarzan's escape from the cell left him still within the walled area that comprised the palace and temple grounds and buildings. He had reconnoitered as best he might from the window after he had removed enough bars to permit him to pass his head through the opening, so that he knew what lay immediately before him—a winding and usually deserted alleyway leading in the direction of the outer gate that opened from the palace grounds into the city.

The darkness would facilitate his escape. He might even pass out of the palace and the city without detection. If he could elude the guard at the palace gate the rest would be easy. He strode along confidently, exhibiting no fear of detection, for he reasoned that thus would he disarm suspicion. In the darkness he easily could pass for a Ho-don and in truth, though he passed several after leaving the deserted palace, no one accused or detained him, and thus he came at last to the guard of a half-dozen warriors before the palace gate. These he attempted to pass in the same unconcerned fashion and he might have succeeded had not one of them who came running rapidly from the direction of the temple shouting: "Let no one pass the gates! The prisoner has escaped from the palace!"

Instantly a warrior barred his way and simultaneously the fellow recognized him. "Not tar!" he exclaimed. "Here he is now. Fall upon him! Fall upon him! Back! Back before I kill you!"

The others came forward. It cannot be said that they rushed forward. If it was their wish to fall upon him there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm than that which directed their efforts to persuade some one else to fall upon him. His fame as a fighter had been too long a topic of conversation for the good of the morale of Mo-sar's warriors. It was safer to stand at a distance and hurl their clubs and this they did, but the ape-man had learned something of the use of this weapon since he had arrived in Pal-ul-don. And as he learned great had grown his respect for this most primitive of arms. He had come to realize that the black savages he had known had never appreciated the possibilities of their knob sticks, nor had he, and he had discovered, too, why the Pal-ul-dons had turned their ancient spears into plover-shaves and pinned their faith to the heavy-ended club alone. In deadly execution it was far more effective than a spear, and it answered, too, every purpose of a shield, combining the two in one and thus reducing the burden of the warrior. Thrown as they were in the manner of the hammer-throwers of the Olympic games, an ordinary shield would prove more a weakness than a strength, while one that would be strong enough to prove a protection would be too heavy to carry. Only an arm club, deftly wielded to deflect the course of an enemy missile, or in any way effective against the formidable weapons, and, too, the war club of Pal-ul-don can be thrown with accuracy a far greater distance than any spear.

And now was put to the test that which Tarzan had learned from Om-ut and Ta-den. His eyes and his muscles trained by a lifetime of necessity moved with the rapidity of light and his brain functioned with an uncanny celerity that suggested nothing less than pre-eminence and these more than compensated for his lack of experience with the war club he handled so dextrously.

Weapon after weapon he ward off and always he moved with a single idea in mind—to place himself out of reach of one of his antagonists. But there were warriors for whom the superstitious fears of them attributed the miraculous powers of deity. They were determined to keep between Tarzan and the gate, and all the time they howled and re-enforcements. Should these come before he had made his escape the ape-man realized that the odds against him would be insurmountable, and so he redoubled his efforts to carry out his design.

Following their usual tactics, two or three of the warriors were always circling behind him collecting the brown clubs when Tarzan's attention was directed elsewhere. He himself retrieved several of them which he hurled with such deadly effect as to dispose of two of his antagonists, but now he heard the approach of hurrying warriors, the patter of their bare feet upon the stone pavement and then the savage cries which were to bolster the courage of their fellows and fill the enemy with fear.

There was no time to lose. Tarzan held a club in either hand, and swinging one he hurled it at a warrior before him, and as the man dodged he rushed in and seized him, at the same time casting his second club at another of his opponents. The Ho-don manly whom he grappled reached in grasped his wrist, but the ape-man was a quick man. There was a sudden twist, the snapping of a bone and an agonized scream, then the warrior held as a shield between his fellows and the fugitive as the latter backed stood the gateway. Beside Tarzan entrance to the palace grounds. The warriors were advancing to the succor of their fellows when the ape-man flung him full force of his head foremost attacker. The fellow went down and two directly behind him as the ape-man seized their companion and cast him back into the torch and to be extinguished as it struck the re-enforcements.

In the ensuing darkness Tarzan disappeared in the streets of Tu-lur behind the palace gate. For a time he fact that they trailed away and did him the direction of Jad-in-lul informed wrong direction, for he had turned south out of Tu-lur purposely to throw off his pursuers. Beyond the outer gate he turned directly toward the northwest, in which direction lay A-lur.

In his path he knew lay Jad-bal-lul, the shore of which he was compelled to cross at the lower end of the great

lake upon the shores of which lay A-lur. What other obstacles lay in his way he did not know, but he believed that he could make better time on foot than by attempting to steal a canoe and force his way up stream with a single paddle. It was his intention to put as much distance as possible between himself and Tu-lur as he slept for he was sure that Mo-sar would not lightly accept his loss, but that with the coming of day, or possibly even before, he would dispatch warriors in search of him.

A mile or two from the city he entered a forest and here at last he felt such a measure of safety as he never knew in open spaces or in cities. The forest and the jungle were his birth-right. No creature that went upon the ground upon four feet, or climbed among the trees, or crawled upon its belly had any claim over the ape-man in his native haunts. As myrrh and frankincense were the dank odors of rotting vegetation in the nostrils of the great elephants, so the pungent odors of the forest were to him as the perfume of a woman's hair. He squared his broad shoulders and lifting his head filled his lungs with the air that he loved best. The heavy fragrance of tropical blooms, the commingled odors of the myriad-scented life of the jungle went to his head with a pleasurable intoxication far more potent than aught known in the oldest vineyards of civilization.

He took to the trees now, not from necessity but from pure love of the wild freedom that had been denied him so long. Though it was dark and the forest strange yet he moved with a surety and ease that bespoke more a strange and uncanny sense than wondrous skill. He heard a moaning somewhere ahead and an owl hooted mournfully to the right of him—long familiar sounds that imparted to him no sense of loneliness as they might to you or to me, but on the contrary one of companionship, for they betokened the presence of his fellows of the jungle, and whether friend or foe it was all the same to the ape-man.

He came at last to a little stream at a spot where the trees did not meet above it, so he was forced to descend to the ground and wade through the water and upon the opposite shore he stopped as though suddenly his godlike figure had been transmuted from flesh to marble. Only his dilating nostrils bespoke his pulsing vitality. For a long moment he stood there thus and then swiftly, but with a caution and alertness that were inherent in him, he moved forward again, but now his whole attitude bespoke a new urge. There was a definite and masterful purpose in every movement of those steel muscles rolling softly beneath the smooth brown hide.

He moved toward a certain goal that quite evidently filled him with greater enthusiasm than had the possible event of his return to A-lur.

And so he came at last to the foot of a great tree that there he stopped and looked up above him among the foliage where the dim outlines of a roughly rectangular bulk loomed darkly. There was a choking sensation in Tarzan's throat as he gazed himself gently into the branches. It was as though his heart were swelling either to a great happiness or a great fear.

Before the rude white built among the branches he paused listening. From within there came to his sensitive nostrils the same delicate aroma that greeted his eager attention at the little stream a mile away. He crouched upon the branch close to the little door.

"Jane," he called, "heart of my heart, it is I."

The answer from within was as the sudden indrawing of a breath that was half gasp and half sigh, and the sound of a body falling to the floor. Hastily Tarzan sought to release the things which he held the door, but they were fastened from the inside, and at last, impatient with further delay, he seized the frail barrier in one giant leap and with a single effort tore it completely away. And then he entered to find the seemingly lifeless body of his mate stretched upon the floor.

He gathered her up in his arms; her heart beat; she still breathed, and presently he realized that she had but swooned.

When Jane Clayton regained consciousness it was to find herself held tightly in two strong arms, her head pillowed upon the broad shoulder where so often before her fears had been soothed and her sorrows comforted. At first she was not sure but that it was all a dream. Timidly her hand stole to his cheek.

"John," she murmured, "tell me, is it really you?"

In reply he drew her more closely to him. "It is I," he replied. "But there is something in my throat," he said haltingly, "that makes it hard for me to speak."

She smiled and snuggled closer to him. "God has been good to us, Tarzan of the Apes," she said. "For some time neither spoke. It was enough that the other was alive and safe. But at last they found their voices and when the sun rose they were still talking, so much had each to tell the other; so many questions there were to be asked and answered."

"And Jack," she asked, "where is he?"

"I do not know," replied Tarzan. "The last I heard of him he was on the Argonne front."

"Ah," then her happiness is not quite complete," she said, a little note of sadness creeping into her voice.

"No," he replied, "but the same is true in countless other English homes today, and pride is learning to take the place of happiness in these."

She shook her head. "I want my boy."

"And I too," replied Tarzan, "and we may have him yet. He was safe and unharmed the last word I had. And now," he said, "we must plan upon our return. Would you like to rebuild the bungalow and gather together the remnants of our Waziri or would you rather return to London?"

"Only to find Jack," she said. "I dream always of the bungalow and never of the city, but John, we can only dream, for Obergart told me that he had circled this whole country and found no place where he might cross the morass."

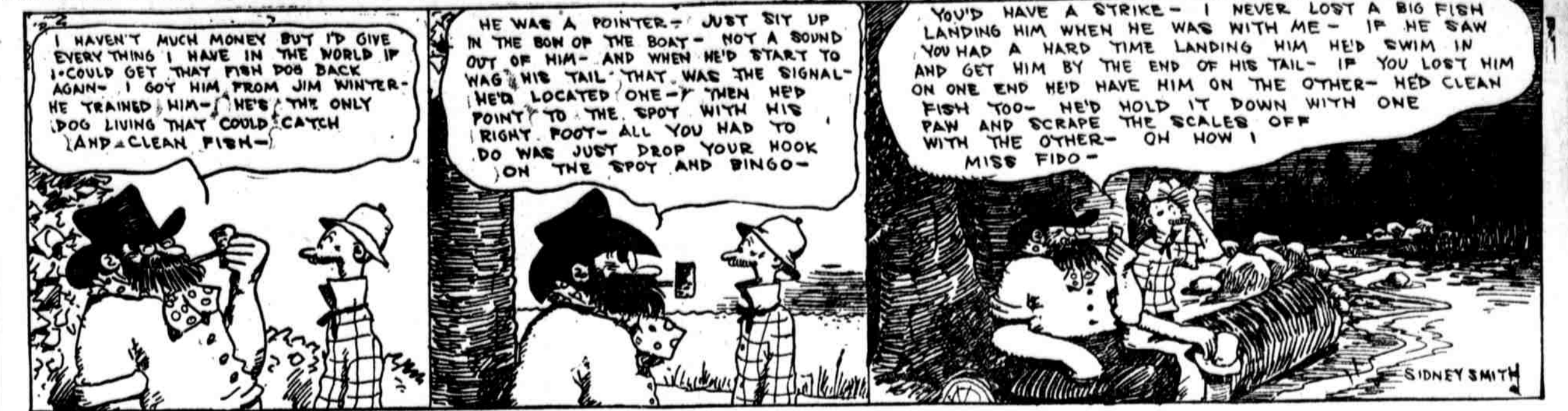
"I am not Obergart," Tarzan reminded her, smiling. "We will rest today and tonight and then we will set out toward the north. It is a savage country, but we have crossed it once and we can cross it again."

And so, upon the following morning, the Tarzan and his mate went forth upon their journey across the Valley of Jad-ben-Otho, and ahead of them were fierce men and savage beasts, and the lofty mountains of Pal-ul-don; and beyond the mountains the restles and the morass, and beyond that the arid, thorn-covered steppe, and other savage beasts and men and weary, hostile miles of untracked wilderness between them and the charred ruins of their home.

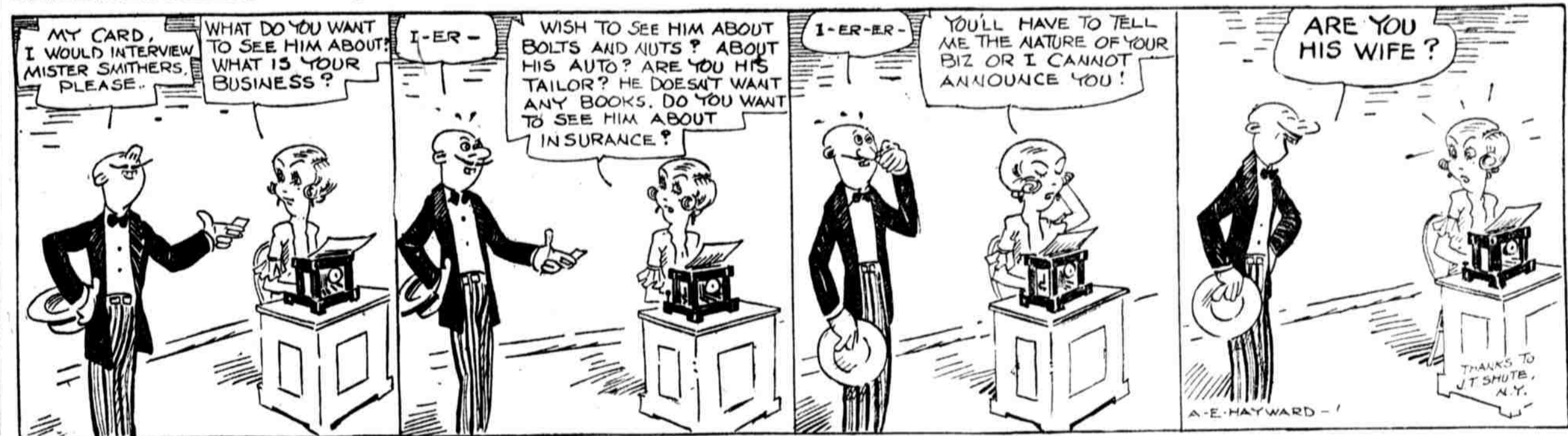
Lieutenant Erich Obergart crawled through the grass upon all fours, leaving a trail of blood behind him after Jane's spear had sent him crashing to the ground beneath her tree. He made no sound after the one piercing scream that had acknowledged the severity of his wound. He was quiet because a great fear that had crept into his warped brain that the devil woman would pursue and slay him. And so he crawled away like some filthy beast of the jungle, seeking a thicket where he might lie down and hide.

CONTINUED TOMORROW

THE GUMPS—Old Dog Tray Was Sure Faithful



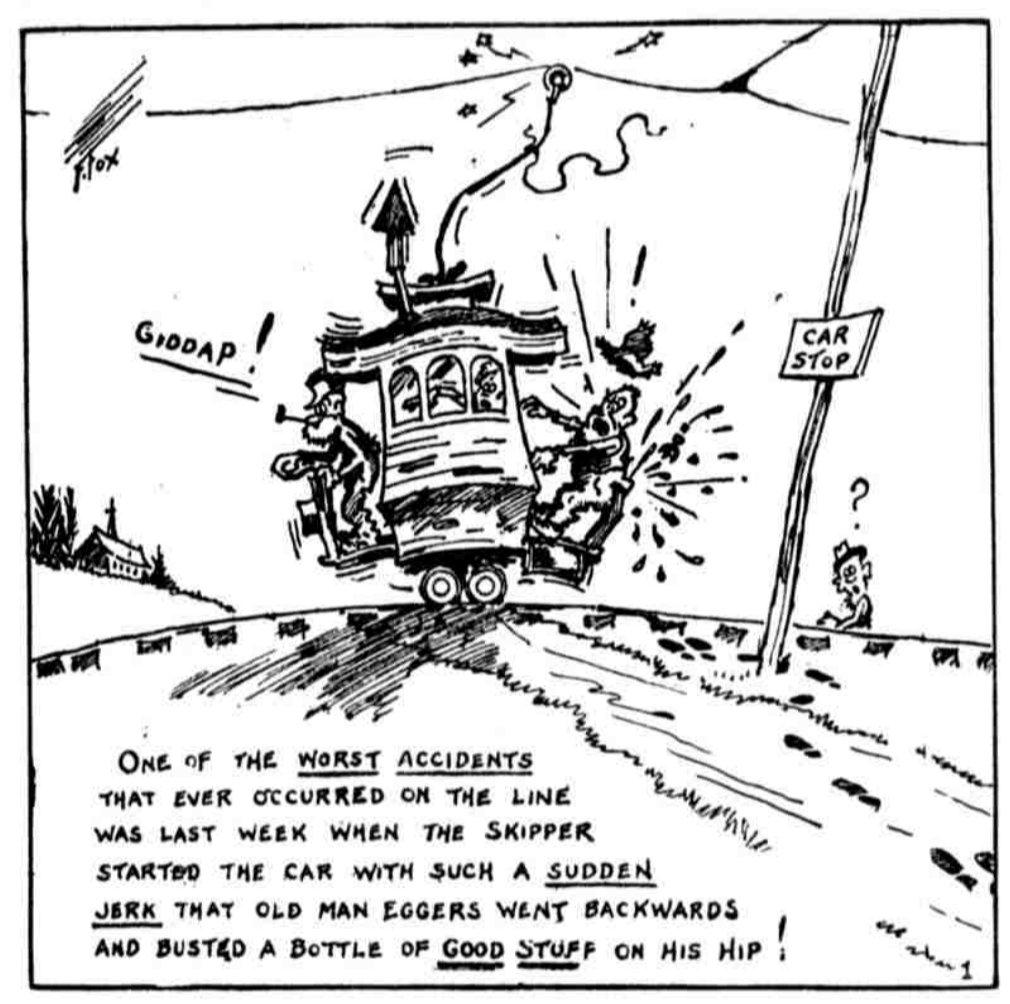
SOMEBODY'S STENOGRAPHER—This Boy Had a Comeback



The Young Lady Across the Way



The Toonerville Trolley That Meets All the Trains



ONE OF THE WORST ACCIDENTS THAT EVER OCCURRED ON THE LINE WAS LAST WEEK WHEN THE SKIPPER STARTED THE CAR WITH SUCH A SUDDEN JERK THAT OLD MAN EGGERS WENT BACKWARDS AND BUSTED A BOTTLE OF GOOD STUFF ON HIS HIP!

SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—He's Reduced to a Whisper



THE CLANCY KIDS—A Trip From the Clouds

