



THE TIGER TRAIL

by Edison Marshall

Illustrations by PAUL FREHM

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

Dr. Long is visiting Southley Downs to which he is conducted by Ahmad Das, an Oriental. There he meets Mr. Southley, whom a detective friend, Alexander Pierce, had told him to watch, and his son Ernest Southley, Mr. Hayward and his son Vilas, and then Josephine Southley, whom he had seen faint 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. Now read on—

"It's no use," I said. "The water would have washed them all out." We separated and looked up and down. And finally I turned to call Ernest back to the house. He was bent low, holding his lantern close to the mud.

"What is it?" I asked. "Come here," he ordered me. He stood up as I came close and held the lantern before him. It shone on his white, set face.

"I've found it," he told me simply. At once it seemed to me that Ernest had left his boyhood far behind him, and was a man. The voice was mature, steady, perfectly calm. He spoke so low I had to strain to listen.

It wasn't the sort of tone that I had expected. I had supposed that if we were able to find the tracks they would have cleared up the mystery in a perfectly satisfactory manner; and we would have a good joke to tell when we came to Southley Downs. Only, of course, Ernest would tell it, not I. My hours of joking in the old manor house were done. Instead of triumph, his tone hinted that cold futility with which men tell of their worst personal tragedies.

"The track, Ernest?" I asked. "The rains have washed out—all but one. This one is on a high place in the road, and it is almost gone, too. But you can't mistake it."

I lowered my light to see, but he caught my arm. "I guess not, Long," he said quietly.

"Why not?" "You really don't want to see it. It wouldn't do you any good. It would just give you unpleasant memories to carry away with you—and besides, it can't be true. It's not there, Long."

"Let me see." "No use, doctor." "Get out of the way, and let me see it," I ordered.

But instead he suddenly leaped at a shadow in the muddy sand. He dug for an instant with his feet, and splashed the water. And when I looked again the track had been hopelessly obliterated.

"Little fool!" I told him. "It wasn't there, Long," he answered in a far-away voice. "It was some trick of the rain—or a mirage. It wasn't possible that it could be there."

"It doesn't help—to lie."

It must have been almost one o'clock when I got to my room. There were plenty of things to think about. One was that on the morning I would say good-by to Southley Downs. The meeting of the girl in the sleeping car had come to nothing after all.

I thought about Alexander Pierce, and all that he had told me. I had been at Southley Downs almost a week, and its problems had grown more complex, rather than simplified. Still I didn't know why the man whom Alexander called Roderick had offered the reward for trace of the elder Southley. I couldn't explain why my host had gone for years under an assumed name, or had adopted an alias now. The relation of the Haywards with the Southleys, the creeping figure on the golf green, the track in the muddy road, still remained as mysterious as ever.

I thought about some stealing figure that was in the corridor just outside my door.

How I knew he was there is a mystery still. I certainly could not have heard him above the thunder of the rain. Perhaps it was the jar of his footsteps on the floor, or maybe a sixth sense that sometimes warns a man he is being shadowed. It seemed to me that he was coming stealthily down the hall—and he had halted just outside my door.

Then I heard a voice. It is a strange thing that I didn't recognize it at first. My ears are usually sharp for such things. The only possible explanation is that the voice was somewhat changed.

"Dr. Long?" someone called softly. "Yes?"

I unlocked my door. Ernest stood in the shadow of the corridor. He carried a candle. He came in very quietly and closed the door behind him. He put his candle on the table. It is strange how the mind works. My first observation was the peculiar resemblance to his sister that I saw in his eyes. They were dark, just like hers. He sat down on the edge of the bed. I saw that he was also partly undressed.

"Have you got a pistol?" he asked. "Yes. It is in my bag."

"I wish you'd get it, doctor. I'm not sure—but that we'll need it." I opened my bag without question and drew out my automatic.

"Can you shoot with the thing?" he asked. "Fairly well."

"Then you'd better keep it. I don't think I could hit the side of a barn! We might need cool shooting. Long, we've got a hunt on our hands tonight!"

I looked at him as coolly as I could. "What have we got to hunt?" "That I don't know, except that it's the thing that left the track. It's in the house."

"How do you know?" "How do I know? My dear old boy, I'd love to say I didn't know, but unfortunately I do. It has got beyond the legend stage. If our lighting system was only in order! You can't see anything with these candles—and yet I saw plenty. Are you ready?"

"Yes." He crept along the soft rugs, and our candle guided us. It gave such an ineffective light. Still the rain thundered, and he had to put his lips close to my ear to make me hear him. Then I felt, rather than heard.

We stopped on a little landing in the stairway. "We won't have long to wait," he said.

"But why wait at all? Why not chase it down?" "Because chasing don't work. It knows how to hide. Behind the curtains, and every place else. We've got to watch his trail."

He blew out the candle. The only light that remained was a single candle on a little table at the base of the stairs. We stood in darkness.

"You're the only one I could trust," he told me. "My father laughs at the stories, and the Haywards are frightened almost to death."

We waited a long time. There was a row of windows at the end of the long room, dimly lighted from the distant lightning. The flashes were almost continuous, and the flickering light was gray and strange through the rain. It was just a dim, weird radiance, and in no way alleviated the shadows of the room. The clock struck in the hall below us, so softly we could hardly hear.

"Let's go to bed," I whispered. "Evidently the walk is done."

"Be patient, old man." Then he uttered the strangest little sigh. "Look, Long. It isn't done, after all."

His voice dropped a note; that was its only change. I knew he was pointing toward the row of windows at the opposite end of the hall. Three of them glowed dimly from the flickering lightning in the far reaches of the sky, rectangular in shape as they should be. The upper part of the fourth was lighted too, but the lower part was wholly obscured by something that stood in front. It was something low and long that stood perhaps three feet high. Something was crossing at the end of the hall, between us and the windows.

The shadow slowly changed in shape. It made an arc over the lower part of the same window we had seen before—a shape as of a monstrous flank of an animal. And the adjoining window was partly obscured now. Whatever moved at the end of the hall was creeping slowly past the windows, and its body was long enough that it left dark umbrages against two of the lighted panes.

There was no chance for a mistake. My senses were perfectly alert. It was not a delusion or an effect of shadow. Both of us kept our self-control and were rather surprisingly calm.

"Can you hit at that range?" Ernest whispered in my ear. "I can, but I don't dare. I can't shoot at a shadow, Ernest. Too great a chance for accidents."

"Then we'll stalk it. It doesn't pay to wait any more, Long. Anything is better than this suspense."

We stepped out of our hiding place and crept down the hall. And four of the windows were clear in outline now. Our quarry had headed on, evidently into the corridor that ran at right angles to the main hall.

But Ernest spoiled our chances of stalking the creature in the hall. We got to the windows and made the turn. Both of us knew, as well as we knew that the rain was clattering on the roof, that the creature we hunted was close in front of us. We were trying to walk with utter silence, Ernest a pace or two in front. He forgot about a little step at the turn in the corridor.

He tripped, and even above the roar of the rain the sound was distinct. The floor shook—and it seemed to me that I heard the impact of cushioned feet as our quarry leaped. But I can't be sure of that. The imagination is known to play tricks. Perhaps there was a faint rattle and stir.

"Quick!" my companion breathed. "It will escape us!"

We started running down the hall. It was a tremendously long corridor, stretching almost the breadth of the great house; and it seemed folly to try to overtake those swift feet. And completely at the end Hayward's door suddenly flung open.

Both of us knew in a single instant that we would get a sight of the thing as it crossed the open doorway. Hayward had many candles in his room, and some of their light flung out into the hall. But there was hardly time to receive the thought, much less to act. There was no time, whatever to raise a pistol. Our quarry was a long way in front of us; and the door was scarcely wide open before it passed

in front. Of course, it was too far to see plainly. But I had no more delusions about its reality. The disease that afflicted the old manor house was surely drawing to its crisis.

The creature we saw fitted with disturbing consistency into the old legend of the mansion. The form was low and long, and although the light was dim its general color was perfectly visible to both of us. It was a rich, beautiful yellow, striped with black. There were no extenuating circumstances. Both of us saw it—as plain as we saw the open doorway. The posture was exactly that of a great cat creeping, with belly low hung, upon its prey.

Neither of us stopped. I don't think either of us cried out. We simply raced on up the hall. Even then there might have been a chance of overtaking the creature if it had not been for Hayward's interference. He flung out of the door as we went past and seized me by the shoulders.

"Good God! Did you see it?" he cried. "Didn't you see, man? It went past my door!"

The candle light was on his face; and the look was one not quickly forgotten. His ruddy color was quite gone, and his eyes were changed, too. He clutched at us with great, cold, frenzied hands.

But we shook loose and hurried on down the corridor. There were unoccupied rooms along it, many opening from rear doors into other corridors, and passages to the rear stairs and to the third floor. A window opened to a little balcony at the end. We looked about and whispered to each other, and then went back for candles. We held them in high and peered in the corners and among the curtains. The elder Hayward kept close behind us, uttering low, inarticulate sentences not particularly worth listening to.

He had forgotten our scene in the den a few hours before. His present emotion left no room for remembered anger. It looked as if he were trying to keep close to me.

"Did you see it—when it passed my door?" he was crying. "You know what it was—just as I know, too. There's no use pretending any more. It was there, and I saw it, and so did you. And I'll leave this house tomorrow!"

He seemed to be talking to himself rather than to us. "We can keep the arrangements we've got, and Vilas can tend to 'em. I'll go tomorrow for good and all! And Vilas can stay with his wench if he likes."

Ernest stopped beside him. "We will remember that word—at a better time," he promised. Then he whirled to me. "The thing's got away—but this is one thing more I want to do before I go to bed. I want to look in Ahmad Das's room—just to see if he's in bed and asleep, as he ought to be."

So we took the candle and went on back into the main hall. Then we mounted a flight of stairs. At a little room, clear at the end of the corridor, we stopped to knock.

No answer came, so we knocked again. Then we pushed open the door. Ahmad Das was not in his room.

His bed had not been slept in. "Does it mean anything to you?" Ernest asked me.

"Nothing whatever—any more than the rest of this devilish mystery means. Do you suspect—that Ahmad Das is perpetrating something?"

"I suspect nothing. I only want you to recall a few little points that will undoubtedly be a great source of pleasure to you." He spoke with a grim humor. "You must have heard stories—every man has—of men shooting at hyenas in Africa, wounding them, tracing them to the huts of natives, and then finding—not a hyena—but a black man, dying, with a bullet in him."

"I've heard the stories, and they don't make good sense."

"And maybe you haven't heard of the theory of the transmigration of souls?"

"Every man of education has heard it," I replied.

"If you have, just remember these little points. One of them is that the transmigration of souls—that the soul of an animal can live again in the body of a man—is a rather current belief in India. Ahmad Das is of Hindu blood. And he was born at the same hour that my father's tiger was killed."

He laughed grimly, and gave me a cigarette. Then we walked out into the hall.

Ernest and I found the elder Hayward in the library. He stood shivering before the faint coals that had been the fire. All of us leaped when the front door opened.

It was Southley, and he carried a lantern. His clothes were simply drenched. He wore no hat, and his white hair was stringing about his worn face, and the water poured from him. His wet face glistened in the candle-light.

"What's this?" he asked. "Just a little midnight session," his son answered. "Tell us first why you went out in the rain, with no coat?"

(Continued next week.)

Hints for the Home by Nancy Hart

No More Gas In Stomach and Bowels

Soon the roads will be dotted with cars bearing friends and neighbors from north, south, east and west of you—all eager to renew acquaintance after winter's stay-at-home days.

And how gladly you'll welcome them—IF you know your pantry shelf is ready for emergencies. One needs so little to be prepared for unexpected guests—yet this little is so often neglected!

For a hurried luncheon or tea, what could be nicer than salmon or tuna fish served with thick golden mayonnaise; potatoes fried slowly in butter or margarine, so they are crisp and brown; assorted pickles and preserves arranged attractively in a condiment dish—and hot biscuits? These are homely foods, and inexpensive. But fish and dressing, pickles and preserves must be on the shelf—if they are to come to your rescue, pronto!

Since half the charm of hospitality lies in its seeming to be no trouble at all, let's remember these tricks of preparedness that help so much when friends "just drop in."

Date and Nut Spread

For luncheon or tea, use this spread on slices of buttered white or graham bread. With these open sandwiches, serve others of pimiento cheese (this may be bought in jars). And cut your bread in fancy shapes, without crusts.

1/4 cup dates, chopped; 1/4 cup chopped nuts, 4 tablespoons sweetened condensed milk, 2 teaspoons lemon juice. Beat milk and lemon juice together with a fork until thick. Add dates and nuts and mix well.

Easy Way to Preserve Cherries

Fill glass jars with sound, clean cherries; cover with syrup made of one pound sugar (beet or cane) and one quart water. Close jars; immerse in boiling water, allowing one inch of water over tops. Simmer slowly 15 minutes. Remove, let stand 15 minutes, and set in cool place.

Measuring Flour for Cakes

In baking cakes, it makes a difference whether flour is measured before or after sifting. So always examine recipes carefully, noting directions in this respect. Newer re-

ceipts invariably specify the use of prepared cake flour sifted once before measuring, then sifted as many additional times as the recipe directs. This makes lighter fluffier cakes.

Tonic for Asparagus Beds Salt strewn generously over asparagus beds will kill the weeds and serve as a fertilizer.

Do Your Omelets Fall? One way to be certain of success with omelets is to add a tiny bit of baking powder to the eggs when whipping them.

BECHDOLT HONOR STURENT.

Oregon State Agricultural College, Corvallis, June 2.—Adrian Bechdolt of Hardman, who received his degree in commerce last Monday, has been selected as one of the 48 honor graduates, his average being 92. Students, to be eligible for honors, must maintain a scholastic average of 90 or above for the four years in college and must qualify as to character, personality and leadership. As not more than 10 per cent of the graduating class or 10 per cent of any one school may be designated as honor graduates, the group chosen includes the upper 10 per cent scholastically of the 500 students graduating.

WANTED—Twenty-five ladies at 10:30 A. M., Saturday, June 9, to take advantage of a most unusual value in a folding table finished in two colors. Just the kind of a table you need so often for camp or at home. The number is limited. The first to arrive in line will get this, our Saturday extra special. This bargain will be on display, but none sold before the appointed time. CASE FURNITURE CO.

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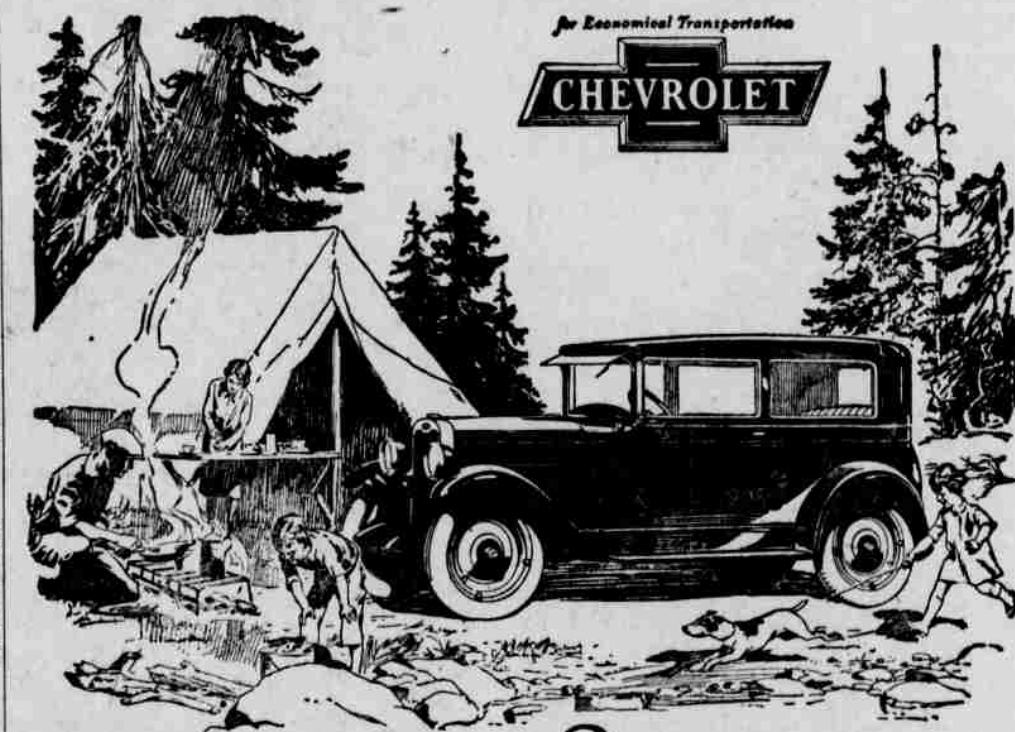
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