

The Golden Horseshoe

By DASHIELL HAMMETT

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

What Has Gone Before:

CONTINENTAL OPERATIVE NO. 7, hero of "The Thin Man," called in by wealthy Mrs. Norman Ashcraft to find her husband who had disappeared after a quarrel, has traced the missing man to Tiajuana's Golden Horseshoe Cafe, where he had adopted the name of Ed. Bohannon. With "Bohannon," was a pretty, young music-hall girl called Kewpie. Returning to Mrs. Ashcraft's home in San Francisco to report, the detective finds her dead, murdered, together with a maid and a Filipino boy. Cont. Op. No. 7, with Gorman, an aide, rushes back to Tiajuana. Kewpie welcomes him, but when the detective tells her that the murder will surely be pinned on Ashcraft, the girl turns on him.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN I told Kewpie that Ashcraft would swing for the murder of his wife, she flew into a rage.

"You liar!" she screamed.

Her left hand flashed down under her short skirt. I pushed her shoulder forward, twisting her body sharply away from me. The knife her left hand had whipped up from her leg jabbed deep into the underside of the table. A thick-bladed knife, I noticed, balanced for accurate throwing.

I slid my left arm around behind her and pinned her elbow to her side just as she freed the knife from the table.

"What th' hell's all 'is?"

I looked up.

Across the table a man stood glaring at me—legs apart, fists on hips. He was a big man, and ugly. A tall, raw-boned man with wide shoulders, out of which a long, skinny, yellow neck rose to support a little round head. His mouth was stretched in a snarl, baring a double row of crooked brown teeth.

"Where d'yuh get 'at stuff?" this lovely person roared at me.

He was too tough to reason with.

"If you're the waiter," I told him, "bring me a bottle of beer and something for the kid. If you're not a waiter—sneak."

He leaned over the table and I gathered my feet in. It looked like I was going to need them to move around on.

"I'll bring yuh a—"

The girl wriggled out of my hands and shut him up.

"Mine's liquor," she said sharply.

He snarled and wandered away.

"Who's your friend?"

"You'll do well to lay off him," she advised me. "Now, what's all this about Ed being in trouble?"

"You read about the killing in the papers?"

"Yes."

"You oughtn't need a map, then," I said. "Ed's only out is to put the job on you. If he can't, he's nailed."

"You're crazy!" she exclaimed. "You weren't too drunk to know that both of us were here with you when the killing was done."

"I'm not crazy enough to think that proves anything," I corrected her. "But I am crazy enough to expect to go back to San Francisco wearing the killer on my wrist, and that's what I'll do."

She laughed at me. I laughed back and stood up.

"See you some more," I said as I strolled toward the door. I returned to San Diego and sent a wire to Los Angeles, asking for another operative.

"Looked like I was going to have to shoot you loose from the place for a moment," he grinned. "Between the twist flashing the pick and the big guy loosening a sap in his pocket, it looked like action was coming."

"You let me alone," I ordered. "Your job is to see what goes on, and that's all. If I get carped, you can mention it in your report, but that's your limit. What did you turn up?"

"After you blew, the girl and the big guy put their noodles together. They seemed kind of agitated. He slid out, so I dropped the girl and slid along behind him. He came to town and got a wire off. I couldn't crowd him close enough to see who it was to. Then he went back to the joint."

"Who is the big guy, did you learn?"

"He's no sweet dream, from what I hear. 'Gooseneck' Flinn is the name on his calling cards. He's bouncer and general utility man for the joint."

So this Gooseneck party was the Golden Horseshoe's clean-up man, and he hadn't been in sight during my three-day spree? And it had been on one of those three days that Mrs. Ashcraft and her servants had been killed.

"I wired your office for another op.," I told Gorman. "He's to connect with you. Turn the girl over to him, and you camp on Gooseneck's trail. I think we're going to hang three killings on him, so watch your step. I'll be in to stir things up a little more tomorrow; but remember, no matter what happens, everybody plays his own game. Don't ball things up trying to help me."

"Aye, aye, Cap," and he went off to get some sleep.

The next afternoon I wandered around looking for some fellows I needed. I spotted the first one—a sun-burned man who was plainly a farm-hand in his Sunday clothes. "How'd you like to pick up five bucks for a few minutes' work?" I tempted him. He would like it, but what was the work?

"I want you to go over to the Old Town with me and look at a man. Then you get your pay. There are no strings to it."

That didn't exactly satisfy him, but five bucks are five bucks. He decided to try it.

I put the farm-hand over by a door, and went after another—a little, plump man with round, optimistic eyes and a weak mouth. He was willing to earn five dollars in the simple and easy manner I had outlined. Then I got a Filipino and a stocky young Greek.

Four men were enough. I put them in a jitney and took them over to the Old Town.

"Now this is it," I coached them when we had arrived. "I'm going into the Golden Horseshoe Cafe, around the corner. Give me two or three minutes, and then come in and buy yourselves a drink." I gave the farm-hand a five-dollar bill. "You pay for the drinks with that—it isn't part of your wages. There's a tall, broad-shouldered man with a long, yellow neck and a small ugly face in there. You can't miss him. I want you all to take a good look at him without letting him get wise. When you're sure you'd know him again anywhere, give me a nod, and come back here and you get your money. Be careful when you give me the nod. I don't want anybody in there to find out that you know me."

It sounded queer to them. They asked me questions, which I refused to answer, but they stuck.

Gooseneck was behind the bar, helping out the bartenders, when I entered the place.

I couldn't find Gorman's freckled face in the crowd, but I picked out the hatchet-sharp white face of Hooper, another Los Angeles operative, who, I knew then, had been sent down in response to my second telegram. Kewpie was farther down the bar, drinking with a little man. She nodded at me, but didn't leave her table.

Gooseneck gave me a scowl and the bottle of beer I had ordered. Presently my four hired men came in. They did their parts beautifully!

First they peered through the smoke, looking from face to face, and hastily avoiding eyes that met theirs. A little of this, and one of them, the Filipino, saw the man I had described, behind the bar. He jumped a foot in the

excitement of his discovery, and then, finding Gooseneck glaring at him, turned his back and fidgeted. The three others spotted Gooseneck now, and sneaked looks at him that were as conspicuously furtive as a set of false whiskers. Gooseneck glowered at them.

The Filipino turned around, looked at me, ducked his head sharply and bolted for the street. Another of my confederates, the Greek, cleared his throat with the noise of a gasoline engine's backfire. Gooseneck was edging down the bar, a bungstarter in one hand, his face purple.

I looked at my assistants. Their nods wouldn't have been so terrible had they come one at a time, but they were taking no chances on my looking away again before they could get their reports in. The three heads bobbed together—a signal that nobody within twenty feet could, or did, miss—and they scooted out of the door, away from the long-necked man and his bung-starter.

I emptied my glass of beer, sauntered out of the saloon and around the corner. They were clustered there where I had told them to wait.

"We'd know him! We'd know him!" they chorused.

"That's fine," I praised them. "You did great. Here's your pay. Now if I were you boys, I think I'd sort of avoid that place after this."

They grabbed their wages and were gone before I had finished my speech. I returned to the Golden Horseshoe—to be on hand in case one of them should decide to come back there to spill the deal to Gooseneck.

Kewpie had left her table and met me at the door. She stuck an arm through mine and led me toward the rear of the building. I noticed that Gooseneck was gone from behind the bar.

When we had dropped down in front of a vacant table, she asked:

"Who were your friends?"

"What friends?"

"The four jobbies who were at the bar when you were there a few minutes ago."

"Too hard for me, sister," I shook my head. "There were slews of men there. Oh, yes! I know who you mean! Those four gents who seemed kind of smitten with Gooseneck's looks. I wonder what attracted them to him—besides his beauty!"

She grabbed my arm with both hands. "So help me, Painless," she swore, "if you tie anything on Ed, I'll kill you!"

Her brown eyes were big and damp. She was a hard and wise little baby, but she was only a kid, and she was worried sick over her man.

I patted her hands.

"I could give you some good advice," I said as I stood up, "but you wouldn't listen to it. It won't do any harm to tell you to keep an eye on Gooseneck, though—he's shift."

There wasn't any special meaning to that speech, except that it might tangle things up a little more. One way of finding what's at the bottom of either a cup of coffee or a situation is to keep stirring it up.

Hooper came into my room in the San Diego hotel at a little before two the next morning.

"Gooseneck disappeared, with Gorman tailing him, immediately after your first visit," he said. "After the

(TURN OVER PAGE.)



"I pushed the door open and went in. The Englishman sat facing me, his right hand in his coat pocket. I was sure he had a gun there."