

The IRON CLAW

by Arthur Stringer

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SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island Pallardi intrigues Mrs. Golden into an appearance of evil which causes Golden to capture and torture the Italian by branding his face and crushing his hand. Pallardi opens the dyke gates and floods the island and in the general rush to escape the flood kidnaps Golden's six-year-old daughter Margery. Twelve years later in New York a Masked One calling himself "The Hammer of God" rescues an eighteen-year-old girl from the cadet Casavanti, to whom Jules Legar has delivered her, and takes her to the home of Enoch Golden, millionaire, whence she is recaptured by Legar. Legar and Stein are discovered by Manley, Golden's secretary, setting fire to Golden's buildings, but escape. Margery's mother fruitlessly implores Enoch Golden to find their daughter. The Masked One again takes Margery away from Legar. Legar loots the Third National bank, but again the Laughing Mask frustrates his plans.

SIXTH EPISODE

THE SPOTTED WARNING

Enoch Golden had never formed the habit of taking orders into his confidence. And when events came into his life which seemed to leave him more and more dependent on his immediate associates he betrayed an occasional tendency to focus his nebulous resentment against that situation on the exasperatingly imperturbable figure of David Manley.

"Young man," he said, fixing his secretary with a steely eye, "I came to this decision twenty long years ago, and nothing is going to change it. That woman was sent from my home, and she will never enter it again."

Manley, looking down at the note still held in his hand, thought of the troubled and tear-stained face of the girl who had so recently clung to his arm and asked him to plead her cause. And the memory of Margery Golden brought fresh courage to him.

"But this woman who was once your own wife is only asking for a glimpse of her own daughter again. Surely that is asking little enough!"

"And I repeat that I won't allow it. I have saved my daughter from the dangers that woman's wrong surrounded her with. I have saved her from—"

"Have you?" interrupted Manley, deliberately meeting the older man's stare.

Any retort the older man was about to utter remained unspoken, for at that moment a soft-treading footman entered the room and crossed to the desk with a salver of mail in his hand. Manley, looking up, eyed that servant resentfully, and with a touch of suspicion. This intruder, he promptly surmised, was a new figure in the household retinue.

"Be so good as to knock when you enter this room," was the young secretary's sharp command.

"Very good, sir," answered the new footman, scarcely raising his eyes.

"H'h!" Golden scoffed, looking up from the letter which he had just opened. "Since you're so ready to ask favors, here's another friend to ask them for. Here's the captain of the circle you're so ready to champion! But instead of asking favors you see, he demands them!"

He tossed the folded sheet angrily across the desk top. Manley took it up and read it.

"Your happiness hangs on one small scrap of paper. That paper is the portion of the Windward Island chart which you still hold. Unless this is delivered to me, and delivered as I have already directed, the Spotted Warning will come to your daughter Margery. And the meaning of the Spotted Warning she already understands. JULES LEGAR."

"And what do you intend to do?" asked Manley, still staring down at this strange note.

"Do you suppose," retorted Golden, with a slightly tremulous finger already on the bell, "that I'm going to



Traces the Telephone Circuits.

empty my safe to every blackie who bundles about a catch-word that belongs to little Italy?"

"But what earthly use is this piece of chart to you?" asked the younger man.

"It's use to me is not the point at issue," doggedly retorted the older man.

"But one point at issue is at least the safety of your daughter," contended Manley, remembering only too well the events of the immediate past.

"And that, young man, is a responsibility which still rests on my own shoulders," was Golden's curt retort as the new footman stepped into the room in answer to his summons. "Tell Miss Margery to come here at once."

As Margery quietly stepped into the room Golden stared at her for a moment, and then sank back into his

chair. Manley at the same time placed a chair for the wondering girl and motioned her into it. She sat watching her father as he took up the letter which lay on the desk.

"What is the Spotted Warning?" he suddenly demanded.

The girl, with her troubled eyes bent on the grim-faced face of her father, did not speak at once. But over her quiet face came a change, an almost semaphoric flash of fear.

"The Spotted Warning?" she repeated, in a little more than a whisper.

"Yes, what is that supposed to mean?"

"It is a warning of death," was the girl's quietly enunciated reply. Manley could detect the tremor that sped through her body. "And it means that you have been hearing from Legar again!"

"But what does Legar mean by it?" asked Manley. "Why should he use such a phrase?"

"It is a warning that comes to the person who is about to die. It is a message of warning, spotted black. It is the last word they send. And I have heard them say it has never failed—never once!"

But the indomitable old fighter at the desk was once more on his feet.

"That Sicilian black-magic stuff can't intimidate me," he thundered out. "And Spotted Warning or no Spotted Warning, I'll never give in to Legar! He can shower his Spotted threats on this house until it's snowed under, but by God, I'll fight him to the last ditch."

He turned to his daughter. "Until this Calabrian brigand farce is played out, I'm going to send you into the country. I'm going to send you where you'll be well guarded and well out of harm's way. And I guess the sooner you get out there the better!"

"But where are you sending me?" asked the girl. Instead of watching her father, however, her eyes were on Manley's face as she spoke.

"I'm going to send you out to your Aunt Agatha's on Long Island!" was his curt response as he swung about to his secretary. "And while Margery's getting her things together, Manley, you send Train, the chauffeur, here to me for his instructions."

Manley, promptly crossing to the door, was startled to find the figure of the new footman standing close beside it as it was swung open.

Ten minutes later, when Manley returned to the library with Train at his heels, he found Enoch Golden staring down at a sheet of paper lying on his desk. At the center of this paper stood a large black blot.

"It's the Spotted Warning," said Golden, his heavy face furrowed with a trouble deeper than he was willing to admit. "But how, in God's name, did it get here?"

Manley, after staring at the strangely-spotted sheet, stared even more intently at the ceiling directly above the point where the paper lay on the desk-top. A momentary look of satisfaction flitted across his face as Golden turned to him with a crisp command to precede Margery to Cedarton and there explain both the reasons for her visit and the precautions to be exercised during that visit.

"And as for you, Train," continued the grim-eyed old millionaire, turning to his chauffeur, "I want you to take my daughter out to Cedarton as quickly as your car and the speed laws will let you carry her. There are special reasons for this, remember. And from the moment you leave this house, don't let anything or anybody stop you."

Thirty minutes later Margery Golden, surrounded by her bags, sat back in the swaying automobile, puzzled over this new and unexpected turn in the tide of events. And as mile by mile swam by beneath the hurrying wheels, the keen-eyed man in the driving seat found a load lifted from his own shoulders.

Yet at the next turn in the road his light-heartedness suddenly departed from that keen-eyed driver. For as he took this turn and speeded up along a dustless stretch of open highway, he saw a figure run out to the middle of the road. It was not the fact that this figure stood directly in his path that most disturbed him. It was the discovery, as he drew down on it, that this figure wore a yellow band of cloth across the eyes, with a moon-shaped apron falling almost to the end of the nose, that brought the redoubtable Train's heart suddenly up in his mouth. But even while that figure remained stubbornly and directly in his path, motioning for him to stop, he remembered his orders. Instead of slackening his speed, in fact, he increased it, increased it to the limit of the engine's power. And he would surely have ridden down that would-be interceptor had not the latter, at the last moment, leaped quickly aside.

Margery Golden, as he did so, half rose in her seat, for she, too, had caught sight of that mysteriously-shadowed face.

"But that was the Laughing Mask!" she cried aloud, in wonder, as they swept on.

"The what, ma'am?" asked Train, without looking back, for he had every need now of watching the road.

She did not answer him at the moment, for she was staring back, trying to catch a second glimpse of the stranger in his strangely-fashioned domino. But he had already disappeared from sight. And as she turned about again she sat regarding the whipcorded breadth of Train's wide back and wondering how she could make plain to him just who and what this mysterious righter of wrong might be.

She was startled by a quick cry of

warning bursting from that driver's throat. Staring ahead, she saw that still another effort was being made to intercept them. This time it was a man with a red flag. What that flag stood for, waved so authoritatively before them, she could not comprehend. Her doubts, however, were not shared by Train, for the car was again humming with its suddenly-accelerated motion. Instead of stopping, it swept past the man with the crimson ensign of warning, swept past him so close that its fender-end slapped against the flagstick itself as he repeated his lusty shout of command. But that command was more or less lost on Train, a little dizzy now with the sheer drunkenness of speed.

"Stop!" mocked the driver as he raced on. "I'm going to stop for nothing like this side of hell!"

Yet that valiant boast was little more than the articulation of mortal pride so often prelude to mortal disaster. For, bearing down on them along that lonely stretch of roadway they could already see a second car. The point about this car that worried Train was that it was not approaching them as a well-behaved car should approach a comrade vehicle, but verily lurched drunkenly from one side of the road to the other. Even Margery, as she leaned forward, puzzling over these strange movements, realized that peril was involved in passing a vehicle so uncertain of its course. At the same time, too, she could hear from far behind her the prolonged and warning cry of an auto horn, wailing disturbingly through the quiet air of the late afternoon.

She glanced back for only a second, dimly conscious that they were being followed by a roadster, a good half-mile behind. But she had no time to give thought to this discovery, for the drunken black touring car, swerving from side to side as it came, was now close upon them. And Train, puzzled as he was, had not for a second slowed down his own machine. The next moment they had met, head-on.

There was a crash of metal and glass, a rending of honey-comb radiators and coppered fenders. Human bodies erupted from seats, rolled invertebrate on the dusty road, lay stunned and motionless in the clouded

smiled again, more happily, as she had helped the girl into a softly-lighted room and gently told her that she must rest. And there had been something ineffably soothing in the quiet going and coming of that quiet-eyed woman, before sleep brought relief to the shaken and throbbing body on the ivory-white bed.

The Tower of Destiny. Enoch Golden, anxious and worn-out, sat waiting for some further word as to the fate of his daughter Margery. Nothing had come to him since Train's startling message of the collision and the even more startling news of the girl's mysterious disappearance. Unwilling as Golden was to surrender to despair, he felt more and more that Legar, and Legar alone, was responsible for this latest catastrophe.

Still again he hoarsely demanded long-distance, and still again he called for his sister's house at Cedarton. That quiet-voiced sister, for years all but a stranger to her grim and granite-willed brother, told him for the third time that they had as yet had no news of Margery. David Manley, she reported, had been there with her, had been there, indeed, both once in the afternoon and once in the evening, but for some reason, which the quiet-voiced woman would not quite comprehend, had abruptly and excitedly taken his departure.

These words brought small consolation to Golden. And he would have caught even less consolation from a talk taking place at almost the same moment over the servants' telephone below stairs. Part of that guarded conversation was carried on by Wrench, the new footman, and much of it had to do with the very situation so disturbing the aged millionaire in the room above. For it was Legar explaining that a masked stranger at the last moment had snatched the girl from their hands and had apparently carried her off to some hiding place of his own. This was followed by the command to deliver still another message to Enoch Golden, with the final warning that every wire leading into the Golden house must be cut as soon as possible.

The new footman, in obedience to these orders, quietly traced out the

surrounding that bungalow, it was because he had made the sudden discovery that Legar himself was in the neighborhood. Nor was it hard for him to guess the reason for that master-criminal's invasion of those sequestered grounds. And Manley, promptly deciding to stalk the stalker himself, was rewarded by overhearing enough of Legar's plans, as the latter hurriedly issued his instructions to two of his confederates near the roadside, to realize the necessity of at once getting in touch with Enoch Golden. Whatever happened, he felt, it was his duty to warn Margery's father that Legar himself had acknowledged his ignorance of the girl's whereabouts and had expressed his intention of tricking the chart out of its present owner's hands.

Ten minutes of frantic efforts at a telephone booth in the nearby village, however, convinced Manley of the impossibility of getting in touch with Golden by wire. Every effort to reach the house by that means proved fruitless. And time was precious.

Manley's first thought, in his dilemma, was to commandeer some nearby car. Yet nothing but a racer, he remembered as he snatched out his watch, could get him to the Central Tower building in time. And racers, he bitterly remembered, did not grow on bushes.

His next thought, however, took him tearing down the village street like a madman. For the name of "Cedarton" had brought into his mind yet another name, the name of "Bobby Ewart." And Bobby Ewart, who had his workshop and hangar on the southerly outskirts of that village, had been the first of the Racquet club members to forsake automobiles for aviation, and startle Long Island by his early morning hydroplane maneuvers over suburban golf courses and country homes. He had been the first civilian volunteer for the federal air scouts and at San Diego had twice broken his own altitude record established at Pensacola, and was now immured in the mysterious task of fashioning a stabilizer for monoplane, a stabilizer, Manley remembered, which was receiving sympathetic attention from certain navy officials in Washington. And the intrepid Bobby, he also remembered, seemed the one person who could still save the day for him.

Instead of finding this same intrepid Bobby poring over blue prints of stabilizer parts, however, the breathless Manley found his old-time friend in a rattan club chair tranquilly playing chess with his maiden aunt. In two minutes the breathless newcomer had explained to the somewhat astounded young chess player a situation which brought a brighter light into the latter's boyish eyes.

"The point is," cried Manley, "could you get me there. Could you make a landing at night?"

"Yes, I can get you there! But what have we got to make a landing on?"

"The main building of the Central tower stops at the eighteenth story. That gives us a flat roof of several hundred yards. Could you make it on that?"

"Not unless it was lighted!" explained Ewart, shouting for his mechanic as he rounded the gloomy corner of the hangar itself. "But it is lighted," Manley told him. "It gets the light from the tower itself, and the whole cornice line is strung with electric, the same as the Singer building!"

Ewart's finger, touching a button, threw a white flood across the vaulted roof of the building. A touch on another button sent the great doors swinging open. Manley looked at his watch. Then he shook his head.

"It's too late," he proclaimed. But Ewart and his mechanic were already at work on the wide-winged monstrosity nestled under its metal roof like a pterodactyl in a cave.

"Get aboard," commanded Ewart. "We're going to try for it anyway!" He turned to his helper. "Hey, Brown, throw my friend up that fur coat of yours!"

"But what speed can you get out of this machine?" asked Manley as he clambered aboard the chassis and struggled with his seat-straps.

Ewart, who had been stooping over his engines, looked up.

"I got one hundred and four an hour out of her this morning," he off-handedly announced. "But I think I can push her up to one hundred and ten."

Manley's heart beat faster.

"Then there's a chance!" he cried. "A fighting chance."

A sudden sense of chill caused Manley to clutch for the fur coat thrown in at his feet, and struggle into it. As he did so the earth seemed suddenly to fall away from him. Villages became spangled checkerboards of lights. Highways became winding strings of pearls.

Manley forgot the chillness striking into his bones. He forgot Margery Golden and Legar. He forgot the origin of his mission that brought him winging through the midnight heavens. He forgot the fact of his own puny existence and the trivial ends to which it had been given over. All these he forgot, completely and utterly, until Ewart, sweeping out along the twinkling shore lights of South Brooklyn, circled north again where the brazen figure of Liberty guarded the upper bay, and dropped lower along that tapering point of gloom where Battery park nosed like a ship's prow into the tides of the Atlantic. They were still planing down, gently, like a settling sea bird, with the tilted planes veering a little westward to escape the beetling skyscrapers along the canyon of lower Broadway.

Manley thought, for a moment, that Ewart had misjudged his position. Then he felt sure that Ewart had also misjudged his height, that his stabilizing fin was already too low to clear the flat roof that abutted the light-strewn tower itself.

But Ewart, obviously, knew what he was about. For he took that oblong of flat gloom outlined in electric with a gentle upward undulation like the upward swoop of a bluebird alighting on a maple tree. But that arduous upward swoop was absorbed much of its momentum, for Ewart had plainly remembered that their running

space was limited. But even with this precaution there remained a perilous paucity of runway, for before the bounding and quivering organism of nickel and steel and canvas came to a stop it lurched head-on into a wall of the tower itself.

Manley could hear the crash of glass as the damper plane at the nose of the quivering chassis brought up short against one of the tower windows. He was dimly aware of half-tumbling and half-climbing through a network of wooden studs and steel piano-wire



They Fought With Gasps and Grunts.

stays and cross-guys. He was vaguely conscious of Ewart calling out that everything was all right, that there was no damage which a half-hour's work couldn't patch up.

But Manley, in truth, was thinking little of either Ewart or his flier. All his thoughts, as he climbed frantically up through the broken tower window, were revolving about the problem as to whether or not he was too late. And that all-vital question still obsessed him as he mounted the iron treads of the stairway leading to the tower top, panting up flight after flight until his lungs seemed bursting for want of air, and his over-driven heart beat drumlike against his rib-cage. And as he reached the top and flung out through the narrow door opening on the campanile-like balcony crowning that skyscraping structure, he knew, even as he saw two figures standing there before him, that he was too late.

That much he knew, even before he caught at enough breath to call out a warning to Enoch Golden or swing about and spring for the second figure, already shrinking back in the shadow of that many-columned cupola. For in the hand of the second figure Manley had already caught sight of a tall-tale sheet of paper. It was a yellowed and time-worn scrap of paper, and little more, but to Manley it had become the emblem and pennon of a desperate cause, a flag to be rallied round and fought for, to the last ditch and the last gasp, as harried soldiers fight through the smoke of battle for their colors.

And Manley, as he clinched with Legar's stalwart emissary, fought for it. Nor was his opponent one to be despised. The two men fought along the crest of that midnight tower as two mountain lions might fight along the brink of an Andean precipice. They fought with gasps and grunts, with strange guttural sounds, with teeth bared and face distorted, blind to the blows that were given and taken, unconscious of the fact that the very paper for which they were fighting had already fallen to the cupola floor, and from there had been blown by the north wind to the furthest edge of the cornice circling the stone column supports.

Golden himself was already reaching for that paper when Legar's confederate caught sight of it, broke from Manley's grasp and dove bodily for where it lay. Manley, a second later, followed him. There, half astride the balustrade of coppered wood painted to look like marble, the fight was renewed. Each crouched low as he fought, drunkenly conscious now of the abyss that yawned so close to his feet. But still they fought.

Then a second breeze of night breeze, sighing through the tower top, carried the paper slowly along the cornice edge. It was Legar's man who saw it as it moved. He wrenched away, twisted about, and caught at it as it fell. But already he was too late. It lifted with the wind, drifted and eddied slowly about in the moonlight, and floated swayingly down into the darker canyon of Broadway, where it was soon lost to sight.

But neither Manley nor his enemy saw that descent, for Legar's man as he lurched suddenly forward threw all his weight on the outstanding copper cornice, painted white to look like marble. And it was a cornice made only for ornamentation, and not for support. For its fastenings surrendered to the strain of that suddenly-imposed weight and the buckling segment of copper swayed outward as the desperately-clinging fingers clutched at its edges.

Manley, hanging to the balustrade with one arm, reached out to grasp that buckling strip of metal to which a helpless man was hanging sheer over space. He caught at it, even as Golden caught at his straining shoulders to hold him steady.

But a hold, stronger than the will of man, seemed to suck the metal slowly, inevitably, out of the clutch of his tired fingers. Then the last fastenings gave, the strained and twisted sheet-metal tore slowly away, and the black shadow of a man fell like a plummet to the iron and stone of Broadway, three hundred feet below.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CHANGES OF THIRTY YEARS

Period Not Much in the Span of Time, but Much in the Life of Man.

He left the little town 30 years ago, and had not returned to it until the other day. Then he went back and spent a week with his friends at the barefooted days, and now he does nothing else but talk about it. He tells how he met boys whom he went in swimming with and how they have changed, and girls whom he played with in sand piles and the mud—and how they have changed.

Thirty years is a brief span of time. It doesn't amount to much in the records of the world. One can hardly tell whether a tree is 300 years old or only 270—the 30 years making so little difference. The scientists are uncertain whether certain strata of the earth's crust were 30,000,000 years in the making or 60,000,000—30,000,000 years being such a short length of time in the making of the world. But 30 years away from your boyhood life—30 years' absence from the familiar scenes of youth—aye, it is an eternity it seems, remarks a writer in the Columbus Dispatch.

Gray hair has come into the heads of all—your own included. It came so gradually into your own you have failed to take note of it. But in the head of the young man you knew 30 years ago—jet black then, snowy white now—you wonder how it happened.

The lines about your eyes and mouth have crept along so gradually you dispute the camera when you have your photograph taken. You do not believe the glassy eye of the thing has caught you as you are, and the photographer, if he is wise, eradicates the lines and makes you look a few years younger than you are. You see the lines about the eyes and the mouth of the fellow you knew when a boy, and you comment about them. But 30 years is a short period of time.

MR. SMOOTH'S NEAT GETAWAY

Insurance Agent With Keen Eye to Business Came Near "Putting His Foot in It."

Slipping on an untenanted banana skin, the homely young woman sat on the pavement with an unmusical splash. With efficient presence of mind, Eustace Smooth, agent for the General and Particular Insurance company, slipped on another peel and sat down beside her, with two muttered curses.

"Accidents will happen on the best regulated pavements, won't they?" he observed with a snarl. "Oh, well, luckily I happen to be an insurance agent, and I can insure you against slipping on banana peels or even on a cake of ice for the small sum of \$14 a week, and the first time you slip after being insured, one of our automobiles, with absolutely no advertising matter on the outside, will take you home for \$7.20, or, if you prefer, to any old hospital."

"The idea!" scoffed the enraged woman. "It's too much!"

"But think of the risk we run," pursued Smooth. "Now, other kinds of insurance, such as insurance against being bitten by wild beasts, come as low as \$19 a month."

"I'll take one of them," she said promptly. "I always was a great one for bargains." And she handed him her card, which read: "Miss, Kutie, Wild Animal Trainer, Lions, Tigers and Leopards a Specialty."

"Excuse me a moment, I gotta see a man," stammered Eustace Smooth.

Uncertainty of Opinion.

Don't be sure of your opinion. It is the verdict of a few facts and yet there are thousands of facts that give no assistance in forming it. If there were no other proof of the uncertainty of opinion, the fact that it causes so much dispute is sufficient. Truth causes no dispute. Think of two men quarrelling over two and two make four, action and recreation are equal, water seeks its own level, or the golden rule. Men can love one another on the platform of truth, but as soon as they make a platform of opinion they are at swords' points. It is so in religion, politics, industry, society. There is no true truth in anything that is not based on love. When we see men quarrelling about religion they are the devil's own agents. They will never get truth that way. Truth comes through the heart. The three things that combine in God are faith, truth, love, and the greatest of these is love, for without it the other two are impossible. When it makes you mad to have someone differ with you, go off and pray for forgiveness.—Columbus Ohio State Journal.

Monks' Most Precious Relic.

The relic which the monastery of the Greek church of Vatopethi on Mount Athos cherishes most tenderly is the girdle of the Virgin Mary. The monks give a categorical history of it from the presentation by the Queen of Heaven to the doubting Thomas until its recovery during the Greek revolution from a European consul, to whom the Turks had sold it.

If the earlier stages of the story are involved in some obscurity, the last six or seven hundred years of it are unquestionable. The girdle has now been divided into three parts, one of which is never allowed to leave Vatopethi. It occupies a little domed chapel in the courtyard. The other two parts often go out on tour, especially when invited by the faithful; and many are the miracles reported to have been performed by them.

Criminals Among Bees.

Bees, while noted as workers, sometimes have lazy spells, when they indulge in thieving. There are instances where whole colonies have attacked a hive, assaulted the sentinels and inmates and sacked the establishment. Bees do this repeatedly usually and by becoming habitual criminals.

Proper Place.

Manager—I would like to get a man of iron character for this play. Critic—Then why not go to a type foundry?