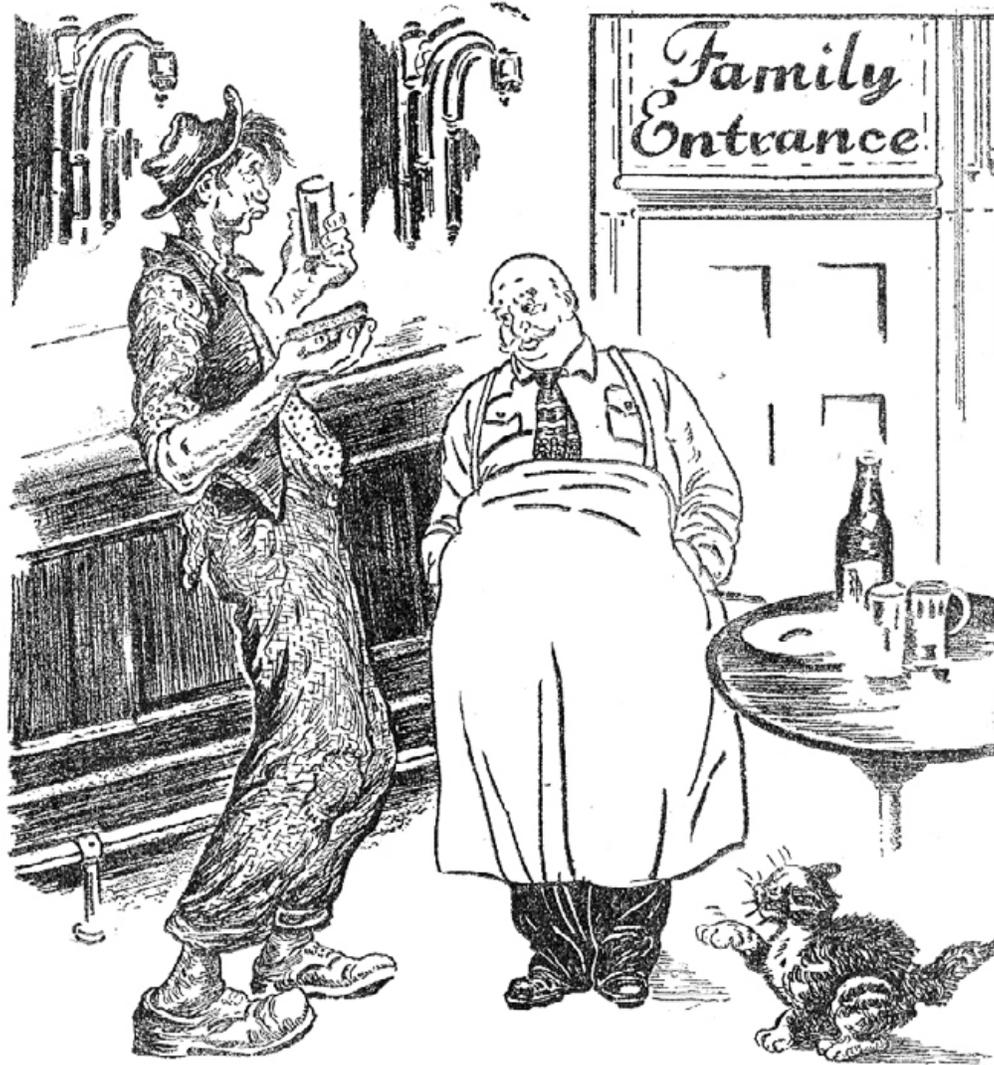


Being a Private Detective Was Certainly Something



SHAD TRIES THE FREE LUNCH

By VERNE CHUTE

Author of "Never Trust the Obvious," etc,

SHADRACK ARNOLD'S beardless face seemed to hold a secret from the rest of his bean-pole body. Yet all six feet six inches of him was tense as he waited inside Rudolph Hoorn's "Paradise Bar" for the afternoon westbound express. With the mail would come a letter that would tell him just how to go about "arresting" the man who had killed the

postal clerk at Dalleese, a hundred miles to the west.

Shad's thin jaw set. The killer was here, in Granville! Shad had been at the depot with his delivery wagon when Nicholas Carson got off the train.

Shad was thinking of this while the Dutch proprietor of the Paradise beamed at him. Mr. Hoorn had a pale, paper-white

face, with light-colored eyebrows and mustache; it looked like one of those newfangled wax faces in the window of Wayne's Clothing Store in Center City. Mr. Hoorn's ham-like hand waved to indicate the free lunch Shad could have with his sarsaparilla. "New bickles, I got—St. Louis—*Ja!*" He added, proudly, "Detectiff Shad."

Free lunch with a *sarsaparilla!* Only the number one citizen of Granville might break a precedent that decreed that free lunch went with beer. And Hoorn's schooners of beer were giant size. They cost a nickel.

To give Shad time to recover from his surprise, Mr. Hoorn turned his expressive eyes fondly to the calendar. Dated 1910 and put out by the St. Elmo Tombstone Company of St. Louis, the picture was of gay young love on ice-skates. Rudolph Hoorn was never tired of looking at it. Beyond the calendar was a side door and a sign: "Family Entrance. No Profanity—It Might Be Your Sister."

Before the mouth-watering array of free lunch, Shad almost forgot the letter he had coming from Investigators, Incorporated. Besides the new pickles from St. Louis, there was bright yellow Wisconsin cheese, sliced pork, beef and ham. In a pan was a thick rib roast of beef lying in its own juice and looking so tender as to fall apart at the touch of a knife. A leg of pork sat upright in its own gravy. Two earthenware bowls held small white onions in vinegar and potato salad, rye and new white bread was sliced and ready under a covering of damp cheesecloth. A row of hardboiled eggs stood on their ends where they had been put down hard on the board—a trick of Mr. Hoorn's.

Shad's long fingers trembled as he selected two pieces of rye bread and forked over a slice of pork and one of beef, like he had seen Hank Mark and other frequenters

of the bar do.

The fat Dutchman watched his new customer with appreciative, mirthful eyes.

"Dry the ham an' the cheese. Goat, that cheese, my poy. Und also the bickles—*Ja*, detectiff!"

Shad's thin face flushed with pleasure at the title, *detective*. "Thanks, Mr. Hoorn," he said with quiet dignity.

Shad had hardly finished construction of his sandwich when a long, mournful wail came in over the batwing doors. The westbound was whistling for Bart's Crossing a mile out of town. Shad crammed part of his two-story sandwich down his throat, giving it several hasty bites on the way. He washed it down with sarsaparilla, which must have been a big surprise to the free lunch.

Waving a skinny hand at the proprietor, Shad moved with studied dignity to the swinging door—as befitting one of his position. *Being a private detective was something*. If he wanted to make a public display of his title he had the proof at hand. Reposing in his inside vest pocket was a diploma that would set any scoffer to shame—a gold-edged diploma from Investigators, Incorporated! St. Louis! Signed by Captain Ellsworth himself! In a felt pouch inside the hip pocket of his Levis was a pair of shiny handcuffs; also a nickel-plated badge, in case he wanted to make an arrest. Page *twelve*, of the sixty-nine page book which had come with the course, stated emphatically that the power of arrest was every man's prerogative!

Shad's trained, inscrutable, photographic, deductive eyes swept the town's main street from over the top of the swinging door. Loyalty to Carter's Grocery, which paid him his twenty dollars every month, made him look first toward his delivery horse. Old Bill was all right, stamping at the hitchrack. Old Bill was an aberrant; sometimes he shook loose from

the hitchrack and moved down the street to the watertrough or wandered about town, pulling the rickety wagon after him.

Shad saw the Kittridge surrey pull across the vacant lot to the depot. Mrs. Kittridge was leaving Mr. Kittridge again and going back to her mother; she got out and hurried toward the waiting room. Lanky Mr. Kittridge followed with her bags. Mr. Caldwell, the postmaster was also enroute to the station, a canvas mail sack over his stooped shoulders.

The train rumbled in and came to a brief stop. Its bell kept ringing nervously, as if the engine was impatient to get on its way. A trainman yelled. The engine began to snort and soon the train was gone again. In a little the postmaster came into view carrying another mail sack. Mr. Kittridge came back empty handed, looked at the surrey, then toward the main street.

Shad knew the man was looking at Hoorn's gigantic sign with its legend: "Largest Beer in Town—5 cents." Kittridge started toward the sign.

Yet that wasn't what made Shad's eyes widen. A man had got off the train. A passenger had detrained. Shad pressed closer to the batwings. *A good detective watches all trains that may bring criminals into his midst.* Captain Ellsworth of Investigators, Incorporated, had made a special issue of this on page *three* of the sixty-nine page booklet.

But suddenly the town of Granville was safe again. Shad gave a faint smile. The man who had got off the train was Hank Mark, Granville's shoe shiner; now he was starting for the main street. Hank Mark was thick of body, swart and up to a month before, unkempt in appearance. He had been a principal in Shad's one big case a month previous. Shad had cleared Hank Mark of a local robbery and murder which had brought into the toils of the law the town banker. That had been Shad's first

case under the tutelage of Investigators, Inc.

Shad propelled his lanky body out into the sunlight, his Adam's apple still working on the last bit of sandwich. He wiped his mouth with the frayed sleeve of his shirt. A detective of Investigators, Incorporated, must keep up his personal appearance.

On page *two* of Captain Ellsworth's book it said, among other things: "*A private detective owes a certain allegiance to his community. His conduct and reputation must be above reproach, and he should always keep his payments up to date.*" A sub-heading cautioned: "*Refrain from trusting the obvious.*"

So Shad had kept his payments up to date, and he hadn't trusted the obvious. And he kept up his personal appearance—as far as his natural handicap would allow. Granville had got used to Shad's six feet six height and his one hundred and twenty-eight pounds. Only strangers stared at him now.

At the postoffice was Hank Mark waiting for the postmaster to sort the mail. He grinned at Shad. "How's crime?"

Shad said, "Crime is fine," and shook hands with Hank. Hank Mark was living proof of the efficacy of Captain Ellsworth's detective course. Shad was still trying to forget that he had become mixed up in that case, and that up to the last minute had been trying to convict Hank Mark of the crime. Shad dropped his voice to a whisper: "See that picture Mr. Caldwell put up while you were gone?"

MARK looked where Shad indicated. On the wall of the postoffice was a new poster of a "wanted" man. It was full-faced, bearded, with walrus mustaches—a poor picture of whoever it was. Shad looked surreptitiously around. Several persons were coming in now, He sidled closer to Mark, whispered, "That's him —

the man who killed the postal clerk over at Dalleese.”

Mark kept looking at the picture. He shrugged his heavy shoulders. “Never heard about it. Been away nearly a month, you know.”

“That’s right,” said Shad. “But this is the man. It says so on the poster.”

Mark grinned suddenly. “The gent’s kind of thin—even with his whiskers. His nose looks like a fox’s.”

Shad cast his deductive eyes over the citizenry lining up for its mail. He spoke from the side of his mouth, keeping his voice low: “That gent in the picture is here in Granville. I spotted him the minute he got off the train. He’s the new barber, and all I’m waiting for is—”

Shad didn’t finish. Postmaster Caldwell was sidling up to the window.

“Nothing,” he told Hank Mark. Then he turned to Shad and stuck out a long brown envelope. “Letter from Investigators, Incorporated – how much you owe now, Shad?”

“Paid up,” said Shad succinctly. He took the envelope as if it held quicksilver balanced on its edge and sidled off toward the door. This letter would tell him how to proceed. He would read it while on his way out to Marston’s with Mrs. Marston’s groceries. Even if Nicholas Carson was smoothly shaven he was *the* man. And he was less than one hundred feet away—behind the second chair at Levers’ Barbershop!

Shad hesitated at the door, tapping the brown envelope against the heel of one hand. A letter from Investigators *was* something. He played it up.

Behind him, the postmaster was saying to Hank Mark: “Back, huh . . . back to another year at shoe shining. Lucky for you, Mister, that Shad took that detective course. . . . If he hadn’t caught Banker

Winston for killing poor old Norton you’d been sent up sure.”

“Don’t I know it,” growled Mark. “Yeah, I feel much obliged.”

Shad’s neck colored with pleased embarrassment as he swung out to the board walk and across the street to wake up Old Bill nodding at the hitchrack. When he drove out of town he was lost in the nebulous complicities of his profession. His thin face was set, not unlike Captain Ellsworth’s picture on page *one* of the book as that master of them all followed the precepts of the admonishment: “follow That Man.”

Vicariously, Shad had rubbed elbows with the denizens of vice dens on the waterfront, had walked hand in hand with the swells. He had conducted investigations for senators, for governors, and for fine, perfumed ladies.

Countless children had been rescued from the sordid hands of child-stealers and restored to grateful parents. Shad had even, when nothing of greater importance pressed, saved the pets of beautiful ladies, whose rewarding embraces he had had to fight off. On many occasions he had politely but firmly declined these beautiful ladies’ offers of marriage.

A MILE out of town, Shad opened his letter. The message was short, concise. Half the sheet, in fact, was tilled by the insignia of the agency – the symbolic handcuffs, badge, crossed six-shooters. But Shad’s smoky eyes scanned the message:

Fellow Investigator: You are to be congratulated on your perspicacity and your ability in recognizing your man. Your excellent work shows you are ready for Supplemental Packet Number Two of Confidential Material. Money cannot buy this post-graduate packet; it is available

only to graduates of Investigators, Incorporated. It is, therefore, yours free. All you have to do is to send \$10 to pay for the cost of collection, multigraphing, printing and mailing. Your copy has been reserved—if we hear from you by return mail. . . .

Shad grinned and said, “Gee!” His Adam’s apple quivered as he read on.

Knowing that you are entirely trustworthy, we quote from Page Two of Confidential Packet Number Two: “In a case where a man is hiding his identity behind real or false whiskers, mustache or other concealment it is best to obtain photo of man smoothly shaven. By merely applying whiskers or mustache to the photograph identification can be made. To reverse the process, paint out whiskers and mustache from picture by special eradicating paint. If your dealer doesn’t handle this, send two one-dollar bills plus four cents postage to Department B, Investigators, Incorporated, St. Louis.”

A word of caution: In a case of this nature, be sure to have a talk with your local law enforcement agency before proceeding. Also for our records, please return this letter with your remittance.

Sincerely,
 Captain Evans Ellsworth.
 By James F. Padd, Secty.

Shad rode along in his dream until Old Bill turned into Marston’s yard and came to a stop under a cottonwood tree. Grinning, Shad put away his two-compartment purse and unwound his lanky legs to get down and take the groceries inside.

But he didn’t get down, He didn’t even move. He kept staring at the empty wagon bed. “Hully Gee,” he mumbled in awe. “I forgot the groceries!”

IT WAS nearly six o’clock before Shad returned to town from his second trip out to Marston’s. He was in a hurry. He had to get to the postoffice before Mr. Caldwell closed it and went home. There was the matter of a letter to Investigators, and Shad had to see that “wanted” poster again.

Shad looked into the barbershop as he passed. Nicholas Carson was there, cutting Pop Weaver’s hair. Carson was about the size of Hank Mark, but his face was thin and vulpine, his eyes a piercing black. A hard smile was part of his face. A pallid face. A less observant eye than Shad’s would have overlooked the fact that the blue of that pallor was caused by Carson’s having shaved off his whiskers recently.

Shad was sure of his man now.

He lengthened his stride, arriving at the postoffice just as Mr. Caldwell was putting away his stamps. While Mr. Caldwell made out his slips, Shad turned to the picture on the wall; perhaps he could “borrow” it.

Shad gulped. The picture was gone!

Then he turned – into Mr. Caldwell’s grinning face.

“They got him, son. Got word in on the mail.”

“But—” stuttered Shad, “they couldn’t. They couldn’t a-got him, Mr. Caldwell. What did you do with the picture?”

“Took it down—want it?” Mr. Caldwell reached around behind the desk and handed him out the torn poster.

Shad shoved the picture into his pocket. “Just make that out for ten dollars now,” he said.

Shadrack Arnold was a little sick when he went back to the grocery to put up Old Bill. Yet he couldn’t give up. Nicholas Carson was guilty of something!

Late that night he studied his books. And he studied the “wanted” notice. He didn’t have the special *eradicator*, but he did have an eraser left over from his second year in the eighth grade. He erased the

whiskers and the walrus mustache from the picture—and had a blotched-up something that hardly looked like a human. He wished then he'd sent the extra two dollars for the *eradicator* paint.

But his disappointment didn't keep him out of the barberchair of Nicholas Carson the next morning. Page *thirteen* said: "*It is often necessary to follow your suspect into the lowest places, and at times, to join him in his sotten pleasures.*" The advice could go as well for haircuts. He had found Carson alone.

"Haircut," said Shad before Nicholas Carson could look at his sparsely hair-shaded cheeks and chin.

"Sure. Haircut," said Carson. He kept his smile going while he swung the hair cloth across Shad's lap. Then he took a hitch around Shad's thin neck with his cloth—and Shad was trapped.

Trapped like a rat, Shad thought. He held his breath—until he heard the comforting sound of Carson's scissors snipping tentatively at the air before starting their real work. He felt better when the barber began running a comb through his yellow hair.

Shad was breathing easier now, and looking around him. The shop had always been of great interest to him during his growing up. Now at twenty-four, he was almost ready for a mug. *That would be something.* The mugs were in their case along the back wall. Shad could see the gold letters on some of them—Carter, Marston, Tom Dillon.

SHAD didn't mind so much being alone with Carson now. He soon found he could get a good view of the man by merely looking in the cracked mirror. As Carson moved around, Shad could see the man's reflections as the front and back mirrors went to work, each reflection smaller than the one before.

And Shad had found out plenty about Carson. The man wore pegtops, had button shoes that were brown and stylish, and he had money enough to stay at the Parker House Hotel. He had told Mr. Lever he could work cheaply because he was here for his health.

Carson said suddenly, "Say, I understand you're quite a detective."

Shad started. "No, not much. Just something to do—you know how it is."

The man kept grinning. Shad thought the grin was kind of hard around the edges. He added quickly, "Nothing much happens around here."

Carson stopped cutting hair and laughed softly. "I'm glad of that. But I can take care of myself." He stood back from the chair. "Lots of fellows carry a gun or a knife for protection. But not me. Here's what I swear by." Carson flipped his barber's jacket open. In the same movement a naked razor blade scintillated in the light. Carson laughed. "Yeah, I can cut a man open before he could say Jack Robinson."

Shad's eyes widened and his Adam's apple slid up and down in his throat. "Gee, Mister, I didn't even see you reach for it."

Carson laughed again and then folded the razor. He put it away and picked up his scissors again. As soon as the barber began clipping, Shad sat back in the chair to think the thing over. This man was dangerous—but then, a killer was always dangerous.

But now, as always when he needed it, the stern face of Captain Ellsworth came before Shad's eyes. And there was a page in the book for just such things as this. "*Do not underestimate your man. Watch him constantly. Talk to him if you can do so without arousing his suspicion.*" Mentally, Shad pulled on his spotless kid gloves, twirled his cane and leaped into the case with new vigor; this man was guilty—of something. Shad was positive of that.

While he was thinking about it, the barbershop door opened. Postmaster Caldwell stuck his thin face across the frame. His face was flushed, and he looked excited. "Been looking all over for you, Shad."

"Yeah, Mr. Caldwell?" Shad sat upright in the chair.

Mr. Caldwell's voice was a shrill whisper. "Got to have that picture back. I took down the wrong one—that feller wasn't caught yet. I just read my letter wrong."

Shad tried not to show his excitement. His lean face held to an inscrutability that would have done justice to Captain Ellsworth himself. "That's the way I figured—" He started, then clamped his jaw shut. When he opened it again, he said: "I'll bring it over to you soon's I'm through."

Cardwell nodded and hurried away. The barber looked at Shad for a moment; his dark eyes were curious.

Shad headed off the question that was brewing. "Just a little trouble west of here," he said.

Before the barber could press him for more information, Mr. Lever and Hank Mark came in. The little owner of the shop was doing the talking. "When you coming back to work, Hank? A dozen pair of shoes waiting to be shined for next Saturday's dance."

"Couple of days," said the shoe shiner. "Hello, Shad," he said toward the chair. Then he nodded at the barber. Mark's little eyes were dark and suspicious. He picked up a two-day-old *Center City Chronicle* and sat down to read it.

Shad watched Hank Mark now. It was plain that Hank Mark was having ideas about Carson himself. Mr. Lever went back to the rear and Nicholas Carson kept on with that set grin of his and soon finished with Shad.

Shad hurriedly paid his twenty cents, glad to get away. Hank Mark got up and followed Shad outside. As he walked down the boardwalk with Shad he said, "Is that the jasper?"

Shad blinked. "I didn't say that. But—" He watched his elongated shadow jump a broken board in the walk. He looked down at the bootblack then. "Just don't say anything, will you?"

"You can trust me." A funny look came to Mark's fat face. "Got a gun?"

"Huh?" Shad blinked. "No. No, I ain't got a gun, Hank. I don't need one. If this fellow robbed that postal clerk and killed him I'll have a way to grab him when the time comes—" Shad pulled up then, biting down on his lip to stop the flow of words.

He already had his plan. He had thought it out when he was in the barber's chair. It was a plan that would take all the ingenuity of an Investigators, Incorporated, detective to put across. On page *three* it said, "*At no time divulge any of your work or plans to a layman, and only to a duly constituted officer on occasion.*"

Hank Mark growled, "I don't like the way the fellow is fooling around. He acts like he was watching everybody—as if he was going to rob 'em." He looked closely at Shad. "You're sure about him, ain't you?"

"Sure I'm sure," said Shad.

"Well, then, better take my gun, If something happens to this gent you'd be a hero. Yeah, you'd be a hero, Shad!"

Shad chewed a straw on the idea until he got to his delivery wagon. Old Man Carter had piled the wagon high while Shad was gone. "Late," said Shad, and left Hank Mark.

IT WAS dark when Shad got back from his last delivery of the day. But he had planned this last trip. He had an idea. A dangerous idea. But a public servant must

not falter or shirk his duty.

Shad hurriedly put up Old Bill, and then looked toward the kerosene lights of Lever's Barbershop. Nicholas Carson was still there, finishing up on Cal Raley, Shad had to work fast. He had to capture his man, turn him over to Marshal Tom Dillon, and then get on out to the Marston's where he was invited to supper. Shad didn't want to miss either engagement.

In a very few moments Shad stood in the shadows between the lamps of the barbershop and those of Hoorn's Paradise Bar. He had it figured out to a nicety. He smiled coolly, feeling a glowing pride in his own calmness.

The plan was simple. For days he had watched Carson leave the barbershop at the same hour, walk through the alley to the Parker House Hotel to change his clothes before returning to spend the evening at Hoorn's. This alley saved him a block's walk. At the far end there was an alley gate that kept stock from wandering uptown from the loading corrals. The wooden gate had a clasp and whoever wanted to open the gate merely reached through and released the latch.

Shad had ideas about that gate. He didn't have to wait long. Nicholas Carson soon finished with his customer, blew out the lights and came outside. When he started into the alley, Shad slipped behind the building and raced for the far end of the alley.

He arrived in plenty of time. Sidling up to the gate with its latch, he waited. His handcuffs trembled in his hand and he had to hold them against his leg. The minutes passed. No sound came from the dark alley. Shad was afraid to look over the gate lest he outline his figure against the lights of the hotel behind him.

Then, suddenly, a noise filtered out of the alley. The noise came closer, resolved itself into stealthy footsteps. The gate

shook and a hand came through the opening and began groping for the latch.

Just enough light came over from the Parker House Hotel to show Shad that hand. That was all he needed. He didn't hesitate. Clamping down one handcuff over the groping wrist, he clicked the other cuff to the latch. He had his man.

The response was immediate. Vociferous. A howling curse.

And Shad howled back. "No use, Mister! I got you to rights for killing that postal clerk! You pretended to be my friend, and I let you—now, stay put! I'm getting Marshal Dillon!"

Shad didn't listen to the cursing answer; he was off at a lope. Straight to Hoorn's Paradise Bar. About now, Tom Dillon would be in rapt contemplation of the big Dutchman's free lunch.

Bursting inside the saloon, Shad gave a yell like a Comanche on a raid. Tom Dillon sputtered beer all over the front of his vest. Hoorn dropped a glass he was wiping.

"Marshal Dillon," yelled Shad. "I got him. I got the fellow that killed the postal clerk at Dalleese!"

The marshal sputtered, cleared his throat. "What!"

Shad's throat turned dry. But he managed to wheeze:

"I got him handcuffed to the latch at the end of the alley." He shoved a lanky hand toward the red-faced town marshal. "Here's the key to those cuffs. He's yours, Mr. Dillon!"

Dillon took the key and looked at Hoorn. The big Dutchman rubbed his waxy mustache, his moon-face suddenly beaming. "*Ach*. This poy Shad—Detectiff. *Ja!*"

The marshal set down what was left of his beer. "You sure?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"*Ja,*" said Hoorn, beaming at Shad. He cast a careful eye around the empty

barroom and said recklessly, "Pheer on the house."

Shad looked at the free lunch—but that reminded him of the supper he was to have at Marston's. He said hurriedly. "I got him all tied up for you at the gate. Put some whiskers on him and you'll have his picture down in Mr. Caldwell's postoffice." He swung toward the door, his gangling figure almost back into its lope. He hesitated just long enough to call back, "Going out to Marston's. For supper."

THE next morning, Shad watered and fed Old Bill as if nothing had happened the night before. Then he started toward the Chinese restaurant at the end of the street.

He smiled faintly, sadly when he passed Lever's Barbershop. The life of a great detective was not all roses. He looked inside. Mr. Lever would have to get a new barber now.

Then Shad's eyes nearly started from his head. Nicholas Carson stood inside at one of the chairs. He was grinning at Mr. Lever and looking at the top of his head in the mirror. Shad didn't wait to see anything else! He moved, fast.

Shad didn't burst into Hoorn's this time; he looked over the top of the batwings. Inside at the bar was Tom Dillon and Mr. Marston. They were watching Rudolph Hoorn behind the bar. Shad moved inside, crept toward the bar. The men were so intent on the operation before their eyes that they never noticed him.

Hoorn had three mugs on the board. He chuckled. "Jamaica rum, Haiti rum, one spoon sugar. . . . *Ach!* Butter from mine own place—*Ja!* Blenty butter." He filled the mugs to the brim with boiling water from the tea kettle. "Always the rum from Jamaica first—*Ja!*" He added a pinch of

spice to each butter-enriched drink and then set them on the bar. He sighed happily. "Hot buttered rum—*Ja!*"

Shad cleared his throat. The men looked around. Hoorn beamed upon Shad. "Hot buttered rum—Detective Shad—on the house! I make mineself another one. *Ja!*"

Shad gave him a quick nod, started to blurt out about Nicholas Carson. But Mr. Marston was shaking his hand, and Tom Dillon was patting him on the back.

"We got him, Shad! He's down in my jail now!"

Marston said, "And you never told us a thing when you were out to supper last night! But it was some confession when he really started to talk."

Marshal Dillon grinned.

"He sure had us fooled. But he knew the thing was up when we found the barber's wallet in his pocket."

Shad gulped weakly. "The barber's wallet? You mean—"

"Sure, the barber's wallet. We found Carson in the alley where Hank Mark hit him over the head to rob him. Hank raved like a maniac when we searched his house and found the money he'd stolen at Dalleese. Hank had come in from the east train to fool us." The town marshal looked enviously at Shad. "A nice bit of work, again, Shad. There'll be a reward on this one!"

Hoorn looked at the cooling "rums," began making funny noises in his throat. Shad nodded; he picked up his drink. The strange workings of Investigators, Incorporated, sometimes filled him with awe.

The big Dutchman beamed when Shad gulped his drink. "Goot, Shad? Half it some vree lunch, hey? New bickles I got. St. Louis. *Ja!*"