THE BOOMERANG CLUE
BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

SYNOPSIS: Now Frankie Derwent and Bobby Jones have an entirely new lead in their effort to find the murderer of Alan Carstairs. They believe he is Dr. Nicholson, and Bobby is getting ready, at the moment, to climb in a second-story window of the doctor's house in the belief that that worthy also has done away with his wife. And Frankie has learned that the will of the wealthy Mr. Savage was queer, that a beautiful woman figured in it, and that Alan Carstairs had taken a hand in helping the relatives the beautiful Mrs. Templeton had bilked.

Chapter 36

BLOW IN THE DARK

IN ANOTHER minute Bobby was swarming up the tree. All went well and he was just stretching out his hand to take a grip of the window ledge when an ominous crack came from the branch he was on, and the next minute the bough had snapped and Bobby was pitchforked head-first into a clump of hydrangea bushes below, which fortunately broke his fall.

The window of Nicholson's study was farther along on the same side of the house. Bobby heard an exclamation in the Doctor's voice, and the window was flung up. Bobby, recovering from the first shock of his fall, bolted across a dark patch of shadow into the pathway leading to the little door. He went a short way along it, then dived into the bushes.

He heard the sound of voices and saw lights moving near the trampled and broken hydrangeas. Bobby kept still and held his breath. They might come along the path. If so, finding the door open, they would probably conclude that the intruder had escaped that way and would not prosecute the search further.

However, the minutes passed, and nobody came. Presently Bobby heard Nicholson's voice raised in a question. He did not hear the words but he heard an answer given in a hoarse, rather uneducated voice.

"All present and correct, sir. I've been the rounds."

The sounds gradually died down, the lights disappeared. Everyone seemed to have returned to the house.

Very cautiously Bobby came out of his hiding place. He emerged onto the path listening. All was still. He took a step or two towards the house.

And then out of the darkness, something struck him on the back of the neck. He fell forward . . . into darkness.

ON FRIDAY morning the green Bentley drew up outside the Station Hotel at Ambledever.

Frankie had wired Bobby that she would be required to give evidence at the inquest on Henry Bassington-ffrench and would call in at Ambledever on the way down from London. She had had no reply.

"Mr. Parker, miss?" said the clerk. "I don't think there's any gentleman of that name stopping here, but I'll see."

He returned a few minutes later.

"Come here Wednesday evening, miss. Left his bag and said he mightn't be in till late. His bag's still here but he hasn't been back to fetch it."

Frankie felt suddenly rather sick. She clutched at a table for support.

"Feeling bad, miss?" the man inquired.

Frankie shook her head. "It's all right," she managed to say. "He didn't leave any message?"

"There's a telegram come for him," he said. "That's all."

"It's all right," she said, and getting into the Bentley she drove away.

Why had Bobby not returned to the Station Hotel? There could be only two reasons. Either he was on the trail—and that trail had taken him away somewhere; or else—or else something had gone wrong.

She was being an idiot—imagining things. Of course Bobby was all right. He was on the trail—that was all—on the trail.

But why, asked another voice, hadn't he sent her a word of reassurance?

The inquest passed like a dream. Roger was there, and Sylvia—looking quite beautiful in her widow's weeds.

The proceedings were very tactfully conducted. The Bassington-frenches were popular locally and everything was done to spare the feelings of the window and the brother of the dead man. The thing seemed over in no time, and the verdict was given as "Suicide while of unsound mind." The "sympathetic" verdict, as Mr. Spragge had called it.

The two events connected themselves in Frankie's mind. Two suicides "while of unsound mind." Was there—could there be a connection between them?

Frankie and Dr. Nicholson remained behind after the other people departed, the Coroner having shaken hands with Sylvia and uttered a few words of sympathy.

"I think there are some letters for you, Frankie dear," said Sylvia. "You won't mind if I leave you now and go and lie down. It's all been so awful."

Frankie turned to Roger. "Roger Bobby's disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

Frankie explained in a few rapid words.

"I don't like the sound of it," said Roger slowly.

Frankie's heart sank. "You don't think—?"

"Oh! it may be all right, but—Sh, here comes Nicholson."

The Doctor entered the room with his noiseless tread. He was rubbing his hands together and smiling.

"That went off very well," he said. "Very well indeed. Dr. Davidson was most tactful and considerate. We may consider ourselves very lucky to have had him as our local Coroner."

"A good stage performance, in fact," said Frankie in a hard voice.

Nicholson looked at her in surprise.

"I know what Lady Frances is feeling," said Roger. "I feel the same. My brother was murdered, Dr. Nicholson."

He did not see, as Frankie did, the startled expression that sprang into the Doctor's eyes.

"I mean what I say," said Roger, interrupting Nicholson as he was about to reply. "The criminal brutes who induced my brother to become a slave to that drug murdered him just as truly as if they had struck him down."

His angry eyes looked straight into the Doctor's.

"I mean to get even with them," he said.

Dr. Nicholson shook his head sadly.

"I cannot say I disagree with you," he said.

IDEAS were whirling through Frankie's head — one idea in particular.

"It can't be," she was saying to herself. "That would be too monstrous. And yet—his whole alibi depends on her word. But in that case—"

She roused herself to find Nicholson speaking to her.

"You came down by car, Lady Frances? No accident this time?"

Frankie felt she simply hated that smile.

"No," she said. "I think it's a pity to go in too much for accidents—don't you?"

She wondered whether she had imagined it, or whether his eyelids really flickered for a moment.

"Perhaps your chauffeur drove you this time?"

"My chauffeur," said Frankie, "has disappeared. He was last seen heading for the Grange."

Nicholson raised his eyebrows.

"Really? Have I—some attraction in the kitchen?"

"At any rate that is where he was last seen," said Frankie.

"You sound quite dramatic," said Nicholson. "Possibly you are paying too much attention to local gossip."

He paused. His voice altered slightly in tone. "I have even had a story brought to my ears that my wife and your chauffeur had been seen talking together down by the river."

"Is that it?" thought Frankie. "Is he going to pretend that his wife has run off with my chauffeur?"

Aloud she said, "Hawkins is quite above the average chauffeur."

"So it seems," said Nicholson. He turned to Roger. "I must be going. Believe me, all my sympathies are with you and Mrs. Bassington-ffrench."

Roger went out into the hall with him. Frankie followed. On the hall table were a couple of letters addressed to her. One was a bill. The other was in Bobby's handwriting.

Nicholson and Roger were on the doorstep.

She tore it open.

Dear Frankie, [wrote Bobby]

I'm on the trail at last. Follow me as soon as possible to Chipping Somerton. You'd better come by train and not by car. The Bentley is too noticeable. The trains aren't too good, but you can get there all right. You're to come to a house called Tudor Cottage. I'll explain to you just exactly how to find it. Don't ask the way. [Here followed some minute directions.] Have you got that clear? Don't tell anyone. [This was heavily underlined.]

Bobby.

Frankie crushed the letter excitedly in the palm of her hand.

(Copyright 1933-35-36, Agatha Christie)

Frankie fights desperately, tomorrow, against impossible odds.

THRIFT PLACES COTTON ON TOP IN NEW STYLES

CHICAGO—(UP)—Showing its sartorial heels to silk, cotton already is dominating the spring and summer style parade, with designers giving it first place in modes for the girl on the limited wardrobe budget.

In the annual cotton carnival here, in which leading designers and manufacturers make their spring and summer introductions at the merchandise mart, the spotlight is being trained on "budgeted wardrobes."

Dramatizing the needs of a girl on a stringent budget, one wardrobe assembled for $39.69 included four dresses, two suits, a negligee, two hats, two pairs of shoes, a pair of beach sandals, slacks and shirt, a bathing suit and cap, two sets of lingerie, handbags and gloves. Another wardrobe, for $87.85, was planned for the girl in the higher income brackets and included in addition to five cotton dresses, a tailored suit of lightweight wool and a printed silk frock, with lingerie and accessories.

The advance showing reveals that shantung, hand-blocked linen, printed pique, lace that lends itself to tailoring, blistered sheers and rough cottons will be the foremost fabrics for spring and summer, with many new and unusual effects achieved by the cotton manufacturers.

Many of the finer cottons being introduced for spring wear are scarcely recognizable as cotton products. Evening dresses of cotton have attained prestige. Mannishly tailored suits of linen and checked cotton are hailed as ubiquitous units of every well assembled wardrobe this spring.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

When Timothy Dexter wrote his best-selling book, "A Pickle for Knowing Ones," he neglected to punctuate it at all. The only hint of punctuation was the capital I that he generously sprinkled through it. The first edition sold out immediately, and three other editions were later sold. Before the second was printed, however, friends of Dexter complained that he should have had some kind of punctuation in his book.

Dexter compiled, but rather than revise the whole book, he merely added a page in the back of the book and on it printed several lines of commas and periods, together with a supply of semi-colons, colons, exclamation points and question marks. In a note published with this strange array of punctuation marks, Dexter directed his readers to use the marks wherever they thought the text needed them.

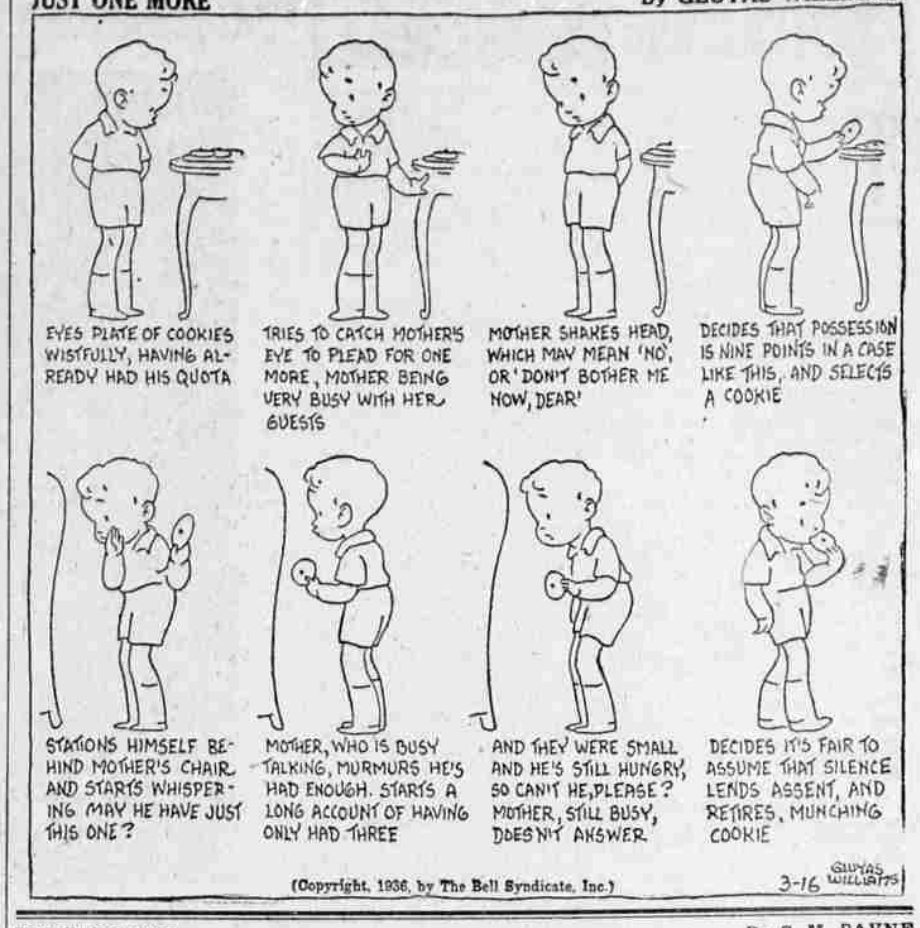
If you apply the flame of a match to the corner of a sugar cube, the sugar will turn black and melt, but it will not catch on fire. If, however, you smear cigarette ashes on the corner of the cube before applying the match, the sugar will take fire readily.

Themosticles, the Greek, banned from his country in the fifth century B. C., was taken in by King Artaxerxes of Persia and appointed governor of Magnesia in Asia Minor. The royal decree that made him governor also provided for his tagle—one city was ordered to furnish the new governor with wine, another had to supply him with bread and a third was directed to give him meat.

Tomorrow: The Golden Drink of Death.

Of all the cities in the United States, El Paso, Texas, is the most isolated from others. Its nearest neighbor, San Antonio, lies more than 500 miles away.

JUST ONE MORE — By GLUYAS-WILLIAMS



S'MATTER POP — By C. M. PAYNE

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Treacherous Texcomac! — By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Within Those Walls — By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Just a Big Guy — By SOL HESS