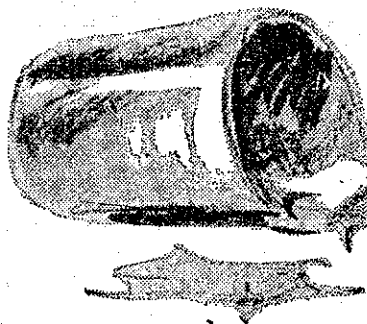


By THE AUTHOR OF "THE THIN MAN"

The Golden Horseshoe

CONT. OP. NO. 7 DOES IT AGAIN
IN A FAST-MOVING THRILL
STORY, SUCH AS MADE "THE
THIN MAN" A MODERN CLASSIC
FOR STACCATO ACTION

By
**DASHIELL
HAMMETT**



"I HAVEN'T anything very exciting to offer you this time," Vance Richmond said as we shook hands. "I want you to find a man for me—a man who is not a criminal."

There was an apology in his voice. The last couple of jobs this lean, grey-faced attorney had thrown my way had run to gun-play and other forms of rioting.

"The man I want found," the lawyer went on, as we sat down, "is an English architect named Norman Ashcraft. He is a man of about thirty-seven, five feet ten inches tall, well built, and fair-skinned, with light hair and blue eyes."

"Here is the story. Four years ago the Ashcrafts were living together in England. It seems that Mrs. Ashcraft is of a very jealous disposition, and he was rather high-strung. Furthermore, he had only what money he earned at his profession. Ashcraft was rather foolishly sensitive about being the husband of a wealthy woman—was inclined to go out of his way to show that he was not dependent upon her money, that he wouldn't be influenced by it. One night she accused him of paying too much attention to another woman. They quarrelled, and he packed up and left."

"She was repentant within a week, and she tried to find him. But he was gone. She succeeded in tracing him to New York, and then to Detroit. After that he dropped out of sight until he bobbed up in Seattle ten months later."

The attorney hunted through the papers on his desk and found a memorandum.

"On May 23, last year, he shot and killed a burglar in his room in a hotel there. The Seattle police seem to have suspected that there was something funny about the shooting, but had nothing to hold Ashcraft on. The man he killed was undoubtedly a burglar. Then Ashcraft disappeared again, and nothing was heard of him until just about a year ago. Mrs. Ashcraft had advertisements inserted in the personal columns of papers in the principal American cities."

"One day she received a letter from him, from San Francisco, requesting her to stop advertising. She mailed a letter to him at the General Delivery window here, and used another advertisement to tell him about it. He answered it, rather caustically. They exchanged several letters, and she learned that he had become a drug addict, and what was left of his pride would not let him return to her until he looked at least somewhat like his former self. She persuaded him to accept enough money from her to straighten himself out. She sent him this money each month, in care of General Delivery, here."

"Meanwhile she closed her affairs in England and came to San Francisco. A year has gone. She still sends him money each month. He has repeatedly refused to see her, and his letters are evasive."

"She suspects by now, of course, that he is simply using her money as a source of income. I have urged her to discontinue the monthly allowance for a while. But she will not do that. Her mind is unchangeably made up in that respect. She wants him back, wants him straightened out; but if he will not come, then she is content to continue the payments for the rest of his life. But she wants to end this devilish uncertainty in which she has been living."

"What we want, then, is for you to find Ashcraft. We want to know whether he is gone beyond redemption. Find him, learn whatever you can about him, and then, after we know something, we will decide whether it is wiser to force an interview between them or not."

"I'll try it," I said. "When does Mrs. Ashcraft send him his monthly allowance?"

"On the first of the month."

"Got a photo of him?"

Continental Operative No. 7, hero of the book version of "The Thin Man," has more chilling adventures in this streamlined story.



"Unfortunately, no. But I don't think a photograph would be of any great help at the post office. It is more than likely that he has someone else call for his mail."

I got up and reached for my hat.

"See you around the second of the month," I said, as I left the office.

On the afternoon of the first, I went down to the post office and saw the inspector in charge.

"I've got a line on a scratcher from up north," I told Lusk, "who is supposed to be getting his mail at the window. Will you fix it up so I can get a spot on him?"

Post office inspectors are all tied up with rules and regulations, but a friendly inspector doesn't have to put you through the third degree.

So presently I was downstairs again, loitering within sight of the A to D window, with the clerk at the window instructed to give me the office when Ashcraft's mail was called for. I stayed on the job until the windows closed at eight o'clock, and then went home.

At a few minutes after ten the next morning I got my action. One of the clerks gave me the signal. A small man in a blue suit and a soft grey hat was walking away from the window with an envelope in his hand. A man of perhaps forty years, though he looked older.

He came straight to the desk in front of which I stood fiddling with some papers. Out of the tail of my eye I saw that he had not opened the envelope in his hand—was not going to open it. He took a large envelope from his pocket, and I got just enough of a glimpse of its front to see that it was already stamped and addressed. I twisted my neck out of joint trying to read the address, but failed. I went after him. There was nothing to do but to pull the heretofore always reliable stumble.

I overtook him, stepped close and faked a fall on the marble floor, bumping into him, grabbing him as if to regain my balance. In the middle of my stunt my foot really did slip, and we went down on the floor like a pair of wrestlers, with him under me. To botch the trick thoroughly, he fell with the envelope pinned under him.

I scrambled up, yanked him to his feet, mumbled an apology and almost had to push him out of the way to beat him to the envelope. I had to turn it over as I handed it to him in order to get the address:

Mr. Edward Bohannon,
Golden Horseshoe Cafe,
Tijuana, Baja California,
Mexico.