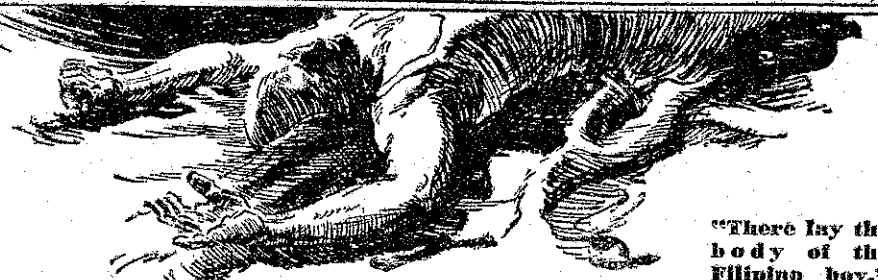




"Leaning over the bed, I began to draw the covers off. Mrs. Ashcraft was dead there."



"There lay the body of the Filipino boy."

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**LARGE ECONOMY TUBE... 1'3**

down there who is young, goofy over him, and a bad actor—one tough youngster. He was planning to run out on the girl and come back home."

"So-o-o?" O'Gar said softly.

"But," I continued, "I was with both him and the girl, in Tiajuana, right before last—when this killing was done."

"So-o?"

A knock on the door interrupted our talk. It was a policeman to tell me that I was wanted on the phone. I went down to the first floor, and Vance Richmond's voice came over the wire.

"What is it? Miss Henry delivered your message, but she couldn't give me any details."

I told him the whole thing.

"I'll leave for the city tonight," he said when I had finished. "You go ahead and do whatever you want. You're to have a free hand."

"Right," I replied. "I'll probably be out of town when you get back. You can reach me through the Agency. I'm going to wire Ashcraft to come up—in your name."

After Richmond had hung up, I called the city gaol and asked the captain if John Ryan, alias Fred Rooney, alias Jamocha, was still held there.

"No. Federal officers left for Leavenworth with him and two other prisoners yesterday."

Up in the library again, I told O'Gar hurriedly:

"I'm catching the evening train south, betting my marbles that the job was made in Tiajuana. I'm wiring Ashcraft to come up. I want to get him away from the Mexican town for a day or two, and if he's up here you can keep an eye on him. I'll give you a description of him, and you can pick him up at Vance Richmond's office. He'll probably connect there first thing."

Half an hour of the little time I had left I spent in writing and sending three telegrams. The first was to Ashcraft:

Edward Bchannon,  
Golden Horseshoe Cafe,  
Tiajuana, Mexico.

Mrs. Ashcraft is dead. Can you come immediately?

VANCE RICHMOND.

The other two were in code. One went to the Continental Detective Agency's Kansas City branch, asking that an operative be sent to Leavenworth to question Jamocha. The other requested the Los Angeles branch to have a man meet me in San Diego the next day.

Then I dashed out to my rooms for a bagful of clean clothes, and started riding south again.

At San Diego I lunched, registered and left my bag at a hotel, and went up to the hotel to pick up the Los Angeles operative I had wired for.

I found him in the lobby—a freckled-faced youngster of 22 or so, whose bright grey eyes were busy now with a racing programme, which he held in a hand that had a finger bandaged with adhesive tape. I passed him and stopped at the cigar stand, where I bought a package of cigarettes and straightened out an imaginary dent in my hat. Then I went out to the street again. The bandaged finger and the business with the hat were our introductions.

I strolled up Fourth Street, and the operative caught up with me. His name was Gorman. I gave him the lay.

"You're to go down to Tiajuana and take a plant on the Golden Horseshoe Cafe. There's a little chunk of a girl hustling drinks in there—short, curly, brown hair; brown eyes; round face; rather large red mouth; square shoulders. You can't miss her; she's a nice-looking kid of about eighteen, called Kewpie. She's the target for your eye. Keep away from her. Don't try to rope her. I'll give you an hour's start. Then I'm coming down to talk to her. I want to know what she does right after I leave, and what she does for the next few

days. You can get in touch with me at my hotel each night. Don't give me a tumble anywhere else. I'll most likely be in and out of the Golden Horseshoe often."

We parted. I waited an hour and then went up to the corner and fought for a seat on the stage.

Fifteen or more miles of dusty riding, a momentary halt at the Immigration Station on the line, and I was climbing out in Tiajuana.

Gorman's freckled face showed over a drink of mescal when I entered the Golden Horseshoe. I hoped he had a good constitution. He needed one if he was going to do his sleuthing on a distilled cactus diet.

The welcome I got from the Horseshoers was just like a homecoming. Even the bartender gave me a grin.

"Where's Kewpie?" I asked.

Kewpie came through the back door just then.

"Hello, Painless!" She climbed all over me, hugging me. "Down for another swell souze?"

"No," I said, leading her back toward the stalls. "Business this time. Where's Ed?"

"Up North. His wife kicked off and he's gone to collect the remains."

"That makes you sorry?"

"You bet! It's tough on me that papa has come into a lot of sugar."

I looked at her out of the corner of my eyes.

"And you think Ed's going to bring the jack back to you?"

Her eyes snapped darkly at me.

"What's eating you?" she demanded.

I smiled knowingly.

"One of two things is going to happen," I predicted. "Ed's going to ditch you, or he's going to need every brownie he can scrape up to keep his neck from being—"

"You liar!"

**NEXT WEEK:** A sinister figure enters the case and Cont. Op. No. 7 begins to unravel the mystery of the triple murder.