

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE THIN MAN"

The Golden Horseshoe By DASHIELL HAMMETT

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What Has Gone Before:

CONTINENTAL Operative No. 7, hero of "The Thin Man," is assigned to locate one Norman Ashcraft, who had disappeared after a quarrel with his wealthy wife. Ashcraft, while continuing to accept monthly cheques from his wife, mailed to him through San Francisco General Delivery, refused to return to her, saying he had become a drug addict. Cont. Op. No. 7 traced Ashcraft to Tiajuana, Mexico, where he was living under the name of Ed Bohannon. Posing as a friend of the men who were supplying Ashcraft with dope, Cont. Op. No. 7 meets a music-hall girl called Kewpie, who is in love with Ashcraft and who takes Cont. Op. No. 7 to him. She leaves, and the two men engage in a drinking bout, each seeking to extract information from the other. At midnight Kewpie returns.

CHAPTER II.

"Looks like you folks were enjoying yourselves," Kewpie laughed as she entered the room.

She perched herself on the table and reached for the Scotch.

"Everything's lovely," I assured her, though probably I didn't say it that clear.

I was fighting a battle with myself just about then. I had an idea that I wanted to dance. I don't remember whether I finally conquered the desire to dance or not. I remember Kewpie sitting on the table, grinning her boy's grin at me, and saying:

"You ought to stay oiled all the time, Shorty, it improves you."

I don't know whether I made any answer to that or not. Shortly afterward, I know, I spread myself beside the Englishman on the floor and went to sleep.

The next two days were pretty much like the first one. The only time we weren't drinking was when we were sleeping it off. I had only a hazy idea of some of the things that went on around me. On the second day someone added a first name to the alias I had given the girl—and thereafter I was "Painless" Parker.

Ashcraft and I were as thick as thieves, on the surface, but neither of us ever lost his distrust of the other, no matter how drunk we got—and we got plenty drunk. He went up against his mud-pipe regularly. I would go to sleep not knowing whether I was going to wake up or not; but I had nothing on me to give me away, so I figured that I was safe unless I talked myself into a jam. I didn't worry much.

Three days of this, and then, sobering up, I was riding back to San Francisco, making a list of what I knew and guessed about Norman Ashcraft, alias Ed Bohannon. The list went something like this:

(1) He suspected, if he didn't know, that I had come down to see him on his wife's account; (2) he apparently had decided to return to his wife; (3) he was not incurably addicted to drugs; (4) he might pull himself together under his wife's influence, but it was doubtful; (5) the girl Kewpie was crazy in love with him, but he wasn't turning himself inside out over her.

A good night's sleep on the train set me down in San Francisco with a nearly normal head and stomach and not too many kinks in my nerves. I put away a breakfast and went up to Vance Richmond's office.

"Mr. Richmond is still out of town," his stenographer told me.

"Can you get him on the phone for me?"

She could, and did.

Without mentioning any names, I told the attorney what I knew and guessed.

"I see," he said. "Suppose you go out to Mrs. A's house and tell her. I probably shall be back in the city by the day after tomorrow."

I caught a street car, and went out to Mrs. Ashcraft's house. I rang the bell several times before I noticed that

CONT. OP.
NO. 7 DOES IT
AGAIN, IN A
TALE ONLY
'THIN MAN'
HAMMETT
COULD DO



"Kewpie was a cute little trick and obviously very much in love with Ashcraft."

there were two morning newspapers in the vestibule. I looked at the dates—that morning's and the morning before.

An old man was watering the lawn next door.

"Do you know if the people who live here have gone away?" I called to him.

"I don't guess so. The back door's open, I seen this mornin'."

He returned his attention to his hose, and then stopped to scratch his chin.

"They may've gone," he said slowly. "Come to think of it, I don't remember seein' any of 'em yesterday."

I left the front steps and went around the house and went up the back steps. The kitchen door stood about a foot open. Nobody was visible in the kitchen, but there was a sound of running water.

I knocked on the door with my knuckles, loudly, pushed the door open and went in. The sound of water came from the sink.

Under a thin stream of water running from one of the faucets lay a carving knife with nearly a foot of keen blade. The knife was clean, but the back of the porcelain sink was freckled with red-brown spots. I scraped one of them with a fingernail. Dried blood.

Except for the sink, I could see nothing out of order in the kitchen. Across the room another door led to the front of the house. I opened the door and went into a passageway. I fumbled in the dusk (the shades throughout the house were down, I discovered later) for the light button. I stepped on something soft.

Pulling my foot back, I felt in my pocket for matches, and struck one. In front of me, lay a Filipino boy in his underclothes.

He was dead. One eye was cut, and his throat gashed straight across, close up under his chin.

I clicked on the lights and went up the steps.

I walked down the hall, then turned a corner—and pulled up with a jerk, barely in time to miss stumbling over a woman who lay there.

I put a finger on the back of her neck. Cold!

Kneeling on the floor—to avoid the necessity of turning her over—I looked at her face. She was the maid who had admitted Richmond and me four days ago.

I stood up again and looked around. The maid's head was almost touching a closed door. I stepped around her and pushed the door open. A bedroom, and not the maid's. Nothing in the room was disarranged except the bed. The bed clothes were rumpled and tangled, and piled high.

Leaning over the bed, I began to draw the covers off. The second piece came away stained with blood. I yanked the rest off.

Mrs. Ashcraft was dead there.

I put the blanket over her, again, edged past the dead woman in the hall, and went down the front stairs, switching on more lights, hunting for the telephone. Near the front of the stairs I found it. I called the police detective bureau first, and then Vance Richmond's office.

"Get word to Mr. Richmond that Mrs. Ashcraft has been murdered," I told his stenographer. "I'm at her house, and he can get in touch with me here any time during the next two or three hours."

Then I went out of the front door and sat on the top step, smoking a cigarette while I waited for the police.

The police automobile swung around the corner and began disgorging men before I had finished my first cigarette. O'Gar, the detective-sergeant in charge of the Homicide Detail, was the first man up the steps.

"Hullo," he greeted me. "What have you got hold of this time?"

I was glad to see him. He and I have always been lucky when we tied up together.

"I found three bodies in there before I quit looking," I told him as I led him indoors. "Maybe a regular detective like you—with a badge and everything—can find more."

"You didn't do bad—for a lad," he said.

I showed the Filipino to O'Gar first, and then the two women. We didn't find any more. Detail work occupied all of us—O'Gar, the eight men under him, and me—for the next few hours.

When the bulk of the reports were in, O'Gar and I sneaked away from the others and locked ourselves in the library.

"Night before last, huh? Wednesday night?" O'Gar grunted when we were comfortable in a couple of leather chairs, burning tobacco.

I nodded.

"I'd say the killer cracked the back door," O'Gar went on, staring at the ceiling through smoke, "picked up the carving knife in the kitchen, and went upstairs. Maybe he went straight to Mrs. Ashcraft's room—maybe not. But after a bit he went in there. The torn sleeve and the scratches on her face mean that there was a tussle. The Filipino and the maid heard the noise—heard her scream, maybe—and rushed to her room to find out what was the matter. The maid most likely got there just as the killer was coming out—and got hers. I guess the Filipino saw him then and ran. The killer caught him at the head of the back stairs—and finished him. Then he went down to the kitchen, washed his hands, dropped the knife, and blew."

"So far, so good," I agreed, "but I notice you skip lightly over the question of who he was and why he killed."

He scratched his bullet head.

"Don't crowd me," he rumbled, "I'll get around to that. There seem to be just three guesses to take your pick from. The killer was either a maniac who did the job for the fun of it, a burglar who was discovered and ran wild, or somebody who had a reason for bumping off Mrs. Ashcraft, and then had to kill the two servants when they discovered him. My personal guess is that the job was done by somebody who wanted to wipe out Mrs. Ashcraft."

"Not so bad," I applauded. "Now listen to this: Mrs. Ashcraft has a husband in Tiajuana, a mild sort of hop-head who is mixed up with a bunch of thugs. She was trying to persuade him to come back to her. He has a girl