THE BOOMERANG CLUE

By Agatha Christie

SYNOPSIS: Until someone slipped a grains of morphia into a bottle of beer and almost killed him, Bobby Jones took no stock in the theory that a certain nice looking man was pushed over a certain cliff to his death. But Bobby, who found the man cannot help but be moved by Frankie Derwent's argument that the man must have been pushed over the edge that the ones who pushed him believe Bobby knows more than he has told and that they are trying to do away with him. He picks up a newspaper, and suddenly he pushes the bell by his hospital bed.

Chapter 11

BASSINGTON-FFRENCH

"WHATEVER'S the matter, Mr. Jones? Are you taken bad?" the nurse demanded.

"Ring up the Castle," cried Bobby. "Tell Lady Frances she must come back here at once."

"Oh, Mr. Jones—you can't send a message like that."

"Can't I?" said Bobby. "If I were allowed to get up from this blasted bed, you'd soon see whether I could or couldn't. As it is, you've got to do it for me."

"But she'll hardly be back."

"You don't know that Bentley."

"She won't have had her tea."

"Now look here, my dear girl," said Bobby, "don't stand there arguing with me. Ring up as I tell you. Tell her she's got to come here at once because I've got something very important to say to her."

Overborne, though unwilling, the nurse went. She took some liberties with Bobby's message. If it was no inconvenience to Lady Frances, Mr. Jones wondered if she would mind coming, as he had something he would like to say to her. But of course Lady Frances was not to put herself out in any way.

Lady Frances replied curtly that she would come at once.

"Depend upon it," said the nurse to her colleagues, "she's sweet on him! That's what it is."

Frankie arrived all agog. "What's this desperate summons?" she demanded.

Bobby was sitting up in bed, a bright red spot in each cheek. In his hand he waved the copy of the "Marchbolt Weekly Times."

"Look at this, Frankie."

Frankie looked. "Well?" she demanded.

"This is the picture you meant when you said it was touched up but quite like the Cayman woman?" Bobby's finger pointed to a somewhat blurred reproduction of a photograph. Underneath it were the words:

"Portrait found on the dead man by which he was identified: Mrs. Amelia Cayman, the dead man's sister."

"That's what I said—and it's true, too. I can't see anything to rave over in it."

"No more can I."

"But you said—"

"I know I said.' But you see, Frankie—" Bobby's voice became very impressive—"this isn't the photograph that I put back in the dead man's pocket. . . ."

They looked at each other.

"Then, in that case—" began Frankie slowly.

"Either there must have been two photographs—"

"—which isn't likely—"

"—or else—"

They paused.

"That man—what's his name?" said Frankie.

"Bassington-ffrench!" said Bobby.

THEY stared at each other as they tried to adjust themselves to the altered situation.

"It couldn't be anyone else," said Bobby. "He was the only person who had the chance."

"Unless, as we said, there were two photographs?"

"We agreed that that wasn't likely. If there had been two photographs they'd have tried to identify him by means of both of them—not by only one."

"Anyway that's easily found out," said Frankie. "We can ask the police. We'll assume for the moment that there was just the one photograph—the one you saw, that you put back again in the man's pocket. It was there when you left him, and it wasn't there when the police came. Therefore the only person who could have taken it away and put the other one in its place is this man Bassington-ffrench. What was he like, Bobby?"

Bobby frowned in the effort to remember. "A sort of nondescript fellow. Pleasant voice. A gentleman and all that. I really didn't notice him particularly. He said he was a stranger down here—and something about looking for a house."

"We can verify that anyway," said Frankie. "Wheeler & Owen are the only house agents." Suddenly she gave a shiver. "Bobby, have you thought? If Pritchard was pushed over Bassington-ffrench must be the man who did it. . . ."

"That's pretty grim," said Bobby. "He seemed such a nice, pleasant sort of fellow. But you know, Frankie, we can't be sure Pritchard really was pushed over."

"I'm quite sure!"

"You have been, all along."

"No, I just wanted it to be that way because it made things more exciting. But now it's more or less proved. If it was murder everything fits in. Your unexpected appearance which upsets the murderer's plans. Your discovery of the photograph and, consequence, the need to put you out of the way."

"There's a flaw there," said Bobby. "Why? You were the only person who saw that photograph. As soon as Bassington-ffrench was left alone with the body he changed the photograph, which only you had seen."

But Bobby continued to shake his head. "No, that won't do. Let's grant for the moment that that photograph was so important that I had to be 'got out of the way,' as you put it. Sounds absurd, but I suppose it's just possible. Well then, whatever was going to be done would have to be done at once. The fact that I went to London and never saw the "Weekly Times" or the other papers with the photograph in them was just pure chance—a thing nobody could count on. The probability was that I should say at once. 'That isn't the photograph I saw.' Why wait till after the inquest when everything was nicely settled?"

"There's something in that," admitted Frankie.

"And there's another point. I can't be absolutely sure, of course, but I could almost swear that when I put the photograph back in the dead man's pocket Bassington ffrench wasn't there. He didn't arrive till about five or ten minutes later."

"He might have been watching you all the time," argued Frankie.

"I don't see very well how he could have," said Bobby slowly. "There's really only one place where you can see down to exactly the spot we were. Farther round, the cliff bulges and then recedes underneath so that you can't see over. There's just the one place, and when Bassington-ffrench did arrive there I heard him at once. Footsteps echo down below. He may have been near at hand, but he wasn't looking over till then—that I'll swear."

"THEN you think that he didn't know about your seeing the photograph?"

"I don't see how he could have known."

"And he can't have been afraid you'd seen him doing it—the murder, I mean—because, as you say, that's absurd. You'd never have held your tongue about it. It looks as though it must have been something else altogether."

"Only I don't see what it could have been."

"Something they didn't know about till after the inquest. I don't know why I say they—"

"Why not? After all, the Caymans must have been in it, too. It's probably a gang. I like gangs."

"That's a low taste," said Frankie absently. "A single-handed murder is much higher class, Bobby!"

"Yes?"

"What was it Pritchard said just before he died? You know, you told me about it that day on the links. That funny question?"

"'Why didn't the,' ask Evans?'"

"Yes. Suppose that was it"

"But that's ridiculous."

"It sounds so, but it might be important really. Bobby, I'm sure it's that. Oh, no, I'm being an idiot—you never told the Caymans about it."

"I did, as a matter of fact," said Bobby slowly.

"You did?"

"Yes, I wrote to them that evening. Saying that of course it was probably quite unimportant."

"And what happened?"

"Cayman wrote back politely agreeing that of course there was nothing in it, but thanking me for taking the trouble. I felt rather snubbed."

"And two days later you got this letter from a strange firm bribing you to go to South America?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Frankie. "I don't know what more you want. They try that first. You turn it down. And the next thing is that they follow you round and seize a good moment to empty a lot of morphia into your bottle of beer."

"Then the Caymans are in it?"

"Of course the Caymans are in it!"

"Yes," said Bobby thoughtfully. "If your reconstruction is correct they've simply got to be in it."

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Tomorrow, Frankie and Bobby discover still another clue.

DEATH NEARS FOR BRITISH ADMIRAL

LONDON, Feb. 15.—(AP)—Anxiety arose today for the health of Earl Beatty, 65-year-old naval hero, who retired a month ago as an admiral of the British fleet.

His physicians, after announcing last night that his condition has been unsatisfactory and that he has been advised to take a complete rest, issued a bulletin today saying:

"His condition is as well as can be expected, but gives cause for anxiety."

Admiral Beatty, whose retirement became effective automatically when he reached the age of 65, January 17, suffered a severe cold when he participated in the funeral procession for King George V.

He had also left a sick bed last November to attend the funeral for Admiral Jellicoe, whom he succeeded as commander of the grand fleet during the World war.

Admiral Beatty retired as first sea lord and chief of the naval staff in 1927, but maintained a keen interest in the British navy.

Archdeacon Renamed

PORTLAND, Feb. 15.—(AP) — The Venerable Henry Duncan Chambers of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon was renamed Archdeacon for Western Oregon today in the first official pastoral appointment by Bishop Benjamin D. Dagwell, new Episcopal bishop for the state.

Be correctly corseted in an Artist Model by Etherwyn B Hoffmann

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

Strange as it seems, some species of ants enslave others and depend so completely upon their slaves that they, the slave holders, cannot feed themselves or raise their own young. The slavers capture unhatched eggs from neighboring ant nests to keep up their number of slaves who do all the work for them. They eventually became degenerate and suffer more than their slaves, for they are helpless without them.

Experiments have shown that slave holding ants are so completely dependent upon their slaves that they will starve to death with food set before them unless the slaves are there to feed them.

When Abraham Lincoln ran for the Senate in 1858 he lost the election in spite of the fact that more votes were cast for him than for his opponents. Douglas, his opponent, carried a greater number of districts and was elected.

In the Presidential election of 1860 more people voted against him than voted for him—and in spite of it he won. Lincoln polled a greater number of votes than any one of his opponents, but together they polled over 900,000 more votes than Lincoln. Out of approximately 4,600,000 votes, Lincoln got 1,800,000 while his opponents got about 2,800,000.

"Daresn't" is properly used when it is used as a contraction of "dares not." It can thus be used only in the third person singular as "he dares not; he daresn't."

RELIEF COSTS IN STATE LESSENED

SALEM, Feb. 15.—(AP)—Relief activities in Oregon up to the first of last December cost $27,405,865, receipts from all funds during that time, including the small amount of activity prior to January, 1933, totaled $26,813,300.

This was the report made to Governor Martin today by Wallace S. Wharton, executive secretary, following a requested investigation of the relief set-up in Portland. The report failed to show confirmation of recent complaints that the offices were overstaffed.

Wharton stated that since the federal assistance for relief ended during November, the office personnel and overhead were reduced by 40 per cent. Further reduction of the force and expenditures for administration, as recommended by the budget department, was now in progress, he stated.

SELECT JURY TRY G. P. EAGLE FUND CASE

GRANTS PASS, Feb. 15.—(AP)—With selection of jury complete and opening statements made, trial of Earl B. Thompson on charge of embezzlement of $982.85 continued in circuit court today. Thompson is accused of diverting to his own use that amount from local serie funds for the state convention of Eagles held here last July.

Rum Agencies Did Well

SALEM, Feb. 15.—(AP)—Commissions paid liquor agencies during last year on a sale basis totaled $114,676, the budget department reported today. There were 130 agencies in operation at the end of 1935.

POSTPONING THE DISHES

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE

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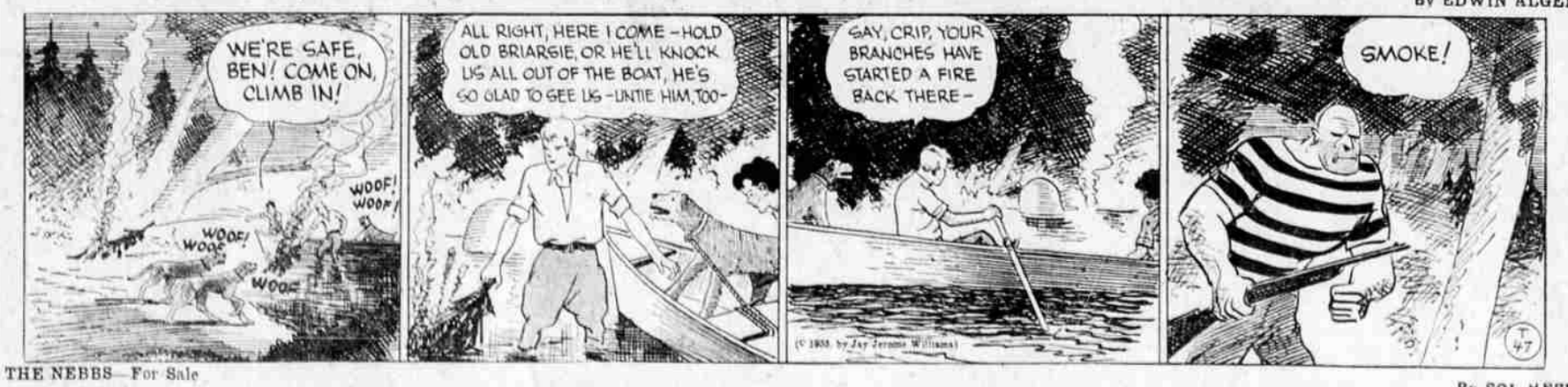
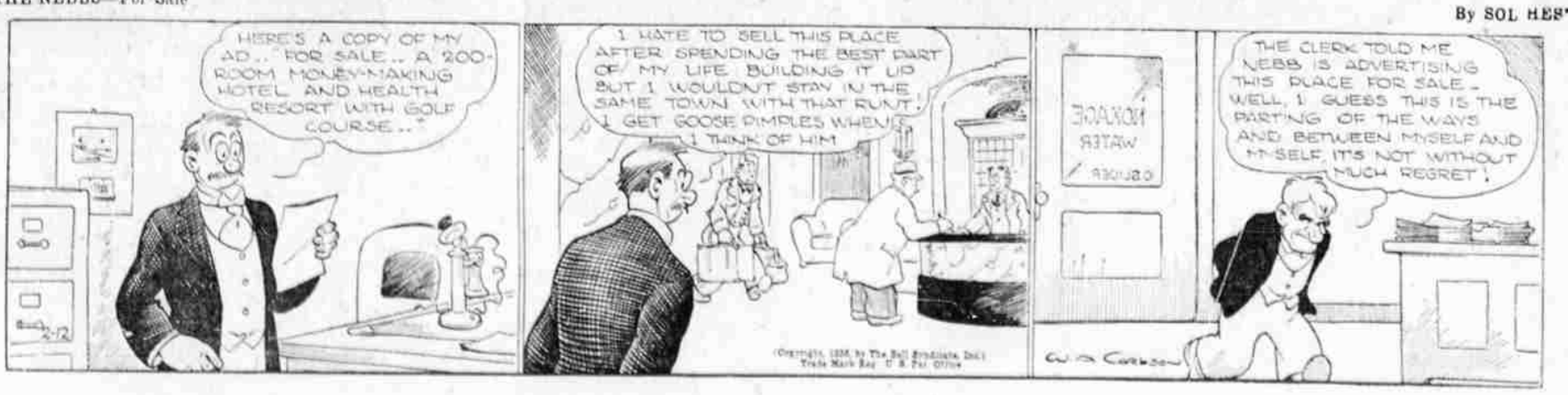
TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Golden Girl Disapproves!

By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Escape!

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—For Sale

By SOL HESS