

GOLD BULLETS

by Charles G. Booth

SYNOPSIS: An accusing finger points at Jerry Ogden as the slayer of his father. Jerry's difference with him on reopening the deserted Territory mine, their long conference just before the murder and Jerry's flight east are implications. John Peebles feels a gnawing dread of the evidence against Jerry and decides that he will not disclose his damning secrets because he is convinced that Jerry, engaged to Peebles' niece, Lucy, is innocent. Terrified, ghost town of the desert, is being drawn into the maze: Terridity, once dominated by Alex Peterson, whose gold-mounted revolver and gold bullets had been bought by Peebles in a mystery-tinted transaction.

Chapter I
GOLD BULLETS
The danger in Andrew's neck belonged to Jerry. He had brought it up from South America with him. Its place was among other trophies of his in a glass-topped table cabinet which stood behind the desk and against the north wall near the windows. So far as I could see, there were no fingerprints on the glass.
I went back to Andrew. My resting my cheek on the desk I could see into his face without lifting his head. I had known Andrew as a man endowed with a fine collection of the "civic virtues." I mean that he was conscientious and eminently respectable, restrained and judicious and successful, a pillar of the church and a member of the chamber of commerce.
But from time to time I had felt that this conventional being wasn't the real Andrew Ogden; that behind it lay and longed an audacious personality he had never revealed to me but which, somehow, I had sensed and loved.
Hubbard came in just then.
"I didn't see Stinson around, sir."
"Never mind. He'll turn up," I thought for a moment. "Has Mr. Ogden had any visitors lately, Hubbard? Stranger, I mean?"
"Why, yes, sir, he has. A man and a woman. And a queer-looking pair they were. I was going to speak to you about them."
"Queer-looking?" I exclaimed.
"Who were they? When did they come?"
"I don't know the woman's name, sir. She was here three or four days ago. She didn't come to the 'oon. The mister was in the grounds and he met her coming up the drive. They talked for a minute or two, then he brought her in here. She must have stayed an hour. She was one of those tall, angular, elderly females that seem to be all sinew and bone and tight-shut mouth."
"How was she dressed?"
"That was the queer part of her."

She had on a black hat, a long black coat, and a long black dress. I couldn't help noticing the set-up of her, sir. Not a bit of color to her, sir. Even her eyes were black. Black as coal."
"She sounds like a crank of some sort, Hubbard. What about the other person?"
"Well, sir, he was just as queer. In his way. He came this afternoon. The look of him gave me a turn when I opened the door. I almost shut it in his face. He was a little crab-apple of a chap, in overalls and a torn coat, and all stooped and puckered. Eighty, if he was a day, a shock of hair as white as a clean nankin all over his head and neck, a stubble of whisker, a leathery skin like an old brown shoe. China-blue eyes all red around the rims, and an eight-sided glass stuck in his eye—that's him, sir."
"An eight-sided glass!" I echoed. "You mean a lens of some sort?"
"Yes, sir. And it was on one end of a wire. The other end of the wire was fastened to his shirt with a safety pin."
"I'm lookin' for Andy Ogden," he shouted in a cackling voice.
"I told you the mister wouldn't want such a looking fellow in his house, so I said Mr. Ogden was out, and I started to shut the door. 'No, he ain't,' the old man shrieked at me. And before I could prevent him he hopped into the hall shook his first in my face, and screamed:
"Tell yer boss o' Parle is here!"
"Luckily, Mr. Ogden looked into the hall just then and asked him what he wanted.
"A word with ye in private," the

old man cackled.
"And do you know, sir, after thinking a moment, Mr. Ogden brought him in here and shut the door! I was stunned. Mr. Ogden has always been so particular about suspicious-looking characters."
"Did Mr. Ogden seem surprised at seeing the men?" I asked.
"He did, sir. Dumbfounded, I might say. At first I thought he hadn't caught what Parle said, Mr. Ogden being a trifle deaf in his left ear, as you know, sir; and then I heard him muttering the man's name over and over, 'Parle, Parle, Parle.' Just like that."
"And you never saw this man before, Hubbard?"
"Never, sir."
"What time did he go?"
"About six, I believe. Mr. Ogden then called in Mr. Jerry and instructed me not to have them disturbed."
"When did you last see Mr. Jerry?" I asked casually.
"When Mr. Ogden called me in, sir. At six."
"How was he dressed?" I went on in the same tone.
"In his channels, sir."
I shut my eyes for an instant.
"Hubbard," I resumed quietly, "did you chance to overhear any of the conversation between Parle and Mr. Ogden?"
Hubbard flushed. "Well, sir, I did, but it was quite unintentional on my part. I was passing along the hall and I heard Mr. Ogden utter two words in angry tones. He shouted them and they quite startled me. I heard nothing else, sir."

"What were those words, Hubbard?"
"Gold bullets," sir.
I started so violently that Hubbard looked at me in surprise. It took me a moment to reassemble my scattered wits. Could it be possible that the Peterson revolver was in some way connected with Parle's interview with Ogden?
What a strange concurrence of events! First, Hyde's refusal to tell me anything about the revolver; then, Andrew's telephone call, Jerry's white-flannelled figure flying down the drive, Andrew snatched to death at the telephone; and finally, this thing Hubbard had told me. Were these events links of a chain that ran back into the limbo of Ogden's past? And Jerry? For a moment my faith in him was shaken.

Dreadful as my announcement to Lucy must be, would the truth compel me to make it inconceivably more so? My agony of heart became unendurable.
A heavy pounding sounded at the front door. Hubbard hurried into the hall. He reappeared with Henry Deacon, Dr. Oakley, a local surgeon, and Thompson, a sergeant of detectives.
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Hyde's secrecy about the revolver—Jerry's flight—Ogden's murder—the "woman in black"—Parle—are they all part of the mystery? Continue this story tomorrow.

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