



Illustrations by PAUL FREHM

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE
Dr. Long, out fishing with Alexander Pierce, a detective, tells of his projected trip to Southley Downs.

CHAPTER III

"My father and some of the servants went out—both Ernest and I were away at school. They couldn't see in the shadows—but my father says that beyond all chance of doubt some living creature bounded through the thickets in front of them.

"I would certainly say that Vilas Hayward had no nerves to trouble him."
"Just a few nights after his arrival, Vilas Hayward came in to dinner with a curious look of question on his face. He said he had seen something."

Josephine's eyes were full and intent upon mine, and the sentence died away. The silence of the vast room was the kind to be listened to in remote deserts, or in the mountain nights.

"Yes?" I urged her.
"It isn't very pleasant," she warned.

"A doctor has the right to know all the symptoms."
"He said when he came through the long hall that leads from the drawing-room something walked before him. It was in the shadows, and he could not see it plain. He asked us if we kept a great yellow and black dog, aound as large, or larger, than a Great Dane."

The elder Hayward and I were strolling on the course, and a few minutes before our host had been with us. He had gone into the house on some errand. Josephine was with Vilas on the veranda, and his chair was drawn close to hers. At first I wasn't thinking about Hayward or Ahmad either. I was remembering with what astounding fortune Vilas and Josephine always seemed to be alone together.

It was a baffling thing. I couldn't think of any conscious effort in that direction. Yet seemingly powers in the sky were always throwing them together. In one instant, all the occupants of Southley Downs would be on the veranda together; in the next, a group of us would have wandered off, and Vilas and Josephine would be alone.

I wondered how much of this curious development was engineered by Josephine herself. It wasn't a particularly pleasant thing to think about. Of course, girls in this age have a right to play all their cards to win the love of a desirable man. It was all legitimate—all fair. But sometimes it seemed to me that she would have preferred to stay with the rest of us, but that some inscrutable power, mysterious and immutable, denied it. That power was either Josephine's aged father, the elder Hayward, or both.

Hayward and I were having a good night cigar together. My wrist watch indicated a few minutes after ten. And then Hayward saw a shadow waver in the moonlight of the golf green.

It was hard to see at first. Some living creature was advancing along the slope toward us—something that seemed dark and not very tall. We stood still and waited. There was nothing else for us to do. Then all at once the creature's form seemed to change. I can't describe it except to say that upon one instant it appealed to me as being low and rather long, and on the next tall and narrow. The change was so abrupt that the creature seemed fairly to leap. Yet it easily could have been the effect of the moonlight or the shadows. It might have been simply a matter of perspective. At once we saw the advancing form that before had seemingly had the dimensions and outline of a huge dog was just the form of a man. But I had been enough in the mountains to know that the moon and the darkness and the jungles play strange tricks on fancy and vision.

It was Ahmad Das. He was coming in from one of his long walks. Hayward gasped behind me, and as I moved back the back of our hands touched.

Hayward's felt cold. Whatever had been fancy and wrong perspective before, this was the truth. His blood wasn't in his hands, as it should have been. Evidently it had all gone up to his brain, playing strange tricks with it.

Ahmad bowed to us as he passed. "Good Lord!" Hayward breathed. "I wasn't looking for that wretch." "He was just coming in from one of his walks."

"Those walks of his! Why don't Southley forbid 'em? I will if he

don't. I'll be damned if I'll have him walking through those jungles and creeping up on us this way!"
"Creeping up on us?" I echoed.
"Creeping up on us?" I echoed.
"Besides, what would a man want to walk around in those jungles for?" he went on, unheeding me. "Tell me that?" Then his voice changed—dropped tone by tone until it was almost a whisper. "And tell me this, too, Long—and tell me the truth."

"Yes."
"Did you see anything curious about—about Ahmad's posture as he came up the hill? Of course, it was probably just the moonlight—yet there was something puzzling about it."
"I'll confess I didn't recognize him at once."

"That isn't it. That isn't quite it, Long. Oh, the devil! It's nonsense, anyway."
We walked up to the veranda and halted for an instant on the steps for a last look over the marsh. There was a ring round the moon that promised rain. We listened to the night birds and the noise of the insect world, like the strum of a banjo infinitely remote, above the drear, gray wastes. Then Hayward touched my arm.

"If you'd go in, Long, and look at Ahmad's hands," he told me, "you'd find 'em with mud on 'em."
"Why, Mr. Hayward?"

"Because he was crawling up that hill—on hands and feet!"
Then his face grew into a scowl, and he entered the house.

I had a pipe by myself after he had gone. At first I thought about what he had said. But it didn't make particularly good sense. It was true that Hayward didn't like the Indian, yet this would have scarcely led to an accusation so bizarre. The glare with which Hayward's eyes followed him, when the servant walked about the rooms was little short of deadly—I had observed it too many times to be mistaken. Orders he gave were always in the most insulting tone. It seemed to me just an unjustified aversion, and the taste of the thing was open to question.

There was a tenseness, a heaviness, in the air. It was obviously the calm before one of those blinding, crashing Floridian thunder storms.

I thought I had better warn the occupants of the house. There might be windows to close, or other preparations. The library was empty; but I heard voices in the den that opened from it. And maybe it was a sign that already the atmosphere at Southley Downs had instilled its poison into my nerves that I did not remember to stop and knock. With the memory of that mysterious calm behind me, I hurried across the soft rug. The door opened softly beneath my hand.

The scene in the candle-light was like a tableau. The light was so yellow and soft, the shadows so startling black, the actors stood so motionless. With arms leaning upon the little mahogany table in the center of the den stood Vilas Hayward. There was a drunken look about him; yet I knew it was not from wine. His face was flushed, intent. With the table between them, as if for a shield, Josephine faced him.

"Don't come a step nearer," she said as the door opened.
Her face was white as the candle that burned between them, its lines were deep, and her dark eyes were smouldering. The little silken weekend bag I had seen on the train lay before her on the table, and her hand was lost in the lace of its mouth.

There were wild, primal passions at play in the room. One of them was lust; and one was the fury of murder. There is no use of mincing words. They were bared and unmasked before me.

Vilas turned to me with an oath. The girl slipped fainting to the floor. I answered him without restraint, and lifted the girl into my arms. I crossed with her to the little sofa at the side of the room where the two had evidently been sitting; then turned to meet the man. He had followed me across the room, and not six feet was between us.

"I think, Dr. Long," Vilas cried, "that you're altogether too officious. You'd better keep out of this."
I am not just sure what I answered him. But primal passions had awakened in me, too, and the words were straight. He leaped at me, and I met him with a blow.

He recoiled, then caught at the table. And his hand reached for the silken bag on the table.
I knew that the girl was screaming. The sound rose above the noise of the storm. I leaped for him, but he whirled about the table before I could reach him. He tore the pistol from the bag. Its glittered in his hand.

I had no delusions about what he would do with it. The drawn face, the smouldering eyes, told all too plainly. He was too far for me to leap at him. So I struck out the candle.

The dark fell over us. The sound of the storm obliterated his breathing. It was the truce of darkness—a truce remembered from primal days.

I don't know how long it had continued when Hayward and Southley came. Their forms suddenly appeared in the open door; and each of them carried candles. Vilas still held the pistol; and it gleamed in the candlelight. "Vilas!" his father called. "Put down that thing!"

He hastened about the table, and

my aged host leaped in front of me. I tried to push him away; and his answer was a laugh—one grim syllable of laughter, ironical.

"He won't kill me," he said. "I'm the goose—that lays the golden eggs. He won't kill me."

Vilas screamed at us. The murder-madness was on him yet. "He struck me," he cried. "The devil struck me. He's got to apologize. He found me with Josephine, and he struck me as if I were a dog."

His father took the pistol from his hands, and put it in his pocket. Southley sighed a little, and placed his candle on the table. The girl rose up behind us, and I was amazed at her self-control. It had all come back.

"He struck me," Vilas said again and again. "What are you going to do about it, Southley? You've got just ten minutes to turn him out of this house—or else I'll go instead."

"Let's forget it—" the old man answered with utter weariness. "Forget nothing, Southley!" he exclaimed. "We've got to get to the bottom of this. If my son was struck, he's got to have satisfaction. I lived long enough on the continent to know that, and so has he. And so have you. It isn't the way it's done over there. If a man's struck the other pays."

"Your son is sufficiently able to take care of himself, I hope," I suggested.
"Let's forget it," the old man answered with utter weariness.

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too. And if you will have my bag brought to me, I will go at once."

The girl clasped her father's hands. A world of appeal was in her dark eyes.

"He can't go in this dark storm," she told him. "The road along the levee isn't safe. Tell him he can't go till the storm is over."

The elder Hayward chortled from beyond the table. "A good wetting might teach him manners," he suggested. "What about it, Southley?"

The tone was insistent, and perhaps it had a scornful quality, too. "Of course, he can't go until the rain is done. I won't send out my cars on a night like this."

The girl whirled to me. Appeal was all over her. "You won't go till tomorrow?" she pleaded. "Tell me, doctor. You won't go till the storm's over?"

"I can't very well, if your father won't let the cars go out." I tried to speak bitterly; but even after her betrayal, the very look of her softened eyes.

"Heavens, what a night!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you've heard about—about the tiger?"

"Of course, I know the legend. Anything new?"

"Hasn't old Hayward told you? He and my father have been out talking to the servants, just a little while ago. He's quite an old beast, you know. Well, the colored people say he is walking again tonight."

"Nice little thing to think about as I drop to sleep," I suggested. "Isn't it? We have an old gardener that we call Mose. Mose was in town today, and he came back riding a horse about eleven o'clock. Rather it was somewhat before eleven, because you and the older Hayward were out on the golf green for your late evening's walk."

"Go on," I urged. "Mose was riding home. I suppose he saw the ghost-tiger floating through the air, or riding a broomstick—"

"Nothing quite so bizarre as that, I'm sorry to say. Maybe I talk lightly, but I'm feeling rather serious, Long. If our tiger had done nothing except ride a broom, or fly, or something, it would have been a good legend to tell our children—and toast to in good vintage. But unfortunately—our tiger took other ways of manifesting himself. All he did was frighten Mose's horse—and leave his track in the earth."

The man spoke wholly without emotion. He smiled a little, too—a rather wan, hopeless smile that was singularly upsetting to the spirit.

"His track!" I echoed. "You don't mean that?"

"He saw a great yellow and black cat—almost as large as a pony. But that isn't quite all. Mose kept his head. He told himself it was a delusion, just as you and I have told ourselves many times. So he controlled his horse; then looked down at the moonlit road. It was covered with dust, and he could see very plainly. And he saw—just what I told you."

I spoke very quietly. "Tracks?" I asked as big as his two hands, clear across the road. He wanted to take father and the Haywards and I down to see them. I think all of us except father, who is rather old for such excursions, were going—but something has evidently diverted them. They were to meet me here."

"I suppose the rain has spoiled them now."

"Weakened them, anyway. Of course, the colored people are terrified. The night the tiger first went wild was just on such a night as this—a middle of the storm. They say on such nights as these—he likes to come back into the warm, dry house, and play in the curtains.

In a few minutes more we were

out where the rain beat upon us. The road was already washed with water. It didn't seem possible that if there had really been mysterious tracks in the dust, that they could have endured the storm.
"I've got some fine plans for tomorrow—if it just clears up," the youth told me joyously as we tramped up the road. I think he was trying to divert his mind, as well as mine, from the business in hand.

"I'm sorry, Ernest," I told him. "I'm going home tomorrow." He stopped in his tracks, and I urged him on.

"Going home? Good Lord, why? I thought you'd stay to see us through. Of course, I can't blame you—"

"I've got to make a living," I told him lightly. "It's time I went to work."

"But you were going to stay a full week—and you promised six last night that you would make it ten days or two weeks?"

"Did she tell you that?"

"Tell me? I should say she did. She danced a highland fling." It didn't make the scene of the hour before any more pleasant to remember. She had seemed glad when I told her I had postponed my departure. And even now Ernest's words filled me with a strange soaring gladness that I tried to fight off. She had proved the hour before how much she really cared. She belonged to Vilas, not me, in spite of the fact that she had been ready to kill him when I opened the door of the den. I remembered every smile—each had been an epoch—every softness in her dark eyes, every tremor of her lips.

We tramped through the down-pour, and soon we came to the point that the negro had described. Then we began to search about with the lanterns. It must have made a strange picture—the distant lighting, the glowing lanterns, our own tall figures in the yellow raincoats. The great house was dark behind us.

(Continued next week.)

NOTICE TO PROPERTY OWNERS.
Property owners of Heppner are hereby notified to clear away all grass and weeds from buildings on their premises, that may act as a fire hazard during the dry season. Prompt compliance will obviate further action and help safeguard the city.
By order of the Common Council.
E. G. NOBLE, Mayor.

NOTICE OF ESTRAY.
I have at my place one brown mare, about seven years of age, branded circle T and weighing about 1350 pounds. Owner may have said animal upon calling at my place and paying for this advertisement. O. G. HAGUEWOOD, Ione, Ore. 10-12.
FOR SALE—Pair Chippewa high top shoes; heavy; size 7. Inquire this office. 11tf.

Advertisement for Brunswick Portable GORDON'S vacuum cleaners. Text: 'Vacationland's greatest entertainer', 'Brunswick Portable', 'See It - Hear It - Here!', 'GORDON'S', 'Price Complete \$27.50 Convenient terms'.

Large advertisement for Ford Motor Company. Text: 'Years of Service in Model T Fords', 'Expenditure of few dollars may enable you to get thousands of miles from your old car', 'THE Model T Ford is still a great car. It led the motor industry for twenty years and it is used today by more people than any other automobile.', 'Ford MOTOR COMPANY Detroit, Michigan'.

Advertisement for Heppner Bank. Text: 'Pioneers Grangers Chautauquans Welcome', 'Farmers & Stockgrowers National Heppner Bank Oregon'.