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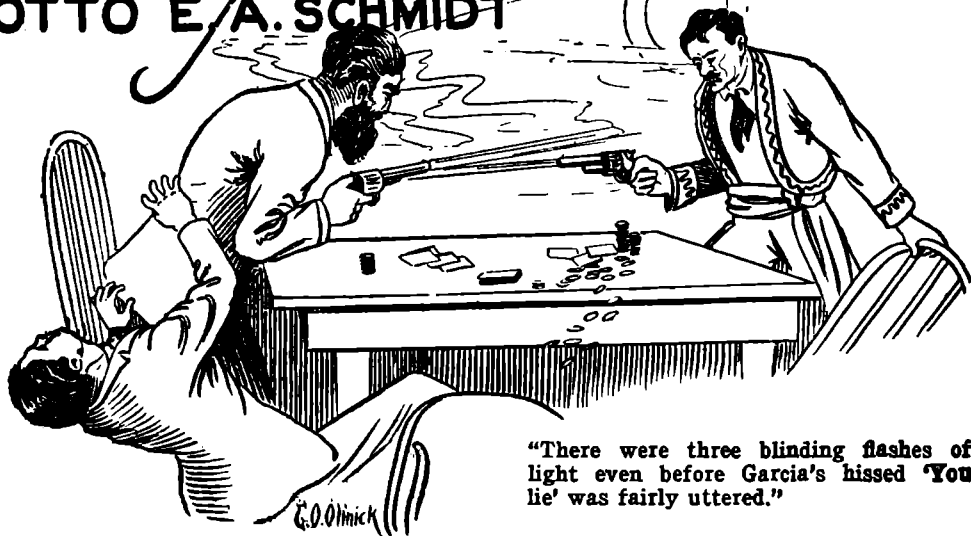
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SHADOWS CAST BEHIND

by
OTTO E. A. SCHMIDT



"There were three blinding flashes of light even before Garcia's hissed 'You lie' was fairly uttered."

HUMDRUM, indeed, must have been the existence of that man who, having reached middle age, can look back on no episode or occurrence in his past life that was either uncanny, outré, or inexplicable by the ordinary laws of physics. When a man has been blessed, or otherwise, by being the chief actor in such incidents, he has food for speculation for the rest of his natural life, and perhaps beyond. Let skeptics scoff—who can blame them, not having taken part in the happenings themselves?—but I, having seen, sensed and felt what I have find it impossible to "laugh off."

It was back in the 80's, in the early days of my novitiate as a United States customs guard, that I was assigned the offshore detail on the passenger steamship *Glory of the West* as she lay tied up at the Broadway dock in San Francisco one winter's night. Well do I remember it.

To the uninitiated I may explain

that the duty of the offshore or deck detail of the customs guarding force consists in preventing the smuggling of goods by boat or otherwise off the vessel by way of the offshore or waterward side.

Brrr, what a disagreeable night! Despite my heavy overcoat and muffler, I shivered. A fine drizzle, driven by a cold, gusty wind, seemed to penetrate to my very marrow as I tramped up and down the deck with feet heavy and chill as two chunks of ice.

I heard quick footsteps approaching—ah, the lieutenant of the watch.

"Hello," said a cheery voice.

"Hello, lieutenant," I returned.

"How's everything?" he asked, gazing round and taking in the general surroundings.

"Oh, everything's all right," I replied, "at least as right as it can be when you're cold and wet and miserable. This job of guarding-officer is no snap. If every night

were like this one I'd chuck it up and go to heaving coal."

"It's a pretty nasty night, that's a fact," said Wood, sympathetically, "especially for the offshore detail. But this is only one night. Cheer up, Stallard, there'll be other nights, fine nights that you'll enjoy and that'll make you feel glad to be one of Uncle Sam's boys. You'd better go below," he continued, "and have the ship's watchman fix you up a cup of coffee. I'll relieve you for a few minutes."

A fine chap, that John Wood, a man with a heart freighted deep with sympathy and thoughtfulness for his fellow-man. No wonder he had the love and respect of the whole watch.

I hastened down to the deck below by way of the port gangplank and soon was enjoying the warmth and cheer of the snug little galley. Presently I rejoined the lieutenant, feeling greatly invigorated and refreshed. After a few more words he left me to resume my solitary vigil.

The wind hummed in the rigging and the rain swished down on the slippery deck glistening in the glow of the distant dock-lights. The winches alternately hissed and purred over the main hatch, like great cats crouched in the shadow of the forward cabins waiting for their prey. I tarried often before them, for their slight warmth was grateful; it was good to clasp the steam pipes and thaw out the griping cold from my numbed fingers.

Seven bells, half-past 3, chimed from some "lime juicer" anchored near—four long hours before my relief would start from the distant mail dock at the other end of San Francisco's waterfront! I thought ruefully of my warm bed at home. Why the devil should there be such a thing as night work? Why couldn't everybody sleep at night like white folks, as the good Lord intended?

I WALKED aft and looked over the dreary expanse of the bay, overhung with the misty curtains of the night. The faint light on Yerba Buena Island vaguely blinked a sleepy warning to the mariner venturesome enough to risk his craft in the jaws of the storm, and ever and anon the hoarse murmur of the fog signal on Alcatraz boomed across the heaving space like a deep sonorous snore.

I stood close by the door of the smoking saloon. It was unlocked, I knew, for I had tried it before. I turned the handle and peered into the gloom within. A soft, delicious warmth enfolded me, for it was the sailing day of the *Glory of the West* and her steam pipes were full. I stepped inside and sat down on the end of the richly upholstered settee that ran along the wall framing the doorway, leaving the door slightly open so that I could see almost the whole length of the deck forward and a wide stretch of waters alongside. Surely, I thought, from this point I should be able to detect and prevent any attempt at smuggling overboard; at least, nothing could be pulled off in the short time it would take to thaw some of the chill out of my bones. But would I be performing my strict duty?

While still debating this conflict between desire and duty, I heard a light step ascending the heavily carpeted stairs leading from the dining saloon. I turned and beheld a mess-boy lighting the two lamps in the smoking room in which I sat. I was still wondering at this proceeding, which was unusual at this time of the morning, when I heard voices and more footsteps. Three men came up from below.

I was fairly caught, and, though ashamed to be found in this equivocal position, pride would not permit me to seem to run away; so I assumed a look of indifference and kept my seat.

I wondered how it happened that passengers were already on board, for, although the vessel was to sail that day, it was not customary to allow them to come aboard so long before the sailing hour. I judged that they were passengers because they did not look like seafaring men. They wore no uniforms, nor any of the habiliments of seamen.

One of them said something I did not catch to the messboy, who nodded and softly retired below. No one noticed me, nor, indeed, even seemed aware of my presence.

Of the last comers one was a big, broad-shouldered man, with ruddy, bearded face and enormous hands; the second, small and dark-skinned with glistening black eyes and long mustachios; while the third was tall and slender, blond and smooth-shaven—evidently an Englishman from his speech and appearance.

The big man offered a cigar to each of his companions, and they all seated themselves at the starboard table near the opposite wall; the big man to the right, the dark man to the left, and the Englishman facing me where I sat on my settee shrinking against the wall near the door.

"Well, Mottingly," began the big man in a deep, booming voice which he tried to make low and subdued, "I hope that bite we've just had will change our luck. It's a new one on me. I generally sit through a game till I've had enough. A gambler would think it unlucky; but we ain't superstitious, are we? Anyhow, we can't have no worse luck than we been having. Garcia," turning to the dark man, "what're you goin' t'do with all your winnings? Lemme sell you a mine. Put your money back in the groun' where it come from, an' let her grow." He laughed; but the Englishman only frowned—the look on his face was stern, the muscles tensely drawn.

The man addressed as Garcia smiled, showing a set of very white teeth. Instinctively I disliked him.

"What, me?" he said, with a shrug. "Oh, I no can count my weenings till she be hatch; ha, ha, ha," he laughed at his own attempted witticism.

The big man laughed back. "Don't you try to hatch nothin' now, Garcia, 'cause you ain't no farmer."

Their pleasantry was here interrupted by the return of the messboy with a tray containing a bottle, three glasses and two packs of cards, which he set upon the table. The Englishman seized the bottle and poured a drink for each. I could see his hand tremble slightly as he drank. A gleam came into his eyes as he cried: "Now for our revenge, eh, Thompson? Let us be at it."

He shuffled a pack of cards and they cut for the deal. The big man dealt and I saw that the game was to be poker. No chips were used, only the hard coin, with which all appeared to be plentifully supplied.

They played steadily for a half-hour or more, the big man losing slightly, for he played very cautiously, the Englishman losing heavily; while the bright, yellow gold rose in ever-growing, glittering piles at Garcia's right hand.

The strained look in the Englishman's eyes grew more tense, the frown on his brow deeper. He drank often, and I could see that he was gradually losing his nerve.

At last the big man said: "Say, Mott, I think we've had enough, let's quit."

"No," exclaimed Mottingly testily, "you drop out if you want to. Luck is bound to turn for me sometime. Damme, I'll make it or break the blasted bank!"

"Verry well, *Señor*," spoke Garcia, yawning, "eef you weesh we queet, I queet. I am the so tire', I sleepy."

"No," said Thompson quietly, with a sharp glance at the last speaker, "I'll stay in."

THE game went on again, but much more silently, with an undercurrent of something sinister, some force not apparent on the surface of play and conversation.

I was becoming aware of a feeling I could not explain. A message—I could not yet comprehend what—was being telegraphed to me by my subconscious mind. Once, I thought—but no, I must be mistaken, else the others would have noticed it. Yes, there it was again. I was sure I could not be wrong this time. I was indignant, shocked. In my excitement I had almost risen to my feet and was pointing to Garcia, the words ready to shout on my tongue, when something in the Englishman's attitude held me spellbound. The blue tinge had faded from his face, it was now white as snow; his jaws were set, the lines deep-drawn, while the flesh seemed to have receded from the bones of his cheeks. But he was cool, ah, so cool! His hands were steady as a rock as he laid down his cards. So, then, someone else had seen it, too! His actions and appearance seemed silently to call a halt in the play. All waited for him to proceed. It was his move!

He coolly struck a match and lighted a fresh cigar. "I say, Garcia," he commenced, "I have no more money with me, you've cleaned me out. But here's the deed to the Lone Pine mine that I just paid Mr. Thompson \$10,000 for. I'll stake the mine against your pile there and what you won from us last night, which ought to make it about even, as near as I can figure it——"

"Hell, no!" broke in Thompson; "don't do it, Mottingly. Let the stuff go, you can't buck against such a streak of bad luck as you've uncovered. But the mine is a good one and

will pay it all back to you in a short time."

Mottingly raised his hand as if to command silence.

Garcia played thoughtfully with a stack of coins, letting them fall to the table with a rippling sound. "Ah," he observed softly, "I deed not think Meester Motting-a-ly she shall need one—ha—nurse."

Thompson flushed redly. Mottingly's jaw set more firmly, but he went on evenly, as though there had been no interruption: "Provided," he spoke slowly and distinctly, almost hissing, "provided Mr. Thompson deals the cards——"

"What-a for that?" cried Garcia quickly, his teeth showing in an evil snarl, his eyes flashing luridly from the ghastly greenish yellow of his face.

All three were leaning forward in a crouching attitude and were, unconsciously, slowly rising. The light of understanding had broken on the face of Thompson, now livid with fury.

"Otherwise," went on the tense, slow, almost monotonous voice of Mottingly, "otherwise you will refund to him and to me every cent you have won from us."

There was an instant's pause. The situation was tense. The adversaries—now such in earnest—were keenly eyeing one another, each studying the situation and calculating chances. The sword of fate hung by a hair.

Garcia spoke coolly now, almost contemptuously; but there was a furtive, hunted look in the eyes that glanced rapidly from one to the other of his opponents and over and beside and beyond them. "For why you ask-a that, Meester Motting-a-ly, you spiek verry—ha—strange—what-a for shall I to geeve to you the money I have win?"

They were now all on their feet.

"Because," thundered Mottingly, raking the spreading pile of gold to-

ward himself with one hand and making a quick backward movement with the other, "you've been dealing from the bottom of the pack. You're a damned cheat! I saw——"

There were three blinding flashes of light even before Garcia's hissed "You lie" was fairly uttered, followed by a crash.

"HELLO," said a voice, "ain't you afraid of the ghosts?"

The ship's watchman was holding a lantern up to my face with one hand, while the other was on the handle of the door, which evidently had just banked shut.

"What ghosts?" I gasped.

"Why, the ghosts of three men that killed one another over a game of cards in here about twenty years ago. I heard it from the mate that was on her at the time."

"Were they all killed?" I inquired regretfully.

"Yep, there was an Englishman, an American and a Chileno. There were two empty shells in the Chileno's gun an' one in the American's. The Englisher didn't fire a shot—wasn't quick enough on the draw, I guess. That Chileno was a bad one. Professional gambler. Had six notches on his gun already. They say their ghosts come back every once in a while, so you wanta look out for 'em."

"Say," I said, quite irrelevantly, "are there any passengers aboard?"

He gave me a strange, inquiring look as he answered, "No, not yet. Nobody aboard 'cept me an' you an' some o' the crew. Why?"

"Phew," I said, without answering his question, "it's close in here. Guess I'll go out and get some fresh air."

How grateful the damp coolness of the outside felt! I looked at my watch; it showed 3:45. Only five minutes since I had consulted it last! I could not credit it. I held it to my

ear—yes, it was still running. I seemed to have spent hours in that accursed smoking saloon, and yet in reality it had been only five minutes.

The rest of that interminable watch I passed in deep thought, wondering, speculating, doubting. Up and down, up and down the melting deck I tramped, well forward, though; not venturing abaft the main saloon amidships. I shivered, but not from the cold alone.

I TOLD no one of my adventures, but made cautious and veiled inquiries at the steamship offices. The personnel of the company, naturally, had undergone many changes in the last twenty years and I could find no one who remembered any tragedy connected with the *Glory of the West*.

At last I bethought me of that treasury of pioneer Californian history, *The Daily Alta-California*, one of the first San Francisco newspapers. I spent many of my spare hours poring over its back files and eventually my industry was rewarded by the finding of an account of the death of three men, passengers on the American steamship *Glory of the West*, in a gambling row substantially as related by the ship's watchman.

In the cases of the American and the Chilean the coroner's jury had rendered a verdict of death by gunshot wounds each at the hands of the other. In the case of the Englishman, however, they had allowed that grim and perverted sense of humor, common in those days, even touching the most sacred and solemn subjects, to move them to bring in a verdict "that the deceased had come to his death by suicide consequent on paralysis of the dexter digits." The victim proved to be a remittance man, the second son of Lord C——, and the remains were turned over to the British consul.

I was so profoundly impressed that I determined to follow the matter up in an effort to learn just how accurate the details of my dream, or vision, might prove.

By inquiring at the consulate I learned that the father of the murdered Mottingly was still alive. Thereupon I addressed a long and carefully worded letter to Lord C—— in which I related my vision in detail, and added a copy of the newspaper account of the tragedy and of the coroner's distorted findings. I wound up my recital with a request for a photograph of his deceased son to identify and verify my dream picture.

So long a time passed that I had begun to believe my communication had gone astray when I received a reply as follows:

London, Engl. C. B.
March 2d, 188—.

John D. Stallard, Esq.,
Ahlborn House,
San Francisco, California, U. S. A.

Honoured Sir:

In behalf of my client, Lord C——, let me premise with a statement of his gratitude and appreciation of the great service you have rendered him and his family at such pains and labour to yourself.

Some twenty years ago the body of the unfortunate young man, the second son of his Lordship, arrived here accompanied by a copy of the death certificate containing a statement of the verdict of the coroner's jury as to the cause of death.

I may here state, *en passant*, that father and son had parted in anger several years previously after a stormy interview over the subject of the young man's drinking and gambling habits. His Lordship thereupon disowned him, denied him the use of the family residences, and dismissed him with a lump sum and the injunction never again to enter his presence until he had proven his manhood.

But, unfortunately, his failings had too strong a hold on him to be shaken off here, surrounded by his old associates, and he emigrated to the States, where he drifted about until his means were exhausted. His father turned a deaf ear to his appeals for further assistance but Lady C——, his mother, kept him liberally supplied with

funds, as I happen to know, it being my province to attend to the remittances.

These circumstances, together with strong religious scruples and his stern, judicial temperament as a magistrate of the Queen's bench, caused his Lordship to refuse permission to place the body in the family vault. (No doubt you are aware that an ancient law of England, now obsolete, required that a suicide should be buried at a crossroads with a stake driven through his middle.)

The remains, perforce, were consigned to unconsecrated ground. From that time forward the suite in the C—— mansion formerly occupied by the deceased was, according to the servants, haunted by the spirit of the young master wailing and crying to be gathered to his ancestors.

Your experience, while it would be inadmissible in court as legal testimony, in conjunction with your interpretation and explanation of the grotesque and frivolous verdict of the coroner's jury and the mute evidence of the two guns, so strongly impressed his Lordship and the lay and ecclesiastical authorities that the body has been exhumed and placed in the family crypt with appropriate ceremonies.

His Lordship was also greatly moved by your graphic description of his son's manly stand in the last act of his life drama.

It may interest you to know that since the disinterment and re-burial the servants assert all ghostly manifestations by the young man's alleged spirit have ceased.

I have written you, by his Lordship's direction, thus fully and frankly in consideration of your kind and conscientious services which entitle you to every confidence.

I am posting, under separate cover, a photograph of young Mottingly, and if it be not too great a further trespass on your time and patience my client would greatly appreciate a report from you as to how it compares with the picturization of his son that appeared to you in your vision.

Assuring you again of his Lordship's deep appreciation and cordial acknowledgement of your distinguished favour, I am, with the highest personal respect,

Your most obedient servant,
JOHN N. D. ——, Q. C.

I opened the packet containing the photograph with mingled emotions, but surprize was not one of them when I beheld in the shadowy likeness an exact replica of the face of the man who had appeared in my vision as young Mottingly.