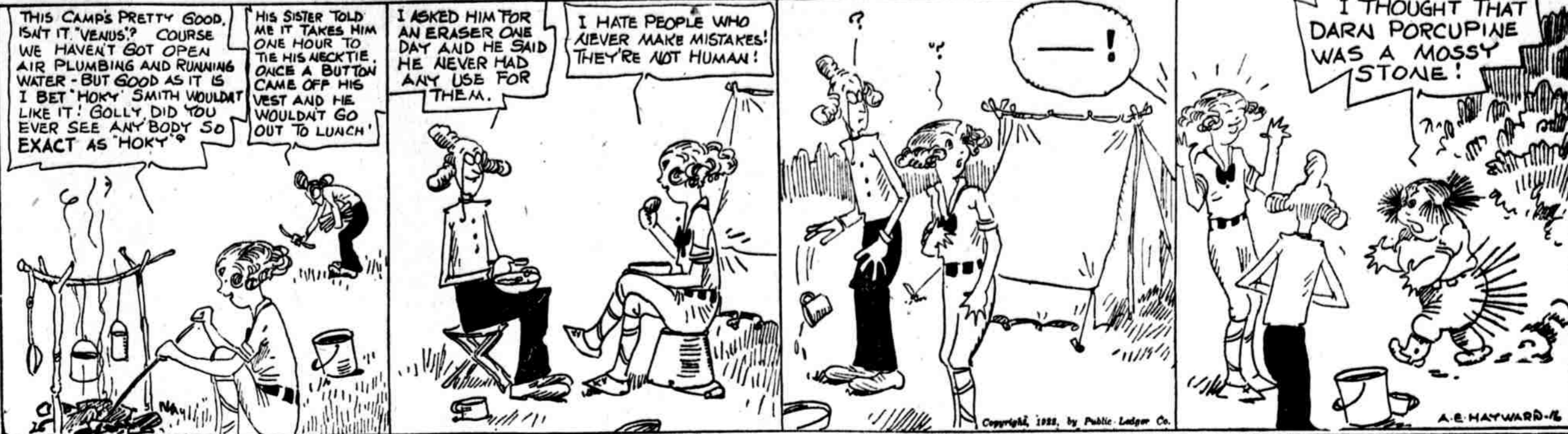


By Sidney Smith

THE GUMPS—Homeward Bound



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Mary's Human



The Young Lady Across the Way



NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—Now-a-Days



GASOLINE ALLEY—Walt Loves Nature, But—



THE STORY SO FAR... Q's face flamed. "She's again! To get the lesson of her life, that lady, if she don't quit temptin' me." Heloise laughed under the dog-cart jerked her music to silence. "This is a perfectly awful form of discipline—this dog-cart of yours, Q!—What will you do to poor Mrs. Fayre if she keeps on temptin' you?—You're too dreadful." Well, ma'am, seems like she entertains the notion that a man is a safe little pet animal, like some kind of lapdog. Now I ain't anything like that. I'm not a quarter so safe. I'm a real man-critter and likely as not some day I'll hug her. Heloise laughed again. "You've never hugged me!" she said. He turned upon her so white and shocked a face that she drew back from him. "Q, I'm sorry. Don't please look at me like that. Don't be so angry. What did I say? I didn't mean any thing. I was just—well, teasing you." He turned away his eyes. "I reckon I've got a whole lot to learn," but he presently between his teeth, "but you've got some to learn yet, girl. I'd sure hate for you to get your learnin' from Fadden—him or any other married man of his kind. I know your own think. I've seen a heap of ugly things likely I hev done, but I BET 'HOKY' SMITH WOULDNT LIKE IT! GOLLY DID YOU EVER SEE ANYBODY SO EXACT AS 'HOKY'?" Heloise burst, neck and brow—burned with pure anger. The insult of the phrase as one even remotely to be applied to her was a whip to her superiority. She bit at her slender pink lip and drew in her breath. "One must amuse one's self," she said with an affectation that made the bite of her words doubly keen to the listener. "In this impossible place. One must have some excitement. One must occasionally have the society of a man of the world, or one gets out of practice—forgetts how to behave." He laughed. "You want excitement. Well, ma'am, so do I. There ain't no danger in this place for one, I figure it. Danger is what 'one's out lookin' for." Before she knew even that he had moved, he was on along the shaft. He flung up his arms with a wild long cry—he did something, she couldn't see what. The mare flung herself back, snorted, and gathered her long bones together. Q was back in his seat, the reins wrapped about his wrists, his body braced. He looked at Heloise, his mask thrown down, his face gleaming, young, reckless, hard—like the faces of men in far wild places. Heloise clung to the seat; her hat was gone already, her hair streamed, they rocked about the road at a speed that took her breath. It seemed to her that the cart must fly to pieces; they ricketed down a hill, flew on one wheel about a turn, dashed by a noisome fall of white and startled faces which drew from Lelo half an hysterical laugh, they swerved from a bridge, bolted down a bank, incredibly steep, splashed through a deep ford. In front was a ledge that seemed to overhang. "By God!" said Q. "She means to make it!" She went at it like a lunatic, doubled herself, jumped, caught the earth with her feet. For a perilous moment they hung, then heaved and plunged up to the roadside. The mare stopped and stood shaking all over, in a lather of foam. "I'll Never Forgive You" "Feelin' better now, ain't 'one'?" demanded Q, looking at his companion. She too was shaking from head to foot and white and wild. "You were trying to kill me!" she panted, when she could get her voice. "Take me home. I'll never forgive you." "I thought you wanted some excitement. Playin' with death is a heap healthier and honest than some other ways of gettin' it," she began, when she fancied she had it in order—it was really a one-sided tangle of ruffled gold and she had a quite distracted and unaccustomed look—but, as a guide, she was quite as untrained as you are as a man of the world. I don't care for savagery, or foolishness. I suppose you were angry with me and wanted to give me a fright. You succeeded perfectly. But I've lost most of my respect for you. I know that you lacked certain qualities of finish and polish, things that come by birth and training, but I did think that you had a fundamental manliness and chivalry. "Your color is comin' back," said Q, "but chiefly to your nose. Ain't that comical?" She was silent, but the color suffused itself more becomingly. "Are you wantin' to meet Mr. Fer-dee-nand at the Club?" "I told you I wanted to go home," she snapped, her temper running wild. "Oh, I forgot your orders. You ain't lookin' quite in Fer-dee-nand's class just at present, but by the time you're all carried up and brushed down again you'll be in the Club, won't it? Say, there's your hat on a bush alongside the road—and I see two cows leanin' ag'in a fence elbowin' each other to make out that lightning-bug thing is. I wish Miss Mary could see that! If you'll hold the reins I'll collect it for you." She held the reins and he was out and in again with his little, linked up movements. They drove for a while in silence. The shadows were lengthening and the katydids were at a frenzy of debate. When Q next spoke he was sober enough. "I was a plumb fool to put you into danger," he said, "but I am often took that way with foolishness after I hev had an extra responsible job. You are right in all you hev told me and I'll be swearin' likely half the night over some of the things you've given me. Maybe I deserved them, but this ain't no pleasure for me, this summer, lady, and you sure had ought to be more careful sometimes. There had begun to affect her oddly, with shame and fear and pain. "You hev got the whip hand over me and you don't often spare to use it. Wasn't it for the times when you look at me like you use to out there in the big places—I'd hev quit you quite a long time back. But you keep me hopin'—and, by God! that's what hurts most." He looked at her and she was perhaps unreasonably startled to see that there were tears in his cool and brilliant eyes. She found herself wondering if ever before they had suffered the shame of that stinging moisture. For an instant she almost understood. She touched his arm with a quick finger, then bent her face to both her hands. "I am bad, Q, bad, cruel, selfish. Go away from me; because I've been hurt myself, I'll hurt you. Go away."

CONTINUED TOMORROW