THE TIGER TRAIL

by Edison Marshall — Illustrations by Paul Frehm

WHAT HAD HAPPENED BEFORE—

Dr. Long was talking with Alexander Pierce, a detective, after of the projected trip to Southwestern Oregon. Pierce advises him to keep the crime with open white flower. On the way to a cruise Dr. Long is attracted by a girl, who after leaving Dr. Long's cruise her, and leaving into her bag, is so amazed to find a loaded revolver.

Dr. Long meets Ahmad Ben, an Oriental, who contracts him to Southwestern Oregon, where he meets Mr. Southley and his son, Ernest Southley, Mr. Harmont and his son, Wilas, and Inez Josephine Southley, who is the girl he had met on the train. Josephine tells him the story of Southley Jewels and its ghost, which is not the ghost of a human being but of a tiger.

Dr. Long has a quarrel with Wilas Harmont over Josephine, and finds that the Harmonts have a strange authority over the Southleys. He is followed to home Southley Jewels. The rain prevents the hunting at once. Dr. Long and Ernest go out on the road in the rain looking for the trouble of a tiger that Ernest says are there.

They find the trouble. Luther Ernest and Dr. Long are a growling creature in the hall at Southley Jewels. The Harmonts the other harmont, who also were it. Ernest begins to feel that Ahmad Ben is perpetrating some feeling.

The other Harmont is later found dead, the neck broken as if by a giant's blow.

The coroner and police arrive in order to investigate.

NOW READ ON—

Sam's other remarks he had talk with Josephine.

"And where do you stay at the ranchhouse?" I asked. "You must sleep in Mr. Southley's back room."

The question drew a long and detailed explanation. The doctor right, it seemed, had been procured by the coroner, and was to be used to convey the body. The dark room was too large enough to bring any employee to Mr. Southley had ordered Sam to procure a large, well-built coffin to go back and forth in. At first he had designed of finding any until the old man who had observed us the way back to the house, so convenient him and offered his own boat and services for hire. He was a shrewd old character that lived by the river at the edge of the city, and he had heard of Sam's negotiation. But he insisted that he be carried along to handle the oars boat. The reason was rather obvious. The old man was brilliant that his very services would bring.

"And what's the old fellow's name?"

"Robbs—and he talked like a crazy."

Southley and I were with the inspector—the make turned out to be Pierce—when he returned the body. He made no comment. Robbs I had given up all hope of a greater detective coming to our aid. I larger after all the clues I had gathered in Sam. He was entirely worsted.

"Like as not you and young Southley spoiled a whole lot more clues than you found, by tramping around the body."

"We were careful about that, inspector," I ventured.

"I don't mean to offer your motives weren't the best," he went on with a world of curt. "Self-interest did doesn't help, as a rule. The fact is evidently the property of the murdered man. This cuff-link—"

He examined the cuffs of the others

after that Harmont were. "Do the cuff, too," he said shortly. "Remove all when he left."

There was nothing more to be said at this point. The hole in the left sleeve was the matter of the broken that we had found.

We heard our story and we walked down with him to show him where the body had lain. He listened very attentively to our theory—that Harmont had attempted to flee from the stranger.

"It's a queer case," he told us finally. "I don't know of any like it. As you say, he must have had something on Josephine as a college-boy, and yet hardly like a blackmailer. Anything very hard would have revived the old feud between the Southleys and the Harmonts. If there have been—Josephine, I mean, I don't know—there were secretities are funny, too. But we have earlier got the murderer pretty well sewed up. If he's in this house he can't get away—because already detects are watching the shores of the company. If he's on the lightship yonder, he can't get off there either, except into the water where he may well see him."

Soon after this the body was carried down to the boat. The inspector seemed all to have disappeared when the moment came, but Ahmad, in preparation as ever, had the boatbearers of old man that we called Robbs, came to our aid. The inquest was to be held three days later, after the detectives had time to make their investigations.

"There's room for me, I hope?" I asked.

"Yes."

"It will be necessary for me to leave this place and go back to my practice in Portland."

Because I hadn't forgotten my previous of departure. Besides, there was no further reason for me to stay. Alexander Pierce had failed to come; I had not been a guest, a spectator. Even the first and Josephine had seen to it that I had been no more. The announcement in the den the evening before had told that all my duties I couldn't decide to myself how much I would have liked to stay, to see the affair to its end, perhaps to behold the curtain lifted from the old mansion's secret, and to watch the shadows depart from those and when. Never before had the thought of being of service been so dear to me. But the sound the girl had taken in the den was impossible to disregard.

"I don't see why you can't go, Long, if you want," the inspector said. "You were just a guest here—though I will say that you came at a propitious time—and, besides, both of the Southleys seem much for you. Wilas says you're innocent, and they say that you were in the library when the crime was committed. Of course, you must tell us where we can get you at a moment's notice."

I told them, and asked them to wait until I got my bag. It was all packed and ready. And as I came down from my room I met Josephine in the hall.

She started back at the sight of me. I couldn't read the look that leaped to her face, enough that it was a hurt look, almost a look of pleading. It was a surprise to me. Evidently she felt that she would miss whatever support I had been to them last night of trial.

"You're going, after all," she said.

She didn't put it as a question. She spoke as if it were some inalienable circumstance.

"Of course I'm going. I'm afraid I

—I've got to get back to my practice. Probably a hundred little lessons handle something to me—"

But her eyes attracted me and stopped the flow of my silly words.

"Perhaps you have forgotten—but we promised Dashiell. The first night at Southley Jewels."

"I had forgotten. Forgive me. And how long ago it was."

"And how much has happened since!"

"How much—and this is the end."

I stretched out my hand, and she grasped it. I had always wondered at that hand. It was so yielding, seemingly so tender. But I felt a grasp, wondering at the strength in her life.

"Goodbye, Miss Southley."

"But I walk with you down to the boat."

"If you wish. But you remember—what is in the boat."

"I'm past all barrier of that." She led the way out of the great door and down the path. "What a night, also crumpled the road. "And I suppose there is nothing—that I can tell you—that would make you stay?"

"Twelve minutes been very sweet and sweet." I said. "I'm glad that you cared at all. But I don't see any use of keeping up the worry game any longer. It can't help but come to unhappiness in the end. I want you to have all happiness—"

I could scarcely hear her answer. The little was so low—hardly more than a whisper. Perhaps it was just a little trembling.

"I don't think you are very kind, doctor," the words came back. "You don't understand."

"Indeed because I wish you happiness?" for least I can do that—with prosperity. There had been enough between us that I can do that. The walks we had—they will be very beautiful to little alone."

"I wish you'd not say any more."

But I want an explanation—"And don't think I'm going to be bitter. We have always sacrificed for the men they loved—everything they had to sacrifice. So man can blame them if he is one of the sacrifices, as I was—in the end—last night."

She stopped as if I had struck her.

"You mean—that you think I renounced you last night, that I let you fall when I could have saved you—because I loved Wilas Harmont?"

"I would rather attribute it to that than to some less worthy reason. At least it showed the fact your love for him was everything—that nothing in the world could stand in its way."

"There there is no use in pleading with you any more, Dr. Long. Some time you may understand—and maybe be a little sorry. If you'd only stay, that time might be soon—before it is too late."

We could say no more. We had reached the boat. I shook hands with the Southleys, and, even as I said good-by, two strange impressions were stamping at the doors of my consciousness. They were not distinct. One of them was that old Robbs was gazing at me with what was almost a look of abject bewilderment on his face; the other was that Josephine was whispering to Inspector Pressant—a hurried, urgent message.

When I looked at them they had moved to opposite sides of the group. The lean face was thoughtful. I gave my bag to the negro, and started to step on the boat.

"Wait just a minute, Dr. Long," the inspector commanded.

I turned to him. "What is it?"

"The past hour, Jennings—that I really haven't the right to let you go. I've learned that you had a scene with the other Harmont—words and all that—on the night he was killed. It puts a different face on the situation, as I know. I'll have to arrange you to stay here until I know it is safe for me to let you go, doctor."

All the white accusations of Southley Jewels—and that of course included Dr. Long—and that of course included the lamp-lighted cottage, whose face is the cool and serene of the whole action broad—that in the library immediately after the murder heavily departing, all of us back there, and Inspector Pressant stood in the center.

"This isn't at first hand, or anything like it," he explained. "I'm simply in search of information. I want to know which who, and what happened what."

He called on Wilas Harmont first.

"Where were you on the night of the crime?" he asked.

"I went to bed at midnight."

"You were present in the den, in which you were insulted by Dr. Long?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm willing to forget that."

For the even did not look as if he were willing. They glowed darkly.

"But we're not willing to forget it," the detective replied. "The matter of motive for this murder is probably the most important factor in identifying the criminal. If we have a motive, we have something to work on. I believe that your father took your part in that discussion."

"That is true."

"And Southley did also."

"Yes, Southley—just as mother. Yes, he supported me."

"I believe the daughter sided in with you, too."

"I would hardly say that."

"At least she offered no explanation why Dr. Long attacked you, isn't that true?"

"It is."

"How did Dr. Long take the combined stand against him?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"It seems to me I am perfectly clear. Did he become angry?"

"I won't venture to say. It was plainly the greatest shock to any when Wilas Southley took the attitude he did. I suppose my father gave him the greatest cause for anger."

"Mr. Southley took the most determined stand against him, insisting on an apology or else a departure from the house."

"And what right did he have to demand that any of Southley's guests be told to go? What was his explanation for this breach of hospitality? The doctor was Southley's guest, not your father's. Why did your father feel he had a right to insist, in the terms he did, that Southley expel the doctor from his home?"

"I—don't believe I know."

"Think a minute."

"Was Inez Southley over an affair of it?"

"I don't believe I care to have you question the manners of my dead father."

"It is a fair question."

"In spite of the difference in their ages, Southley and my father were old friends. They were very true with each other in all things."

"And did your father ever intimate or say something before that the doctor might want to arrange?"

"He called him a fool. I think, as well as other things."

"You say you went to bed at midnight. Where did you learn of your father's murder?"

"After the house broke—when the others came back to the house and told me."

"The sound of the struggle never awakened you?"

"No."

Pressant called on the next. I told my story, as far as it concerned the finding the body. I corroborated most of Wilas's testimony.

"How much time were you alone after the scene in the den and the time of the murder?" he asked.

"A few minutes after a midnight walk with Ernest—between a few minutes before one o'clock and midnight after."

"How did you spend your time?"

"I was endeavoring for bed."

"And then what did you do?"

"I told the of our walk through the hills. He seemed particularly interested, but also somewhat worried.

"It will the purpose of the State in these trying times." he said, "to keep the new Sheriff and will about that matter for better. You all were under a nervous strain, and the length the uncertainty of people is that condition before. It usually isn't worth the paper it's written on. I want to know if you had any time to yourself between the scene in the den and the murder."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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