

# THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE

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The attorney shrugged, and reached for the telephone. He called a number. "Is Mrs. Ashcraft there?... This is Mr. Richmond... No, we haven't exactly found him, but I think we know where he is... Yes... In about fifteen minutes."

He put down the telephone and stood up. "We'll run up to Mrs. Ashcraft's house and see her." Fifteen minutes later we were getting out of Richmond's car.

Mrs. Ashcraft received us in a drawing-room on the second floor. A tall woman of less than thirty, slimly beautiful in a grey dress.

Richmond introduced me to her, and then I told her what I had learned, omitting the part about the woman in Tiajuana.

"Mr. Ashcraft is in Tiajuana, I have been told. His mail is being forwarded to him in care of a cafe there, under the name of Edward Bohannon."

Her eyes lighted up happily, but she didn't throw a fit. She wasn't that sort. She addressed the attorney: "Shall I go down? Or will you?"

Richmond shook his head.

"Neither. You certainly shouldn't go, and I cannot—not a present." He turned to me. "You'll have to go. You can do doubt handle it better than I could. Your course will have to depend on Mr. Ashcraft's attitude and condition. She does not wish to leave anything undone that might help him."

Mrs. Ashcraft held a strong, slender hand out to me. "You will do whatever you think wisest."

It was partly a question, partly an expression of confidence.

"I will," I promised.

I liked this Mrs. Ashcraft.

The automobile that had brought me to Tiajuana dumped me into the centre of the town early in the afternoon, and the day's business was just getting under way.

In the middle of the next block I saw a big gilded horseshoe. I went down the street and into the saloon behind the sign. It was a fair sample of the local joint. Across from the bar a man with a hare-lip was shaking pills out a keno goose.

"I want to see Ed Bohannon," I told him confidentially. He turned blank, fish-green eyes on me.

"I don't know no Ed Bohannon."

Taking out a piece of paper and a pencil I scribbled: "Jamocha is copped," and slid the paper over to the bartender.

"If a man who says he's Ed Bohannon asks for that, will you give it to him?"

"I guess so."

"Good," I said. "I'll hang around here for a while."

I walked down the room and sat at a table in one of the stalls. A lanky dame was camped beside me before I had settled in my seat.

"Buy me a little drink?" she asked.

The face she made at me was probably meant for a smile. I was afraid she'd do it again, so I surrendered.

"Yes," I said, and ordered a bottle of beer for myself



"Now I'll tell one," I growled, "and keep your hands away from your clothes."

from the waiter who was already hanging over my shoulder.

The woman at my side downed her shot of whisky, and was opening her mouth to suggest that we have another drink, when a voice spoke from behind me.

"Cora, Frank wants you."

Cora scowled, looking over my shoulder, and said, "All right, Kewpie. Take care of my friend here."

Kewpie slid into the seat beside me. She was a little, chunky girl of perhaps eighteen. Just a kid. Her short hair was brown and curly over a round, boyish face with laughing, impudent eyes. Rather a cute little trick, neatly dressed.

I bought a drink and got another bottle of beer.

"What's on your mind?" I asked her.

"I hear you're looking for a friend of mine," Kewpie said.

"That might be. What friends have you got?"

"Well, there's Ed Bohannon for one. You know Ed?" I shook my head.

"No—not yet."

"But you're looking for him?"

"Uh-huh."

"Maybe I could tell you how to find him, if I knew you were all right."

"It doesn't make any difference to me," I said carelessly.

She cuddled against my shoulder.

"What's the racket? Maybe I could get word to Ed."

I stuck a cigarette in her mouth, one in my own, and lit them.

"Let it go," I bluffed. "This Ed of yours seems to be as exclusive as all hell."

She jumped up.

"Wait a minute. I'll see if I can get him. What's your name?"

"Parker will do as well as any other," I said.

"You wait," she called back as she moved toward the back door. "I think I can find him."

"I think so, too," I agreed.

Ten minutes went by, and a man came to my table. He was a blond Englishman of less than forty, with all the marks of the gentleman gone to pot on him. Not altogether on the rocks yet, but you could plainly see evidence of the downhill slide. He was still fairly attractive in appearance.

He sat down facing me across the table.

"You're looking for me?"

There was only a hint of the Britisher in his accent.

"You're Ed Bohannon?"

He nodded.

"Jamocha was picked up a couple of days ago," I told him. "He got word out for me to give you the rap. He knew I was heading this way."

"How did they come to get to him?"

His blue eyes were suspicious on my face.

"Don't know," I said. "Maybe they picked him up on a circular."

He looked sharply at me again.

"Did he tell you anything else?"

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"He didn't tell me anything. He got word out to me by somebody's mouthpiece. I didn't see him."

"You're staying down here a while?"

"Yes, for two or three days," I said. "I've got something on the fire."

He stood up and smiled, and held out his hand.

"Thanks for the tip, Parker," he said. "If you'll take a walk with me I'll give you a drink."

I didn't have anything against that. He led me out of the Golden Horseshoe and down a side street to an adobe house. In the front room he waved me to a chair and went into the next room.

"What do you fancy?" he called through the door. "Rye, gin, tequila, Scotch—"

"The last one wins," I interrupted his catalogue.

He brought in a bottle, a siphon and some glasses, and we settled down to drinking. When that bottle was empty there was another to take its place. We drank and talked, drank and talked, and each of us pretended to be drunker than he really was—though before long we were full.

It was a drinking contest pure and simple. He was trying to drink me into a pulp and I was trying the same game on him. Neither of us made much progress. Neither he nor I was young enough to blab when we were drunk what wouldn't have come out if we had been sober.

"Y'know," he was saying somewhere along toward dark, "I've been a damn' ass. Got a wife—the nicest woman in the world. Wantsh me t' come back to her. Yet I hang around here, lappin' up this shuff—hittin' the pipe—when I could be shomebody. Arc—architect, y' un'ershtan—good one, too. But I got in rut—got mixsh up with theshe people. C-can't sheem to break 'way. Goin' to, though—no spoofin'. Goin' back to li'l wife. Don' you shay anything t' Kewpie. Nishe girl, K-kewpie, but tough. S'stick a bloomin' knife in me. Good job, too! But I'm goin' back to wife. Breekin' 'way from p-pipe an' ever'thing. Look at me. D' I look like a hophead? Course not! Curin' m'self, tha's why. I'll show you I can take it or leave it alone."

Pulling himself dizzily up out of his chair, he wandered into the next room, bawling a song.

He came staggering into the room again carrying an elaborate opium layout on a tray.

"Have a li'l rear on me, Parker."

I told him I'd stick to the Scotch.

He sprawled himself comfortably on the floor beside the table, rolled and cooked a pill, and our party went on. I was holding down a lovely package by the time Kewpie came in, at midnight.



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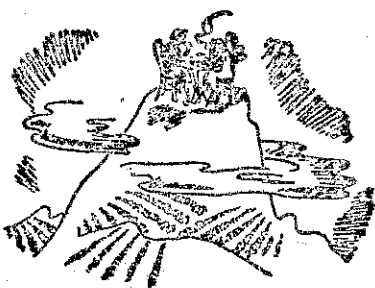
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