

THE TIGER TRAIL

by Edison Marshall Illustrations by PAUL FREEMAN



WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE
 Dr. Long is visiting Southley Downs, which is conducted by Ahmad Das, an Oriental. There he meets Mr. Southley, whom a detective friend, Alexander Pierce, had told him to watch, and his son Ernest Southley, Mr. Hayward and his son Vilas, and then Josephine Southley, whom he had seen faint on the train. Josephine tells him the story of Southley Downs and its ghost, which is not the ghost of a human being but of a tiger.

Dr. Long has a quarrel with Vilas Hayward over Josephine, and finds that the Haywards have a strange authority over the Southleys. He is ordered to leave Southley Downs. The rain prevents him leaving at once. Dr. Long and Ernest go out on the road in the rain looking for the tracks of a tiger that Ernest says are there.

They find the tracks. Later Ernest and Dr. Long see a prowling creature in the hall of Southley Downs. This frightens the elder Hayward, who also sees it. Ernest begins to feel that Ahmad Das is perpetrating some devilry.

The elder Hayward is later found dead, his neck broken as if by a giant's blow.

The coroner and police arrive in order to investigate.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Sam's other errands he had done with dispatch.

"And where did you pick up the rowboat?" I asked. "You went over in Mr. Southley's duck canoe."

The question drew a long and detailed explanation. The motor craft, it seemed, had been procured by the coroner, and was to be used to convey the body. The duck canoe was not large enough to bring any supplies, so Mr. Southley had ordered Sam to procure a large, well-made rowboat to go back and forth in. At first he had despaired of finding any, until the old man who had steered on the way back to the house encountered him and offered his own boat and services for the hire. He was a quaint old character that lived by the river at the edge of the city, and he had heard of Sam's inquiries. But he insisted that he be carried along to handle his own boat. The reason was rather obvious. The old man was evidently in need of the few extra dollars that his own services would bring.

"And what's the old fellow's name?"

"Robin—and he talked like a cockney."

Southley and I were with the inspector—his name turned out to be Freeman—when he examined the body. He made no comment. Since I had given up all hope of a greater detective coming to our aid, I turned over all the clues I had gathered to him. He was entirely scornful.

"Like as not you and young Southley spoiled a whole lot more clues than you found, tramping around the body."

"We were careful about that, inspector," I assured him.

"I don't mean to infer your motives weren't the best," he went on with a world of tact, "but amateur aid doesn't help any, as a rule. The hat is evidently the property of the murdered man. This cuff-link—"

He examined the cuffs of the silken shirt that Hayward wore. "It's his cuff, too," he said shortly. "Broken off when he fell."

There was nothing more to be said on this point. The link in the left sleeve was the mate of the broken link we had found.

He heard our story, and we walked down with him to show him where the body had lain. He listened very attentively to our theory—that Hayward had attempted to flee from his enemy.

"It's a queer case," he told us then. "I don't know of any like it. As you say, he must have used something as heavy as a sledgehammer, and yet not hard like a sledgehammer. Anything very hard would have broken the skull into pieces, at the speed that it must have come. Those queer scratches are funny, too. But at least we've got the murderer pretty well sewed up. If he's in this house he can't get away—because already guards are watching the shores of the swamp. If he's on the highlands yonder, he can't get off them either, except into the water where my men will see him."

Soon after this the body was carried down to the boat. The negroes seemed all to have disappeared when the moment came, yet Ahmad, inscrutable as ever, and the bewhiskered old man that we called Robin, came to our aid. The inquest was to be held three days later, after the detectives had time to make their investigations.

"There's room for me, I hope?" I asked.

"Yes—"

"It will be necessary for me to

leave this place and go back to my practice in Tampa."

Because I hadn't forgotten my promise of departure. Besides, there was no further reason for me to stay. Alexander Pierce had failed to come. I had just been a guest, a spectator, from the first, and Josephine had seen to it that I had been no more. The renouncement in the den the evening before had told that all too plainly. I couldn't deny to myself how much I would have liked to stay, to see the affair to its end, perhaps to behold the curse lifted from the old man's house, and to watch the shadows depart from those sad eyes. Never before had the thought of being of service been so dear to me. But the stand the girl had taken in the den was impossible to disregard.

"I don't see why you can't go, Long, if you want," the inspector said. "You were just a guest here—though I will say that you came at a propitious time—and, besides, both of the Southleys vouch for you. Vilas says you're innocent, and they say that you were in the library when the crime was committed. Of course, you must tell us where we can get you on a moment's notice."

I told them, and asked them to wait until I got my bag. It was all packed and ready. And as I came down from my room I met Josephine in the hall.

She started back at the sight of me. I couldn't read the look that leaped to her face, except that it was a hurt look, almost a look of pleading. It was a surprise to me. Evidently she felt that she would miss whatever support I had been in these last nights of trial.

"You're going, after all," she said. She didn't put it as a question. She spoke as if it were some unbelievable circumstance.

"Of course I'm going. I'm afraid I do not surpass as a detective. Besides—I've got to get back to my practice. Probably a hundred little fevered hands stretching to me—"

But her eyes arrested me and stopped the flow of my speech.

"Perhaps you have forgotten—but we promised frankness. The first night at Southley Downs?"

"I had forgotten. Forgive me. And how long ago it was."

"And how much has happened since."

"How much—and this is the end." I stretched out my hand, and she gave me hers. I had always wondered at that hand. It was so yielding, seemingly so tender. But I dropped it quickly, wondering at the tremor on her lips.

"Good-by, Miss Southley."

"May I walk with you down to the boat?"

"If you wish. But you remember—what is in the boat."

"I'm past all horror of that." She led the way out of the great door and down the path. What a slight, slim creature she was! "And I suppose there is nothing—that I can tell you—that would make you stay?"

"You've already been very kind and sweet," I said. "I'm glad that you cared at all. But I don't see any use of keeping up the sorry game any longer. It can't help but come to unhappiness in the end. I want you to have all happiness—"

I could scarcely hear her answer. The tone was so low—hardly more than a whisper. Perhaps it was just a little tremulous.

"I don't think you are very kind, doctor," the words came back. "You don't understand."

"Unkind because I wish you happiness? At least I can do that—with propriety. There has been enough between us that I can do that. The walks we had—they will be very beautiful to think about."

"I wish you'd not say any more." But I went on remorselessly. "And don't think I'm going to be bitter. Women have always sacrificed for the men they loved—everything they had to sacrifice. No man can blame them if he is one of the sacrifices, as I was—in the den—last night."

She stopped as if I had struck her.

"You mean—that you think I renounced you last night, that I let you fall when I could have saved you—because I loved Vilas Hayward?"

"I would sooner attribute it to that than to some less worthy reason. At least it showed me that your love for him was everything—that nothing in the world could stand in its way."

"Then there is no use in pleading with you any more, Dr. Long. Some time you may understand—and maybe be a little sorry. If you'd only stay, that time might be soon—before it is too late."

We could say no more. We had reached the boat. I shook hands with the Southleys; and, even as I said good-by, two strange impressions were knocking at the door of my consciousness. They were not dis-

tinct. One of them was that old Robin was gazing at me with what was almost a look of abject bewilderment on his face; the other was that Josephine was whispering to Inspector Freeman—a hurried, urgent message.

When I looked at them they had moved to opposite sides of the group. His lean face was thoughtful. I gave my bag to the negro, and started to step on the boat.

"Wait just a minute, Dr. Long," the inspector commanded.

I turned to him. "What is it?"

"I've just been thinking—that I really haven't a right to let you go. I've learned that you had a scene with the elder Hayward—words and all that—on the night he was killed. It puts a different face on the situation; so I guess I'll have to command you to stay here until I know it is safe for me to let you go, doctor."

All the while occupants of Southley Downs—and that of course included the brown-skinned Ahmad, whose race is the root and source of the whole Aryan breed—met in the library immediately after the motor boat's departure. All of us took chairs, and Inspector Freeman stood in the center.

"This isn't a third degree, or anything like it," he explained. "I'm simply in search of explanations. I want to know who's who, and who knows what."

He called on Vilas Hayward first.

"Where were you on the night of the crime?" he asked.

"I went to bed at midnight."

"You were present in the den, in which you were insulted by Dr. Long?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm willing to forget that."

Yet his eyes did not look as if he were willing; they gazed darkly.

"But we're not willing to forget it," the detective replied. "The matter of motive for this murder is probably the most important feature in identifying the criminal. If we have a motive, we have something to work on. I believe that your father took your part in that discussion."

"That is true, doctor."

"And Southley did also."

Vilas hesitated—just an instant.

"Yes, he supported me."

"I believe his daughter sided in with you, too."

"I would hardly say that."

"At least she offered no explanation why Dr. Long attacked you. Isn't that true?"

"It is."

"How did Dr. Long take this combined stand against him?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"It seems to me I am perfectly clear. Did he become angry?"

"I won't venture to say. It was plainly the greatest shock to him when Miss Southley took the attitude she did. I suppose my father gave him the greatest cause for anger."

"Why?"

"My father took the most determined stand against him, insisting on an apology or else a departure from the house."

"And what right did he have to insist that any of Southley's guests be told to go? What was his explanation for this breach of hospitality? The doctor was Southley's guest, not your father's. Why did your father feel he had a right to insist, in the terms he did, that Southley expel the doctor from his house?"

"I—don't believe I know."

"Think a minute."

Vilas face darkened ever so slightly.

"I don't believe I care to have you question the manners of my dead father."

"It is a fair question."

"In spite of the difference in their ages, Southley and my father were old friends. They were very free with each other in all things."

"And did your father say anything of an insulting nature that the doctor might want to avenge?"

"He called him a 'pup,' I think, as well as other things."

"You say you went to bed at midnight. When did you learn of your father's murder?"

"After the levee broke—when the others came back to the house and told me."

"The sound of the breaking levee awakened you?"

"Yes."

Freeman called on me next. I told my story, as far as it concerned the finding of the body. I corroborated most of Vilas's testimony.

"How much time were you alone after the scene in the den and the time of the murder?" he asked.

"A few minutes after a midnight walk with Ernest—between a few minutes before one o'clock and immediately after."

"How did you spend your time?"

"I was undressing for bed."

"And then what did you do?"

I told him of our stalk through the halls. He seemed particularly interested, but also somewhat scornful.

"It isn't the purpose of the State to chase down ghosts," he said. "I think the less thought and said about that matter the better. You all were under a nervous strain, and I've heard the testimony of people in that condition before. It usually isn't worth the paper it's written on. I want to know if you had any time to yourself between the scene in the den and the murder."

Of course his reason for wanting to know was perfectly obvious. He wanted to see whether I could have possibly had time to hire one of the negroes to murder the elder Hayward. He knew that I had not done the deed with my own hands, from the fact that I had already established an alibi.

"We've got a motive for you, Long," he told me at the end, "but not much else. There are others that we have some of the other things, but no motive."

He called on Ahmad Das. The latter told him how he had gone out to the garage after the car; how he had looked in vain for Hayward on the driveway, and how, later, he had found the body.

The detective flushed slightly and leaned forward.

"You didn't like the elder Hayward, Ahmad?" Freeman asked abruptly.

"No, sahib."

"Why didn't you? What had he ever done to you?"

"He was not pleasant to serve, sahib. Many times he swore—"

"And I believe he struck you once, Ahmad."

Ahmad's voice lowered. "Yes."

"And why did he?"

"I was slow in a service that he asked."

"He didn't like you either, Ahmad."

"It is true."

"Considering his influence with your master, did it ever occur to you that he might get you thrown out of employment?"

"Employ—"

"Get you kicked out of your job?"

"No, sahib; I never thought of that."

(To be continued next week)

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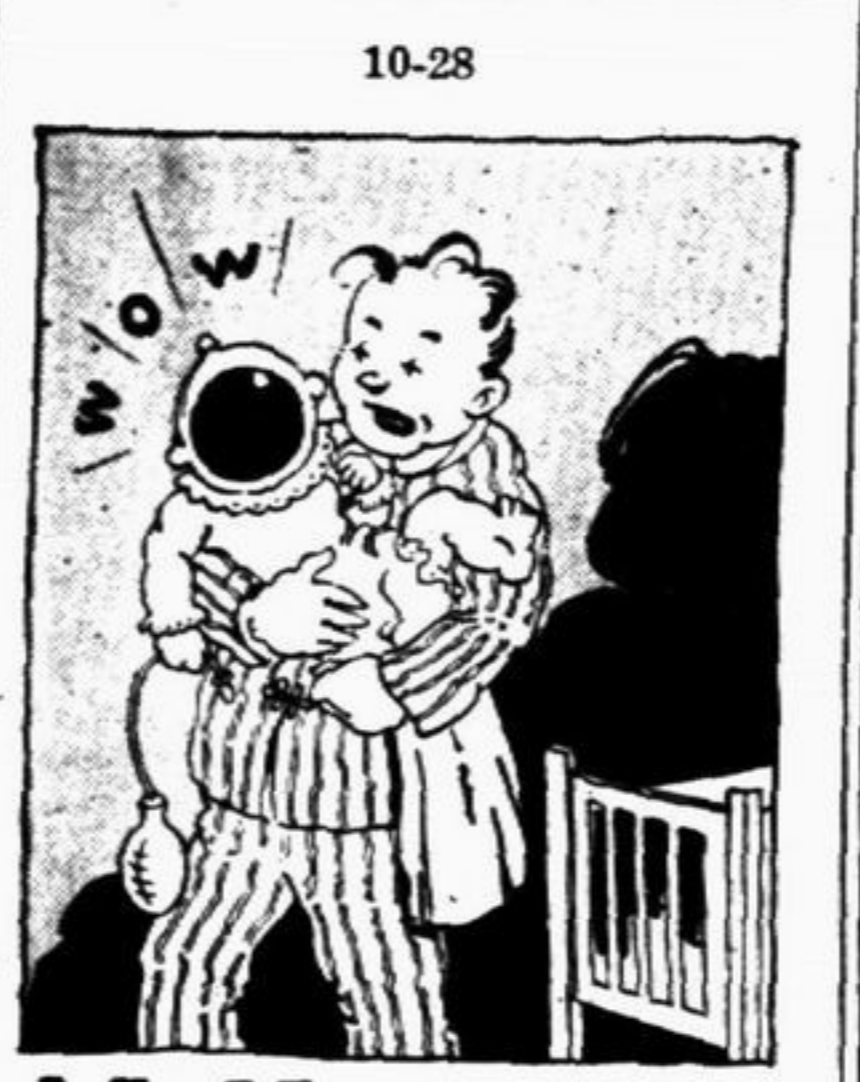
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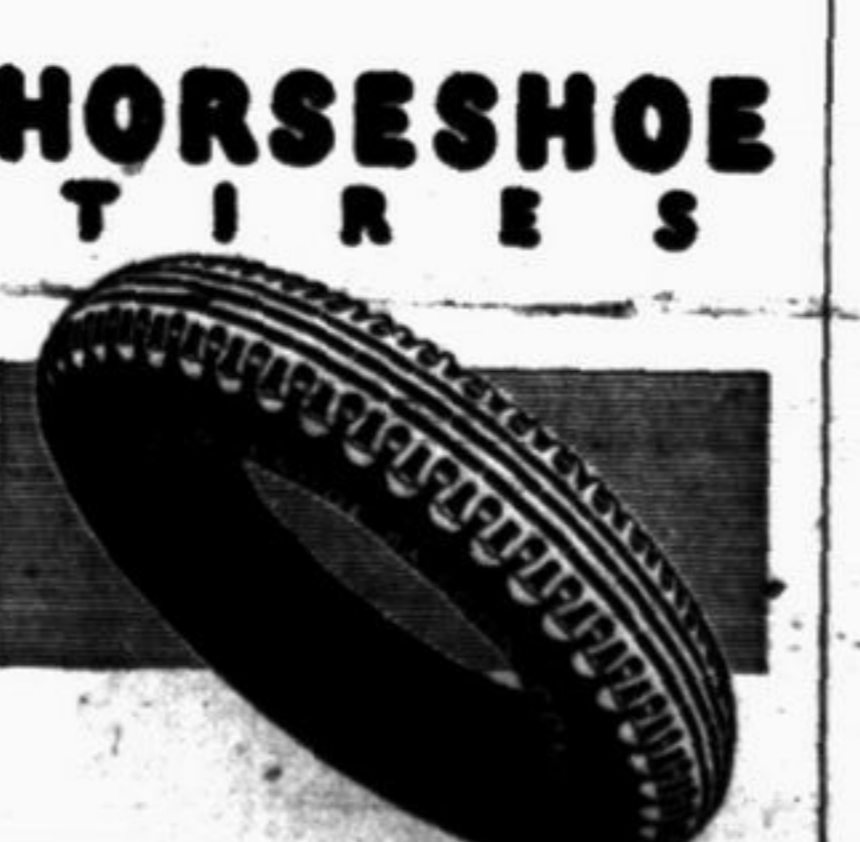
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