

# THE TIGER TRAIL

by Edison Marshall Illustrations by PAUL FREHM

**WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE—**

Dr. Long, out fishing with Alexander Pierce, a detective, tells of his projected trip to Southerly Downs. Pierce advises him to keep his eyes wide open while there. On the way in a train Dr. Long is attracted by a girl, who later faints. Dr. Long treats her, and looking into her bag, is accosted to find a loaded revolver.

Dr. Long meets Ahmad Das, an Oriental, who conducts him to Southley Downs, where he meets Mr. Southley and his son, Ernest Southley, Mr. Hayward and his son, Vilas, and then Josephine Southley, who is the girl he had met on the train. Josephine tells him the story of Southley Downs and its ghost, which is not the ghost of a human being but of a tiger.

Dr. Long has a quarrel with Vilas Hayward over Josephine, and finds that the Haywards have a strange authority over the Southleys. He is ordered to leave Southley Downs. The rain prevents him leaving at once. Dr. Long and Ernest go out on the road in the rain looking for the tracks of a tiger that Ernest says are there. They find the tracks. Later Ernest and Dr. Long see a prowling creature in the hall at Southley Downs. This frightens the elder Hayward, who also sees it. Ernest begins to feel that Ahmad Das is perpetrating some devilry.

Now read on—

The old man sat down in a cushioned chair. He gave no heed to the water pouring from his clothes. He looked tired and listless.

"The levee is breaking," he answered simply.

Only his son seemed to understand. I looked up from the work of tying my shoes, procured in my room on the way to the library. We made a silent circle in the dim light.

"What does it mean?" Hayward cried. "Does it mean we'll be drowned?"

He spoke hoarsely; but the announcement steadied me. Floods were material, and could be faced. They couldn't run and hide behind the curtains.

"Nothing as bad as that," Southley answered. "Of course it means a flood; but by no conceivable circumstance can the water reach the top of the hill where this house stands. But we'll be cut off from civilization—for days. The water will sweep all around the hill, flood low places—eight feet deep. We won't be able to reach the heights across the valley."

Hayward seemed to leap toward him. He simply appeared to break before our eyes. His voice rose shrilly and he shook his arm in Southley's face.

"Then get me out tonight!" he screamed. "Get me away from this house while there's yet time."

"I'm afraid it is too late now," Southley answered.

"Call a car for me at once—hear me? There's still time to make the road. I won't stay here another hour. Get on your feet, you fool—and call a car for me. You'll regret it if you don't."

"There's no one to drive—but Ahmad," Southley answered wearily. "And what about your son?"

"Down my son! Damn this wicked house! Did you say Ahmad?" For an instant we saw the battle of two fears in his great face. "Get Ahmad, then. I'll be ready as soon as I find a coat. Vilas can tend to our business, and he'll communicate with me."

Southley sighed; then got to his feet. He touched a bell on the table. Only a moment we waited. Then through the door came Ahmad Das—calm, imperturbable, his Oriental face quiet as a seer's. Never was there such depth of shadow as we saw in his eyes.

He came swiftly across the floor with that marvelous feline grace.

"Yes, sahib—"

"Get the touring car out at once," Southley ordered. "You have to take Sahib Hayward to the station. Don't lose an instant. The levee is breaking. It will be broken before you return, so you'll have to leave the car in the station and come in a boat. Arrange for supplies while you're there—we may be cut off for weeks."

"I'll cut down the walk to the base of the hill," Hayward instructed. "Pick me up there, and we'll have at least a minute."

The Oriental bowed, then slipped away. He went just like a shadow. He found a raincoat in the hall, and in an instant he was out in the flood of rain.

Hayward put on his own overcoat, and started out after him. The rain

and the darkness swallowed them both.

A window had been left just beside the fireplace, and through it we could ordinarily see the garage. Ernest and I gazed through that window. Ahmad was evidently having difficulty in boating his way through the storm. It was a long time before we saw an indication that he had reached the garage. Then we saw his auto lights flash on.

We were barely able to make them out, although it was plain that the garage door was open and they were shining directly toward us. Of course the distance was far; and the piercing rays could hardly penetrate the wall of rain. The lightning had entirely ceased. We couldn't hear the roar of the engine at all. Then we saw, quite plainly, the track of the lights as the car sped about the shoulder of the hill.

Perhaps, in all, the walk to the garage and the starting of the car had taken four minutes. The walk to the base of the hill, where the postern path met the driveway, took ordinarily two minutes. It was straight downhill, and if Hayward had walked swiftly at all, he would certainly have two minutes to wait. The car came slowly, and still we could see the faint luster in the rain that was its lights.

They curved on to the base of the hill. Then Ernest uttered a syllable of exclamation. "He's driven past the point," he said.

"Possibly Hayward has walked on a few feet," I suggested.

The car slowed up and stopped for a single instant, then started slowly on. It was hard to believe that it halted long enough to permit the portly form of Hayward to enter. It looked to us as if Ahmad were trying to throw the car-lights onto the side of the road. Then, to our vast amazement, we saw him turn around.

The car headed back, just as slowly, and circled about to the garage.

The servant stopped the car in the rain; and we waited a long three minutes for him to drive on again. We only knew he was standing still from the faint blur of the lights in the downpour. I don't remember that we three men talked at all. Possibly there were one or two wondering remarks—as to what was the cause of their delay.

And just then the dark form of the Hindu came into the hall. The look of question on his face seemed very real indeed. I remembered it afterward, as did all the rest of us.

"Where," he asked, "is Hayward Sahib?"

"You mean Vilas?" Southley asked.

"The elder Hayward, whom I was to drive to the station."

"For God's sake, Ahmad! Did you miss him? He started out in the rain, and was going to meet you at the foot of the path. Didn't you understand?"

"I looked—but he wasn't there. Then I thought I had misunderstood, and drove back to the garage. He wasn't there either."

"Good Lord, he'll be drenched. Go down the path and find him."

"Yes, sahib—"

My eyes were upon Ernest's face, and suddenly his gaze met mine. I think that we had the same thought.

"Wait a minute, Ahmad," he said quietly. "Keep the door shut." Then he turned to his father; and stood for a long instant as if in thought.

"Father, I think that we'd all better go—and look for Hayward."

We saw no sign of Hayward at first. We got down to the driveway, and flashed our lanterns all along it. We looked up and down the path. We tried to call in the beat of the rain.

"Good Lord!" Southley cried. "He couldn't have got down into the river and drowned!"

We scattered about, and began to climb over the hillside. The rain, the bobbing lantern, the echo of the catastrophe, the dark house behind us and the gathering lake in front, gave the scene a singular dream-like quality. Then Ahmad, who walked close beside me, tripped and fell over a nothing on the ground.

He uttered an oath in his own tongue; then whirled to look. He bent and felt about with his hand. The place he stood was a little neck of land that dipped down into the floodwaters, an isthmus that separated the height on which the house stood from the plateaus opposite.

"Bring the lantern," the Hindu called. "I have found Sahib Hayward."

The lantern showed everything very plainly. We understood why Hayward had not met the servant at the road. His neck was broken, as if by

a giant's blow.

We didn't stop to examine the body on that rain-swept hillside. I had known the neck was broken simply by the way the great head dropped back when we lifted the shoulders from the ground. The four of us carried him into the house, not an easy load at all. Vilas Hayward met us at the door.

The effect on the younger Hayward was hardly what I expected. It was true that I didn't look for prostration. He was the kind of man that grows away from his parents in late boyhood.

"My father!" he shrieked. The sound went high and wild in the storm. "Don't dare to tell me he's dead."

"We don't dare to tell you anything else, because he is," Ernest answered.

Vilas leaped toward Southley; and for an instant I thought he would attack him. His face was drawn hideously in the half-light. He had evidently left his bed only when the levee gave way; he was only partly dressed.

"Then you're the devil that killed him! You, I say, Southley! You killed him to get rid of him, and you'll be trying to kill me next!"

"Don't be silly," I cautioned swiftly. "I was with Mr. Southley up to the moment that we found him."

"Then it was you, Long, in Southley's pay. I won't believe anything else."

Ernest tried to quiet him, and after he had got him away, I took the covering from the dead man's face. I made a close examination of the body. My aged host knelt beside me. Nothing but a superhuman blow could have so broken the neck. It could not have been from a fall; because only a severe fall could have done it, and out on the isthmus where we had found the corpse there were no heights to fall from. Besides, there was plenty of other evidence that some sort of a blow had killed him. The worst of them all were two, deep parallel grooves on his face, from which the flesh had been simply raked. The flesh was discolored, too.

"It's plain as the nose on your face that the man was murdered," Southley said. "Any coroner's jury in Florida would say so. And the sooner we get word into town the better."

"At least," I answered, "he murderer can't get away. Unless he got out before the levee broke, he's on the island with us."

"And it doesn't seem likely that he could get out without superhuman strength and agility. Of course it might have been possible for a speedy runner to reach the highlands across the valley before the flood waters swept over the isthmus, but it's certain he couldn't get back to civilization. The first thing to do is to post guards to watch over the lowlands, and see that he doesn't get out."

Southley's eyes met mine. I had never seen better self-control.

"The first thing to do is to quiet the negroes," I told him. "They are terrorized. The next is to send for aid."

The old man turned quickly. "Do you mean the coroner?"

"Yes. The State will send detectives. I will be glad. It is certain that one of us three will have to face a murder charge, and the sooner it is cleared up the better."

"But were three were together—"

"That won't matter. They will say we hired one of the negroes to commit the crime. We can improvise a raft, and send a man out tomorrow to bring the coroner."

"We can do better than that. I've got a little sneak-boat—just a canoe—that I use for ducks. We'll have to have a bigger one to bring supplies; but it will carry a message to the mainland."

There was little else to do in the rain. We went into the den, and just as morning broke we told Ernest and Vilas our plans. The rain was less violent now. The storm was at the ebb.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," Vilas apologized. "It was the excitement of the moment. But I would like to know, what you think, Southley. What killed my father—accident or murder, or what?"

The eyes of the two men met.

"Your father was struck down—there is no question about it," Southley replied. "He was killed by a blow from some unknown source. There is every reason to think that his slayer is still about this house and plantation, and every possible effort will be made to chase him down. No one will be able to leave—first, because of a rule that necessity prescribes; and

second, because of the flood. Detectives will be sent out here to investigate."

"And what was the blow dealt with?" Vilas asked nervously. "Couldn't you—find the weapon?"

Southley looked at him sharply. "That will be hunted for tomorrow," he replied. "All we could tell was that he was struck with some blunt sort of a weapon, and with terrific power—enough to snap his neck like a reed. The blunt weapon must have had two nails or spikes—because there are two deep parallel scratches in the bruised flesh."

My eyes were upon Vilas' face. He didn't look at us.

"I only know one thing—one kind of a weapon that would leave a mark like that," he said in a strange, harsh tone. "And that isn't a weapon at all. It's an animal's paw."

"And that is the one thing that must be forgotten by all of us, if we are to learn the truth," Southley told him. "It only brings horror, not clear thought. Forget the legend at once, and begin with clear eyes. That's our only chance."

With this, our little group broke up. Ernest tried to snatch a few hours of sleep on the sofa. I had plans of my own that necessitated a consultation with the negro that was to carry word to the coroner when the sun rose. And just as I came back from my talk with him I met Josephine on the stairs.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

She seemed surprised at my tone. "And what right have you to ask?" she answered me.

She might have been the spirit of the dawn itself in her soft gray drapes, and the lights of stars in her eyes. I knew from her look that she had heard of the tragedy.

"It is just that I'm afraid for you," I told her humbly. "No one knows what might happen—in this house."

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"And you are still watchful for me—even since last night?" Of course she referred to the scene in the den. No words can tell how appealing, from the shadows of the stairway, was her voice.

(TO BE CONTINUED)


**Safety Meeting Held**  
Instruction in first aid work featured a meeting Monday evening of the Mountain States Power company employes. It was the monthly safety meeting. Ferris White, safety engineer for the company, who headquarters are at Albany, was the speaker.



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