SHAKEDQWA PARTI BY

Orange gouts of flame blossomed at the alley's mouth, the harshly missing Langton by inches. He drew, spaced two, three quick of his own at the flashes, saw one shadow drop, heard it moan, as ther cringed, retreat around the corner.

ton vaulted a small fence at the back of the alley, and lost his uers in the dark, twisting streets.

Chadter 6

Again, Hartley took the small, black felt box from his wall safe, d it tentatively, ran his fingers slowly over its smooth corners. The ght and shape of the box fitted snugly, pleasantly in his hand.

opened the box, tilted it, let the contents spill over onto the table. tile creased his face as the diamonds rolled and sparkled end over end the teak surface. Some were ice clear, some were tinted, with glints of and pink on fine cut edges. Several larger, rougher stones contrasted many small, sharp-cut multifaceted gems. he gathered them in his poured them from palm to palm, one by one, all at once.

he diamonds had come from China, some gotten from the coolies sold outhern Pacific, other taken in exchange for opium and silk. Hartley been adding to his hoard for years. The possession of the diamonds ant more to him than did their mere monetary value. Some men were essed with gold; Hartley's obsessions were diamonds and young men. He kept the diamonds, but he wasn't so handy with women.

His marriage to Mandy had been a mistake. He had realized too late she a two bit con artist out for his money. She was too clever, too dy. He has still not been able to rouse her gang of hired toughnuts m his saloon in Frisco. He hadn't seen the profits from that operation ce he sent her packing. He'd send in his boys soon enough, and if she pened to stop a bullet in the doing, so much the better.

le wouldn't actually give the diamonds to Janie. He'd dangle them in nt of her as bait, she seemed simple enough to take it. After all, she a whore, and a good-looking one at that. She wasn't in the business

He had been planning to carry the diamonds down to Frisco himself, decided against it. He had always done business with Wells Fargo, uding a few shipments of hot goods that had gone through under the ise of the sprawling express company's respectability. Wells Fargo ould ensure the diamonds, and they would travel with an armed courier own only to the company, Hartley, and Hartley's trusted help. In two ys, on the morning train from Seattle to San Francisco.

CHADTER 7

Two days, thought Langton. Precious little time to stage a job. had little or nothing to go on. He wouldn't be able to pick out the urier from among the passengers on the crowded train, let alone wrestle e diamonds from him and get away clean. Not without help. The risk as just too high. Who could he recruit?

Anna, perhaps ... but then again, no. She had called the con game quits ong ago, when she had gotten together all she wanted. She had her se, her ladies ... why risk it all for something she didn't need?

le thought of Hartley's wife. Mandy, he had heard her named. She was out for a quick profit too, as Langton had found out to his own expense. could she help? Or better still, would she?

He had treated her harshly. She had been handled roughly, but worst of ll, knew Langton, her pride had taken a beating. Then again, he asoned, she was a business woman. She may be persuaded to co-operate fter all, if the price was right.

The little Chinese boy said nothing, did not even look at Mandy. He topped long enough to hand him a message, and disappeared. She infolded the note.

Mrs. Hartley -- I hope you're not too disappointed about missing me with your knife. You're not the first to miss. But few have come closer. Meet me in the lobby of the

Franklin Hotel in an hour. I think we can do business together. Come alone or I won't show.

Langton. She sat alone at the corner table, stirring coffee that had long since one cold. Langton was late, and she was a fool. She pushed aside her up, got ready to leave. Then she saw the little Chinese messenger boy curry up the stairs, tap on a door. Langton showed, started down the

She had steeled herself for the encounter, rehearsed her opening lines. She would call the shots, ask the questions, get the answers. The words caught in her throat, would not come. Langton strode effortlessly, fidently, to sit across from her.

"Can I get you a drink, Mrs. Hartley?" She looked up, nodded. Presently she s on ice. Langton came directly to "Do you love your ha

Her face cole you get your kicks, Mister? I suppose you want to know

how we do it, too?' A grin creased Langton's face. She was doing just fine, he thought. It looks like she can handle the pressure. He decided to turn the screw just

one more notch. "That's okay, Mrs. Hartley. Everybody in San Francisco knows you

don't do it together at all any more.' She rose to leave. Langton grabbed at her wrist, not gently, not

"What about diamonds, Mrs. Hartley? Do you love diamonds?"

She sat down again, slowly, watched him, said nothing. "You know I'm after those diamonds. I know you want them too. If we both try for them alone, neither one of us has a chance. We'd only be in

He released her wrist, lowered his voice. "Together, though, we can pull it off. I can't go near them, they're expecting me to. I need someone else."

He decided to appeal to her pride. "I need a good actor. Someone with nerves, someone who won't break

under pressure. I think you're that person". Briefly, Langton outlined his plan. She would provide the inside information. It wouldn't take much to bribe Hartley's men, he wasn't well-liked by his help. Langton would provide the plan, stage the

'What do you say, Mrs. Hartley? 50-50?" She lifted the sour mash to her lips, smiled.

"Call me Mandy, Langton."

She reached for the nearly full bottle.

"I think we can do business together. Shall we go to your room and seal the deal?"

CHANTER 8

Mandy's sources in Hartley's employ were still good, as long as they were paid promptly and well. The main plan for the transfer of the diamonds was confirmed, the details revealed. Even the name of the courier was known -- Manning, Dineen's man in the street of only a few days before. Manning had already done business with Hartley, and had met Mrs. Hartley on several social occasions. Strange, thought Manning, how the old tightwads always seemed to get the best-looking

Manning relaxed, watched the countryside change from his window seat one car away from the bar car. The train was leaving the mountains, rolling downgrade into less rugged landscape. Small towns approached, flashed by, receded in his window, ever more frequently as the Southern Pacific train neared the populated basin area of San Francisco.

Blood had been mistaken, thought Manning. Any chances for Langton to make a play for the diamonds were rapidly diminishing. They were only half an hour out of Frisco. Christ, he swore, I could sure use a stiff

Manning looked up as the compartment door opened. A tall lady, redhaired, in a black dress stepped in, looked his way, smiled at him. Why was she familiar? Where had he seen her before? "Why Mr. Manning! What a surprise! I was just on my way to the

for a drink before we got into town. Won't you join me?"

Recognition dawned on Manning -- this was Mrs. Hartley, the wife of his client. Surely he could have a drink, he thought. Mr. Valentine, Manning's and Dineen's boss, and president of Wells Fargo, cautioned his agents against drinking on duty, but this, reasoned Manning, was different. It would be discourteous to turn down a drink with the wife of an

"I'll be honoured to have a drink with you, Mrs. Hartley."

Together they walked to the bar car. Hartley's wife chose two facing seats by the end of the bar, and beckoned for the waiter. She ordered a Pisco Punch, Manning chose vodka straight.

"As a matter of fact, I was speaking to your husband just this morning," ntered Manning. "I was surprised you weren't at home."

"I was finishing up some business on his behalf, so I couldn't be Langton stood, imm there," she lied. Obviously, as she had hoped, he didn't yet know the wife his forehead. The train of his distinguished client had been thrown out. This reassured her.

"Allow me, Mrs. Hartley." Manning reached out for his wallet, but she already had her money out. "By no means, Mr. Manning. You're my guest."

She paid the waiter, tipped him handsomely, took the drinks. Manning looked away to tuck his wallet back into his pants pocket, and the woman slipped a small tablet into the glass of vodka. She placed the glass in front of Manning, and caught a glimpse of a broad-shouldered man letting himself silently into the men's washroom at the other end of the car.

"May I propose a toast, Mr. Manning? To Wells Fargo -- may it

She raised her glass, touched it to his, smiled. They brought the glassed to their lips, drank.

Manning put his glass down. He tried to think of a toast to match. ach, his head were heavy.

ist don't know when the

grinned, gave her a knowing look, turned and headed back to the angton pulled the limp form into a cubicle, searched it, found the pouch, checked it to make sure. Two, three shining crystals played into his palm. He replaced them, closed the pouch and put it into his pocket. He bound and gagged Manning, jammed the cubicle's door shut.

He turned to the mirror, adjusted his disguise. The oversize Stetson. ailored pants and sports coat, leather boots without spurs lent him the

KEN CORBETT

gentleman rancher who w d never have to step in cow shit again. He left the washroom, afident, at ease. It was in the bag. The train was slowing, making its proach to the station. Langton walked the length of the bar car, hea for the main exit. Mandy rose as he passed hind him. As they passed into the next her seat, walked close compartment, momentar alone, he slipped her the diamonds. She dropped the pouch into he

"Still nervous?" "A little," she replied. reached out, grabbed his arm. Langton felt her shake for an instant, she was calm. As they emerged out onto the landing, they looked no rent from any other husband and wife on the

haveer 9

Cam Dineen stood at ar of the platform, shielded from view of the incoming train by a ha k piled high with luggage. He glanced over to Foxx, who was gua he other exit from the platform. He too was watching from concea

Dineen swore. He w se. He had wanted to go with Manning on the train, would even have the diamonds himself. But he knew Langton ot come close, if Dineen had ridden the train as would smell a trap, wou fool went by himself. Dineen wouldn't have well. Instead, the you wagered a plugged nicked the kid would make it to Frisco with the rocks.

He didn't worry too much about the kid, even less about the diamonds.

Langton was the prize lineen had chased, over deserts, mountains, and or nearly twenty years. And he would get him. nternational boundarie The train chugged, missed, and shuddered to a stop on the platform. orters stepped down, are ned doors, reached for luggage. People began Porters stepped down, owly, agonizingly slowly. No sign of Manning. to file down the steps, Most of the passengers ere out now, still milling around the coach door.

"Mrs. Hartley!" Even as the words let his lips, Dineen knew he had made a mistake. He eached for his gun, supped out from behind the baggage truck. He reached for his gun, astonishment as he saw the flinty features of beneath the brim of the Stetson. Langton peer his way for

Just one tall man in a sait, a big Stetson covering his face. The man

turned, to help a young

Wells Fargo knew

shapeless, bloody bur

hadn't acted fast enough

company that had won

after this setback, busi

carrying them after a

ped Mandy by the arm, pushed her back up the crambled up after her. His big foot thrust up, Langton, wheeled, g steps, into the train. ch on the other side, snapping the lock. The out, to strike the door door whipped open, and mey jumped out into the switching yard.

Dineen raised his weepon, aimed, checked himself. He couldn't risk a shot, too many bystand res. He raced for the train door. Travelers milled

shot, too many bystand nitcases lay underfoot. Dineen pushed, weaved, about, lovers embraced hollered, crushed. Languan was getting away!

Langton found his forming, looked left, right. He spied a loading dock, with freight ready for the cars. Behind, doors opened to the streets

d-haired lady in high heels down the steps ...

outside. Their only cha

They jumped over sea ral sets of tracks, rushing pell-mell. Mandy was hampered by her long with skirt and high heels. A freight train, came closer, several tracks away. Langton judged its speed, the distance, saw before it cut them off from the dock. It would they had just enough ti also make good their g

Langton went first, pulled her after him. It would be close, closer than he anticipated. When the were across the tracks safe. He relaxed.

The train came on, he a switch, veered directly at them, only feet away.

He jumped aside, pulled ther. She screamed, tried to free her heel, caught in a crack between two des. The train came, her scream shrieked, stopped abruptly under the crust on grinding wheels.

ile, alone, horrible. A vein swelled, pulsed in lled on, and on. When it passed, he was gone.

Chabter 10

Hartley was disgrace. The San Francisco newspaper had gotten wind of the fiasco in the standard, had given it lots of play on the scandal sheets. Too someone had recognize the white special sheets. Too someone had recognize the whispers spread that she tried to steal running with? Did had seen it happen from the train, his wife.

Was it true she had been running from the law? I was the tried to steal running with? Did had been with a shipment of

They had recovered the diamonds from the of rags that had been Mandy. She had been him left to die. The express company was hurting too, they to hush it up. Again, it was shown that the West was not as all-powerful as it claimed. The company's success was wholly dependent upon its image and s would falter, profits

ey's pride, his

vant any more of

ly his women, always had to

own the steps, shuffle down the street. He waited long enough to watch him turn the corner, and crossed the street to enter the big house.

appearance of a cattleman who had long since made his killing, a nod. The bartender went on polishing his glasses. Anna was not in meaning, could he find peace within?

in her room three doors down the hall.

She came to the door, opened to his knock. She was tall statuesque. Her hair was brown, with streaks of blonde. She met his eyes, sure, Wells Fargo, Dineen would find no pe

"Do I know you?" She asked, with more than a trace of indignation lending a sharp edge to her even voice.

Langton had not expected such a challenge. From what he had heard, he was prepared for a vapid, ordinary sort, one whose ambitions were no higher than the next customer. It was his turn to be taken aback, to choke on his words, doubt his purpose.

"I entertain my guests on appointment, only, Buster. Take a powder." She began to close the door.

"Don't you want the diamonds, Janie?"

She paused, relaxed, and in that instant Langton slipped inside. She looked him over, studied his face.

"I know you now. You're Anna's friend ... Langton, isn't it?" "That's right, lady. Keep it to yourself."

They stood silent, facing each other. Janie's mind raced, as she put the pieces together. "So it was you. You were the man with Hartley's wife in the train

station when..." She could not continue. Langton turned away, looked out the window, turned again to face Janie. She read his cold, rough-hewn face, looked into his dark, silent eyes, could not hold the exchange. She looked down to her feet. "You want those diamonds bad, don't you?"

"Uh huh. He didn't give them to you, did he?" "Hell no. I sent him packing, too. I worked him for all he was worth. I

won't end up like the other women he's gone through..." She stopped, realizing too late she had said the wrong thing. "Do you know what he did with them? The diamonds, I mean?"

She did not answer. She smiled thinly. Again, Langton saw he was dealing with a shrewd player, one that would bear watching. She sat down on the edge of the bed. "Let's suppose I know where they're keeping the diamonds, Langton.

What's in it for me?"

"A quarter, a half, you name it. It's not really the diamonds I want any

"I'll pay anything to get those diamonds. Name your price." She rose lightly from her bed, loosened the lace fastenings restraining her womanliness. Pink played, bounced on soft white, and darker curls of spun gold gleamed as she came to him. She raised a knee, lifted a leg, stroked him with her hands, her thighs. Her lips parted, warm and moist. in Langton's ear.

"The price may be just a little more than you can afford, Langton."

Chabter 11

Anna was waiting. Langton had told her he would be back in a few days, as soon as he took care of some business. She knew him well, knew there was no guarantee he would ever come back. But he had always kept his word before, even when it cost him. Besides, she had a feeling she would see him soon enough. She had been right this way before.

Something troubled her, all the same. Why had he been asking questions about Hartley? And Janie? Janie had always been headstrong and ambitious. It might even be between, he reasoned, if Janie were sent out on her own. She seemed clever enough to get what she wanted.

She closed her ledger books, went to her mirror. Business was good. Satisfied with her appearance, she left her room, went downstairs. The usual number of patrons vied for elbow room at the bar, a few tried their luck on the green felt of the gaming tables on the main floor. Not a bad

crowd for an afternoon. She smiled at Lily, one of her girls, one she trusted as a friend. To her surprise. Lily turned away without returning her smile. Anna went to the bar for a drink. The barman served her businesslike, dismissing her attempt at friendly conversation. Something was wrong.

Lily came up beside her, spoke lightly. "Your boyfriend is here." "Oh? Is he all right?" "Oh yes, he's just fine," answered Lily. Anna always respected Lily for

her frankness and honesty. Lily didn't let her down now. Anna set down her drink, hurried down the hall to stop before Janie's

door. She stood, confused, debating whether she should go in. What was he doing in there? What was she doing out here? The door opened slowly inwards as she hesitated. Langton stood at the doorway, adjusting his shirt, stuffing the tail down into his pants.

Anna stood in shock, saw past him to Janie's bed. Janie lay across the sheets, only partially covered by a tangle of silken cloth, in lurid repose. Her hair was tousled, her eyes were half open. She gazed at the ceiling, her fingers in her mouth.

Anna and Langton faced each other for two, three less she bolted, ran up the stairs, closed the door to her room.

Langton straightened his clothes, tightened his should the house. He had thought all of him had died inside w killed. Now he knew, as long as a man is still alive, there

wall of his office. Langton's face peered back at him

enough to touch, a third time Dineen had drew a he fancy house. After him at his mercy, set for the kill and lost him when he missed his punch. It seemed Langton was mocking him, forever shifting, dancing, just out of his reach.

Was he meant to catch Langton? It seemed Dineen's whole life, the force that pushed him, kept him drawing every breath, was his hate, his need to extinguish this flame that burned deep inside him. When he the side of the building and down the next street to freedom. Sully looked up from his seat behind the bar, gave Langton a grudging caught Langton, would Dineen be the same? Would life go on, having Langton's footsteps echoed faintly through the night canyons of San

Dineen knew he must eliminate this foe, the only one who eluded him question when so many other enemies languished in dark cells, or rotted in graves, victims of Dineen's unwavering dedication to the it was over, with Langton gone, he would retire hile Langton still lived, still plagued enjoy the peace he crave

Dineen left his office, walked down the han, door to Mr. Valentine's office, let himself in. He was expected rung, his mouth was dry. Valentine was angry, and justifiable

When the papers hit the streets, Wells Fargo's stock f points on the San Francisco stock exchange. Wells Far a proud, mighty lion in the West Coast business world, was no longe

Valentine did not blame Dineen openly. He did not need to "Why did you send Manning by himself, Cam?"

"Langton wouldn't have come close, Mr. Valentine. He smelled a trap. I wouldn't have had a chance." Valentine set his cigar down into the ashtray. He leaned for and in his

seat, peered at Dineen through the curls of smoke. "I don't think you understand, Cameron. You had a job to do you were

to bring those diamonds here to San Francisco without any inc wouldn't be in this mess if you had safeguarded the shipment." "But Langton..." protested Cameron Dineen. "Langton hell! You set a trap for him you couldn't sprin forgetting, Cam, you have to protect our shipments first. First the

company job," he emphasized, "then you can settle your ac "But you don't know how dangerous he is. He's taken more n

Wells Fargo than any four other men!" "Yes I know," continued Valentine. "That's why I'm thin taking you off the job. He knows you too well, sees through your tricks. We might need someone new, someone with a fresh approach, let his personal passions conflict with his professional work getting on, Cam, maybe you should take a desk job."

Dineen had his pocketbook out, took out his badge. W special investigator. He laid it down on Valentine's desk, spot a past the

"Well sir, if that's the way you feel..." "Easy, Cameron, keep your badge. I have a feeling he's su

you might have another crack at him vet." He opened a drawer in his desk, took out a small pouch. He drawstring, watched the tinted stones tumble into his hand, be fingers. Both Dineen and he were silent, absorbed, as the poured ice white onto the thick dark teak desktop. Valentine lossed up as

the last gem sparkled to a stop at his wrist. "I've heard that Hartley's been talking to the papers about the b. He's trying to discredit us. We'll have to silence him somehow. Don't we have a file on him somewhere?"

"Yes, sir, down in Records on the bottom floor," answered D "Everybody else has gone home. Why don't you fetch it for the, Cam? I'd like to take a look at it."

Relieved, Dineen let himself out, closing the door behind hi The only other people in the building were the janitorial state clarification allways, dusting furniture, emptying wastebaskets. Dineen not explore the property pass, pushing a cart piled high with brooms and hallways, dusting furniture, emptying wastebaskets. Dineen nec to let one janitor pass, pushing a cart piled high with brooms brushes, and continued down the hallway to the stairs.

thought, everything seems clean enough up here. The janitor, clad in white cotton overalls and peaked has slowly down the hall, stopped outside Valentine's office surposefully, he opened the door, let himself in pulled his can after purposefully, he opened the door, let himself in, pulled his car

Valentine looked up, shook his head. "you're a little late, f friends were in here just after five o'clock." "Sorry, sir, I'm new here."

He made no move to leave. Still moving slowly, he turned closed it, pushed the lock. "Get out of here! I'll have you fired! What's your name?"

The tall form turned, even more slowly, bringing to bear a bug "The name's Langton, Mr. Valentine."

Valentine froze. His throat worked, then his arms moved attempt to conceal the puddle of diamonds between his elbows "Well, what do we have here? This make my work a lot Valentine. Much obliged." Langton's eyes shifted, caught

Valentine's right hand jerked for his desk drawer, ripped i palm clamped around the butt of a derringer, brought it quic But Langton was faster. His right hand holding the Colt sw short circle, slamming the piece against Valentine's temple. began to slump sideways, even as the small derringer spat for ball passed by Langton's head, singeing his white janitor's small gun cluttered noisily to the floor.

Langton had to hurry. The element of surprise was disappeared when Valentine's gun went off. Dineen must h would be even now the stairs. He gathered th them into the tor's unife He drew his gun from his holster, stood back. Aimed for the

The lock was bent, twisted. But still it held. He aimed, fired ock gave. Dineen pushed the door open, rushed inside. was slumped over his desk, moaning, groggy, comi

. The wind blew from the open window t into the night. It was tied firmly

ad silhouette in the couldn't m His fingers smashing the gas Is fired once, twice, heard h mark. His last shot ricocheted

the wall at the alley's mouth, na missing the dark shape that spun around the turn and out of range around

Francisco's streets.