

Gambler's Throw

by Eustace L. Adams

SYNOPSIS: Nancy Wentworth finds that Limpy Ashwood, leader of the gang holding her and her men for ransom, on an island, intends to marry her. Lucel, one of the prisoners, plans to escape and take her with him. Jerry Calhoun, Emory Willis and Stevens have been captured trying to arrest Ashwood.

CHAPTER 22 A DEATH SHRIEK

LISTEN, girlie," Lucel went on in a gush of words which tumbled from his lips in a torrent that she was too weary to dam, "I seen lots of women in my day, but I never give a thought to marrying one of them. You're different. There's something—there's a lot about you I ain't wise to, but I do know that you're my woman and I'm here to say that I'll bump off every guy who don't believe it. This Limpy got a good head on him and he has bossed a swell racket, but he ain't no better than the next guy when he's looking into the hot end of a gat, see?"

Nancy felt as though her heart were in a steel vise, the screws of which were being relentlessly turned by unseen devils. She wondered, vaguely, if it would not ease the ache and smooth out many of the difficulties here on the island were she to throw herself into the placid, silvery Gulf and sink quietly into its cool, shimmering depths. But her weary soul rejected the thought of suicide impatiently. Weary she was, but too healthy of mind and body.

But Lucel was standing by her, waiting confidently for her answer. She must find a way to refuse him which would not turn him berserk. She must choose words which would prevent murder this night. Although she knew that she, herself, might kill Ashwood were he to carry out his threat, she could not bear the thought of this gangster murdering her forthwith.

"Mr. Lucel," she faltered, at last, "I know that you have paid me a very great honor. But before I answer you, I want you to promise me that you will not kill Ashwood."

"Why?" His voice was restrained, but vibrant with jealousy. "Do you love him?"

"Heaven, no!" She laughed shortly. "But I am so sure that he will not carry me away that there is no need of bloodshed."

"He bumped off my two twopennies in Chi. I'd have bumped him off before long, anyway," he reminded her.

"Perhaps, I'm in no mood to argue the ethics of gang warfare. But I do not want him killed. Do you agree?"

"I'll go part of the way with you," he said, after a brief pause. "I'll agree not to smoke him off while we're on this island if he doesn't go after me first or if he doesn't get in my way while I'm trying to jam. Is that an even break?"

"I suppose so," she agreed wearily. "Now as to the rest, I'm going to tell you just what I told Ashwood a few moments ago. I don't love you and I won't marry you. If you take me away, I'll kill myself at the very first opportunity."

She heard his teeth click together. He was fighting hard for self control.

"Yeah? Now lemme tell you something," he said harshly. "What you told Limpy don't interest me none. You could of told him you'd marry him day after tomorrow and all I'd give would be a laugh, see? I'd smoke him off before he could drag his leg half way 'cross the room to where you was standin'."

He pushed his awarty face close to hers. His eyes were as hard and bright as polished shoe buttons.

"So, I ain't good enough for you, eh?" he demanded mockingly. "I suppose maybe my rackets ain't high class enough for you. Well, listen, girlie, you're going to marry me whether you like it or not."

With that he turned abruptly and marched into the house. The screen door slammed. The girl covered her face with her hands and wept.

Jerry, every muscle rigid, leaped out of bed. The inhuman scream that had waked him was dying out in a ghastly bubbling wall whose overtones echoed and reechoed through the darkened house. For an instant there was utter silence, more horrible than the grisly sound which had preceded it.

He reached his door in the space of a dozen heartbeats. The corridor reverberated with the sound of turning knobs and opening doors. There was the slapping shuffle of bare feet, the noisy stamp of heavy shoes. That night light which usually glowed at the end of the hall had been extinguished, the faint gleam of an approaching flash-

light gave everything an eerie appearance.

"Stand still!" A cold, conchise voice snapped through the hall. "I shoot at the first footfall."

The shuffling of bare feet ceased abruptly. A heavy silence fell again, relieved only by the sound of heavy breathing and the rapid tread of heavy boots approaching from the direction of the living room.

"Is that you, Mueller?" It was Ashwood's voice, crisp and metallic. "Yes sir."

"Hurry and bring me that flashlight."

The white beam searched through the hall until, at last, it became stationary.

"Thanks. Now see what's the matter with that night light. The rest of you, please, stand right where you are. Turn around to face me."

The dazzling beam of light, pointing down the hall, suddenly illuminated the short, overcast figure of the detective, fully clothed, but in his stocking feet. Stevens blinked in the glare of the light but his face was mild and inquiring. The searchlight awailed to the man standing next to him. It was Emory, in trousers and singlet, his eyes glittering, his mouth firm and fearless. The light lingered but an instant, then darted to Hamilton, half-dressed, dishevelled, his face a study in fright and bewilderment. Jerry's turn came next. His dark eyebrows were set in a frown but his lips were set in a half-smile, as was their custom in moments of stress. His lithe body leaned slightly forward as though ready to leap into instant action. The searchlight swung to Mallory, leaning against the wall.

The night light flickered on as the man Mueller screwed the bulb into its socket. The others stood revealed in the pitiless glare of the electricity. Lucel, standing in the middle of the hall, his hot black eyes darting from one to the other. His coarse black hair ruffled from contact with the pillow, his cheeks covered with a black stubble of beard, his full red lips compressed in a thin red slit, he looked what he was, a dangerous man. Martin, beyond him, pale and frightened, in flowery pajamas, staring at Ashwood with distended eyes. Nancy, bewitching in the soft rose negligee so thoughtfully provided by her host, without self-consciousness of pose, yet obviously shaken by the ghastly noise which had awakened her.

"Thanks, Miss Wentworth. You may go back to bed." The cripple in Japanese kimono and bempen sandals, stood just beyond Nancy's door. An overzealous automatic in his right hand, he was ready for instant action. "Mueller," he snapped, "watch these men and don't let one of them move until I return."

Then, as the guard shifted his own automatic from his left hand to his right and wheeled around to stand watch, Ashwood limped rapidly to Williams' door, four feet from the spot where stood Stevens.

"Stevens, Calhoun," he said at last, "it might be well if you joined me."

Jerry shuddered a little as he followed the detective to the door. He could still hear the death shriek which had echoed through the dark, still hall. Ashwood, who had already entered the room, switched on the lights and stood just inside the threshold, a set expression on his blood face, gazing steadfastly at the bed. Stevens and Jerry looked over his shoulder. The latter, inured to the sight of death during many months at the front, gasped as he met the impact of the glaring, staring eyes of the murdered man.

The body was sprawled across the bed, its head, arms and shoulders, hanging down over the side. A great crimson smear on the white sheet led from the pillow to the edge and downward to the floor where, beneath the drooping head, was a glistening scarlet puddle. Williams' throat had been cut from ear to ear.

Stevens stepped into the room, approaching the bed in a wide circle lest he destroy telltale footprints in the fibra matting which covered the floor.

"Poor devil," he muttered, "throat slashed while he slept. Waked him up. Tried to get off bed. Never had a chance to defend himself."

Ashwood advanced, his bright eyes darting about the orderly room. Only the bed had been disturbed. Williams' clothes still hung over the back of a straight chair. His diamond tie pin and heavy gold watch lay on the dresser.

"Here, Steve," called the cripple. "Here's the knife that did it!"

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Running footprints portend bad news, of still another mystery, in the next installment.

PARK EDUCATION PROGRAM LIKED

CRATER LAKE NATIONAL PARK—(Sp.)—Although there has been a general decrease in travel to national parks, an increased interest in educational programs has been observed by Dr. H. C. Bryant, assistant director of the national park service, in charge of the educational division, a visitor at Crater Lake this week while on an annual tour of parks.

Visitors are becoming more conscious of the many services provided by the educational division in making guided field trips, auto caravans, campfire and community house programs possible to encourage a complete knowledge of all park features. In keeping with increased interest, naturalist service was begun this year at Carlsbad Cavern national park in New Mexico and

Acadia national park in Maine. In speaking of Crater Lake, Dr. Bryant indicated the new fire lookout and observation on the summit of "The Watchman," first high point on the northwest rim will be one of the most popular points of interest in the park. Ideally situated, a complete panorama of Crater Lake is possible, as well as miles of surrounding country. A short trail leads to the station from the rim road, opened to travel last week.

Keep your skin soft and lovely. Use Coty Hand Lotion. \$1 bottle special 50c. Heath's Drug Store.

MERCURY EXTORTION PLOT BRINGS TERM
PORTLAND, Aug. 4.—(P)—R. B. Ralsbeck, convicted of attempting to extort \$100 from Porter W. Yett, contractor, to keep an article from appearing in the "Sunday mercury," was today sentenced to spend one year in the Multnomah county jail. Sentence was imposed by Circuit

Judge L. P. Hewitt, who declared he could see no justification for a parole, as the crime had been pre-conceived and premeditated.

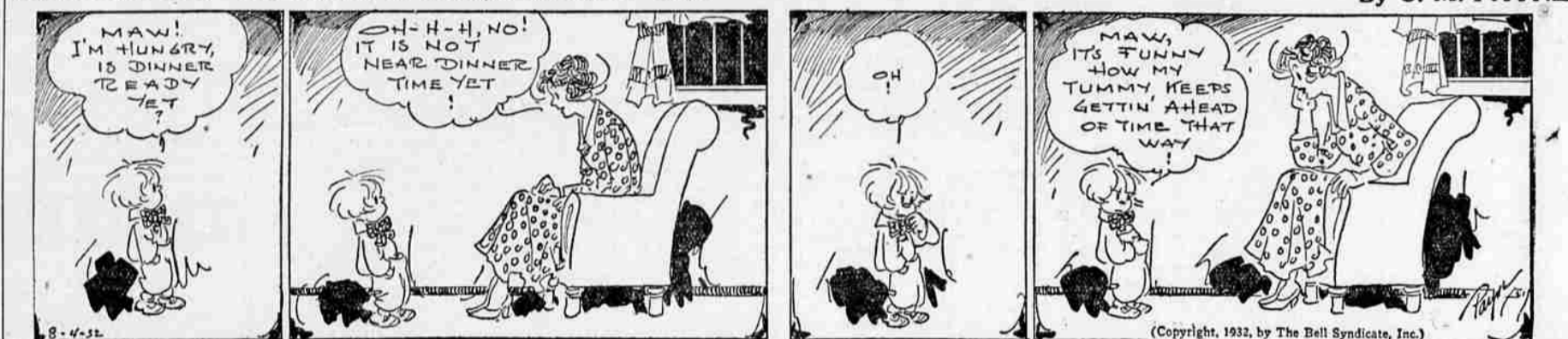
HAM WOULDN'T HELP STOVELESS NEGRO
MACON, Ga., Aug. 4.—(P)—Even if George Holland, negro, had some eggs he couldn't have ham and eggs if he had some ham. Police found him cooking some yesterday, but had to take away his stove on a warrant because he owed \$10 rent.

Elaborate Plans For Own Death
ANSONIA, Conn., Aug. 4.—(P)—Neketa Radzevich Sutkovy, who last year dug his own grave, is now putting the finishing touches on a sepulchre and monument built with his own hands. Sutkovy, 67, claims friendship with the late Crat Nicholas. He was chief jurist of a province near Kiev, Russia, was considered wealthy and entitled to be addressed as "Mister." A desire to travel brought him to this country.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Tommy Gets An Accomplice!



S'MATTER POP—His Tummy Is Always Ahead Of Time



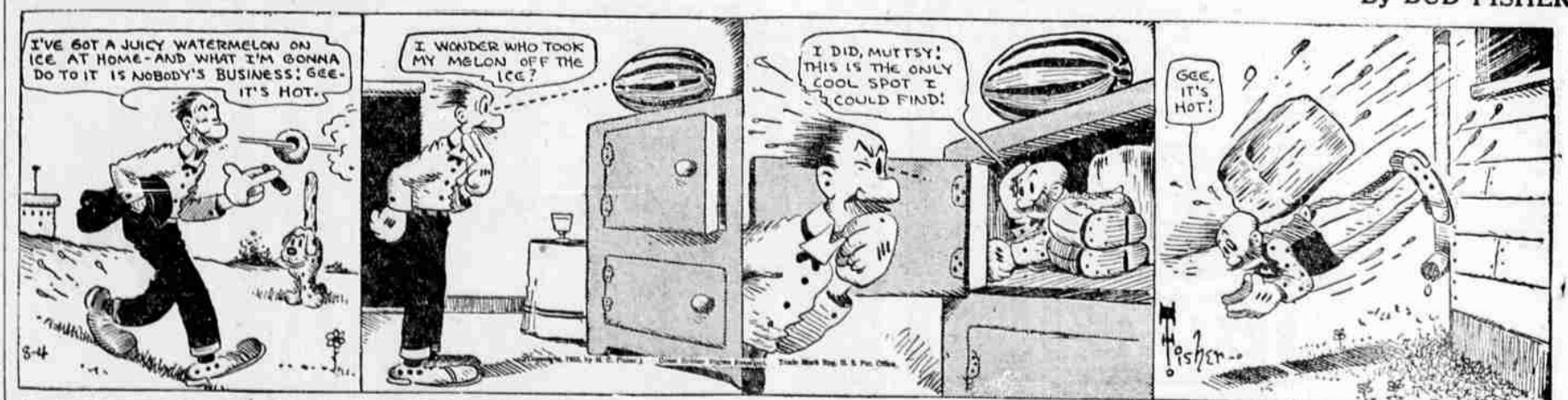
BOUND TO WIN—Jonathan's Opinion



THE NEBBS—I Accept



MUTT AND JEFF—A Cool Spot



BRINGING UP FATHER



WOULD RUN SMITH AS INDEPENDENT

MINNEAPOLIS, Aug. 4.—(P)—Petitions to place former Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York in the Minnesota political field as an independent candidate for president will be circulated tomorrow. John B. Groves, Minneapolis, said today. Groves, a Minneapolis Democrat, four years ago, was an active supporter of the then Democratic presidential candidate. Groves said the proposed ticket would consist of Smith for president and Governor Joseph B. Ely of Massachusetts for vice-president.

Broken windows, glassed by Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

DOUBT ANTIQUITY OF OLDEWAY MAN

LONDON, Aug. 4.—(AP)—New doubts about the antiquity of the now famous Oldeway skeleton, of Tanganyika, Africa, found in rocks dating about a million years, has been raised at an international congress of scientists in session here. One scientist declared some of the mineral material found in the ribs of the Oldeway man had been analyzed in Germany. The analysis, he said, disclosed that this material was of late insertion in the prehistoric soil. Other members of the congress criticized the early dating of the Oldeway man and declared it must be considered disproved.

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

By C. M. PAYNE

By EDWIN ALGER

By SOL HESS

By BUD FISHER

By George McManus