The IRON CLAW by ARTHUR STRINGER

(This serial story is being shown in motion pictures every Wednesday and Thursday at Colonial theatre. Read it in the Observer and see it at the Colonial Theatre.)

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward island Palidori 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. Palidori opens the dyke gates and floods the island and in the general rush to escape the flood kidnaps Golden's six-year-old daughter Margory. Twelve year's 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. Margory's mother fruitlessly implores Enoch Golden to find their daughter. The Masked One again takes Margory away from Legar. Legar loots the Third National bank, but again the Laughing Mask frustrates his plans.

FIFTH EPISODE

THE INTERVENTION OF TITO

David Manley was not altogether proud of his day's work. As he sat tied and bound on the rough brick floor beneath the Owl's Nest that once flippant-minded young man even acknowledged that things looked rather bad for him. He had been made a prisoner. The iron claw of Legar had reached suddenly out and closed about him.

But David Manley did not altogether give up. As he lay there, sore in body, but even more battered in mind, he still spasmodically struggled with the cords that held him hand and foot.

The solitude of that unsavory den did not add to his comfort. The mere fact that Legar could see fit to leave a prisoner thus unguarded impressed the prisoner with the fact that his one-armed enemy was only too well assured of his power. And the more Manley thought of Legar and his methods the more that sinister figure seems to bewilder him. He knew that Legar was the unrelenting and eternal enemy of Enoch Golden, just as he had been the enemy of Golden's daughter Margory.

The thought of Margory directed Manley's mind back to the earlier events of that strange day. He recalled his long talk with that quiet-eyed girl in the quiet-toned shadows of the Golden library. It had been the first talk between them into which the personal note had entered. He had enjoyed that talk, for he had felt, as it progressed, that the girl had begun to realize he was her friend, that he wanted to be her friend.

But the quietness of the Golden home had proved to be nothing more than a lull which precedes the sudden storm. For, five minutes after he had left the smiling girl, the Golden butler, with terror in his eyes, had come running to him saying there was a stranger in the house, a stranger who had been seen lurking about the halls and had promptly disappeared at the sight of one of the servants. So Manley, forgetting everything else, had promptly joined in the search for that mysterious intruder. And his first thought, after doing so, had been for Margory Golden.

Hurrying to the library to make sure of her safety, he had found her seated at her father's desk, quietly talking over the telephone. And there had been little in that scene not suggestive of tranquillity. For blinking placidly down from its perch beside her had stood Tito, Margory Golden's newly acquired parrot, for which Manley himself had small love. This feeling was based, not so much on the malevolent air of wisdom surrounding that green-bodied filcher of human phrases, as on the somewhat disturbing trick, taught it by some earlier master, of seeking out gas jets and turning them on the moment it was freed from its chain.

Yet as it had stood close beside the girl so busily talking over the telephone it had seemed as companionably innocent as a canary. And it had turned to blink sagely at Manley as the girl, apparently unconscious of his presence, had crossed to the mahogany-faced vault set in the library wall and proceeded to open its ponderous door. This had startled Manley not a little, for the combination of that vault was a secret jealously guarded by Golden, a secret unknown to Manley himself. It was not until she stood with the massive door swung open that Manley had confronted her. But she showed no embarrassment at his sudden interruption.

"My father has just phoned from Philadelphia," she explained. "There are certain papers he must have for his conference with the Regent Trust company tomorrow."

"But when did you find out how to open that door?" had been Manley's inquiry.

"Two minutes ago, over the telephone," had been the girl's reply.

"Then the sooner that door is shut and locked again the better," he had warned her.

"Why?" she had asked, for the first time conscious of his excitement.

"Because there's an unknown man hiding somewhere in this house, and heaven only knows what he's after, in times like these!"

Even as he had spoken Manley had detected an unnatural fullness about the portiere draping the side door to the library. And on the polished parquet floor at the bottom of that portiere the toe of a man's shoe had been plainly visible. Yet Golden's secretary had waited until the girl had closed and locked the vault door. Then he had leaped for the figure behind the drapery.

But that intruder behind the drapery had apparently not been altogether unconscious of the danger confronting him. He had at the same moment side-stepped nimbly through the quickly opened door, throwing an approaching and suddenly hysterical housemaid aside as he had swept past her. The redoubtable Wilson, who had also attempted to block his exit, had even more promptly gone down, knocked flat by one fierce blow. It had been then, and then only, that Manley discovered the identity of the intruder. He had caught sight of the scarred face, which even an ample beard failed to screen. He had seen the right arm of wood which ended in its sinister iron hook, and all doubt as to his enemy had vanished.

But this discovery had in no way interfered with Manley's pursuit of that audacious intruder.

It had not been a pretty fight, that hand-to-hand contest between the slim-bodied youth and the scar-faced exploiter of evil, but it had been a desperate one. As Manley, pressing stubbornly on, had struggled to close in on his opponent, Legar had discreetly and nimbly backed away until he found the double house door itself barring his farther retreat. Thereupon he had promptly shattered the plate-glass backing the iron grill work on the hinges, and had actually swung one of these doors open before Manley could gather himself together and spring bodily on his escaping enemy.

They had gone down the broad steps together, locked arm in arm, fighting and clawing as ferociously as midnight cats in a tenement court. And Manley, with one hand on Legar's leathery throat, would surely have won, had not a closed car glided up to the curb along which they were writhing and panting and rolling. From that car a yellow-faced Italian known as Scoop had taken a prompt and active part in the encounter. He had withheld finalities, however, until Manley was uppermost. Then, with a quickly drawn "billy" he had blackjacked that youth into utter indifference as to Legar and mysteriously waiting limousine and all the rest of the world.

Before Manley's senses had come back to him he and the green-feathered parrot had been tossed bodily into the closed car, and, three minutes before the arrival of the police for whom the white-faced girl in the library had so frantically telephoned, that mysterious limousine had speeded off into the night, carrying not only Legar but the youth who had been so presumptious as to attempt to interfere with Legar's exploits.

But Manley did not altogether give up. His heart still had the resilience of youth. He still believed in his star.

What fretted Manley most, however, was his lack of freedom. Rolling a little over on his side, he studied minutely the rough brick floor on which he lay. After this inspection he wormed his way carefully from side to side, lying face down and trying each row of exposed bricks with his shoe toe, in the hope of finding one of them loose.

He had elaborately tested eleven rows before he found any reason for hope in this direction. A chill of excitement ran through his tired body, in fact, as he discovered one brick which seemed less securely embedded in cement than were its fellows. He worked at it patiently, laboriously, kicking away small particles of plaster, thumping it with his boot heel, prying at it with his sole until it rocked free in its row. Then came the even sterner task of shifting it from its place. This he did by turning about and lying close to it, on his side, so that the fingers of his tightly imprisoned hand might come in contact with its edges. Time after time it fell back, but in the end he triumphed.

Yet it was not this unearthed brick which interested him. His attention was directed towards the rough-edged parallelogram where that brick had originally rested, for the corners of this opening, he soon realized, provided him with a saw edge which in time might serve to abrade and cut through the stoutest of cotton rope. But the consolation of this hope did not stay with him long. For even as he started to work, his movements were interrupted by the sound of a key in the heavy iron lock on the door that shut him in. He rolled over quickly, twisting about so that his apparently inert body covered both the loosened brick and the spot from which it had been taken. He continued to lie there as though in a sleep of exhaustion, for his veiled eyes had already caught sight of the two heavy-featured ruffians advancing into the room.

"Let the poor boob sleep," warned the larger man, in a husky whisper. "He's goin' to cash in before mornin'!"

"But I'm sick o' markin' time down in this rat hole. Why can't Legar get back here where he belongs and do his own stickup work?"

"I tell you the doc's up to the Golden house makin' his haul when the coast's clear! And if you wake that king there you'll have to cut out the red-eye and keep busy chokin' off his holler!"

Manley could hear their shuffling feet as they recrossed the rough flooring and then the scrape and rasp of the rusty lock as they once more turned the key in the door. But the moment they were gone he was once more busy with the cotton rope about his wrists, for what he had overheard increased his passion for liberty. When a man, however, is still youthfully blind enough to believe in his start, to nurse the delusion that some special genius has singled him out and watches over him, he is not easily discouraged. Yet discouragement came, and came in a form most unexpected, even before Manley's hands were free.

It came, in fact, in the form of a green-bodied parrot creeping stealthily through the rusty cross-bars grilling the transom above the locked door. He watched the bird slip into the room, climb along the rusty iron gas jet, deliberately turn it on.

Manley knew what this meant, and it spurred him to even more frantic efforts to saw through the cords, still holding him a prisoner, for already the fumes of the escaping gas were reaching his nostrils.

When one strand of it had parted, and he had uncoiled the rest of it from his ankles, his head was swimming and his legs were unable to support him. So he crossed the room on his hands and knees, caught at the rusty gas pipe for support and painfully drew himself upright. His trembling hand went out, found the gas jet, and turned it off. And the next moment he fell face down on the rough floor, and lay there in a gray daze of weakness.

How long he lay there he could not tell. But he was aroused by the sound of thick voices from the outer chamber, punctuated by the shrill cries of an angry and scolding woman. He pulled himself together and possessed himself of the brick bat, as a weapon.

He waited, scarcely breathing, as the door was flung open. So quick, however, was the entrance of the first intruder that Manley could not lift his missile before the darkness had swallowed up that shifting shadow. But standing in the lighted doorway was a second man, crouched low and leaning forward with blinking eyes, a blue-barreled navy revolver in his hand. Manley, eying that evil face as a sharpshooter eyes his target, let fly with his

Sat Tied and Bound in the Owl's Nest.

poised brick, and let fly with all his force.

The stooping man went down like a clouted rabbit, without a sound. But even as he fell the first intruder, at the far end of the room, struck a match. And at that second figure Manley let drive with the only missile at hand.

The heavy glass lamp, hurled true, sent man and match against the case side in a shower of oil and broken glass. But Manley did not wait to witness the result of that second assault. He leaped for the door, caught up the blue-barreled revolver from the hand of the stunned man on the threshold, and drove for the heavier door at the end of the outer chamber.

But this door he found to be locked. He was on the point of starting back in search of a timber heavy enough to batter down that barrier when all movement was arrested by an uproar of sound that fairly drove the breath from his body. For the shower of oil that fell about the lighted match at the vaulted end of the side chamber had sunk into the litter of rubbish beside the powder cases, had burst into flames and had crept closer about those wooden cases until the licking tongues of heat had reached the explosive.

Yet even as Manley stood there, fighting for breath, a second surprise both confronted and engulfed him. Following close on that telltale roar of sound came an even more bewildering rush of water, tearing through the low-roofed cellar like a thousand hounds let loose. And he knew then that the explosion had broken down the walls between him and the East river at high tide.

He leaped in the direction of the door, in the hope of getting it closed.

He was still struggling frantically at this door when a heard a voice, and at first he thought it was a human voice, crying shrilly through the gloom.

"Let me out!" was the frantic cry close above him. "Let me out!" Groping and pawing along the wall, his hand came in contact with the rung of a narrow iron ladder. He caught at this ladder and drew himself up, for he now stood shoulder high in the ever-mounting flood. On the topmost rung, as he mounted, he found a shaking and feathered body clinging stubbornly to the rusting iron, beating with its beak on the hollow sounding boards above his head.

In a flash Manley himself was shouldering up against these boards. There was the sound of a rending staple, and in another moment he was swarming up through the ruptured trap door, catching at the parrot as he went.

* * * * * * *

The Figures of Fate.

Margory Golden, alone in her father's library stared apprehensively about that massively furnished room as though dreading that some new terror might leap out at her from its shadowy corners. She was unnerved not only by the disquieting disappearance of David Manley but also by the thought that she was still so surrounded by the tides of evil.

As she sat there, deep in thought, she was depressed by the sudden suspicion that some one of the many servants in that house was a traitor to his master. Yet as she checked them over, one by one, she found nothing on which to ground this ghostly suspicion. She remembered that she had once been suspicious even of Manley himself, of this serious-minded friend who hid his true feelings behind a mask of light-hearted irrelevancies. And there were things in which she herself had not been altogether candid with him. There was, for instance the matter of Tito, the Amazon parrot. She had not confided to Manley the fact that in that bird, stumbled across in a fancier's shop, she had found an old friend, a friend dating back to her unhappy days in the Owl's Nest. And she sighed aloud as she gathered up the papers on the rosewood desk and turned to the vault to which she had forgotten to restore them.

"Twenty-one, thirty, forty-two, sixty," she repeated, recalling her father's instructions over the wire. "Forward and back and forward and back again, for it's a four movement dial, whatever that may mean!"

The vault door opened, obedient to the combination, and seeking out the inner compartment marked "J" she restored the papers to their place. Her hand was still on the open vault door when the shrill call of the telephone bell sounded through the quiet room.

She crossed to the desk and took up the receiver.

"Do you know who is speaking?" demanded a voice which sent a thrill of apprehension through her forward-stooping body. And the question was repeated as she sat silent, staring before her.

"Yes," she finally answered, trying to steady her voice. "It's Legar."

The wire brought his answering laugh close into her ear.

"You know the voice, I see. And I think you know the man. So listen to what I have to say. I've got your friend Manley, and he'll stay where I've got him. And unless you want him turned out of here with about half of that pretty face of his burned to a crisp, you'll do what I tell you to do. Do you understand? I'll scar him worse than I was scarred, if you try any tricks with me in this!"

"In—in what?" demanded the white-faced girl.

"In exactly one-half hour I want you to walk past the Soldiers' monument and hand me a paper. That paper is somewhere in your father's vault. It is one half of a code list and chart, on a square of yellow manilla. Do you understand?"

"But how am I to know this paper?" asked the terrified girl, fencing for time.

"It's a chart, a map, one half of the map of Windward island. For old Golden wasn't such a fool as he seemed"—and again the venomous laugh sounded low over the wire. "If your father had got hold of my half of that map a little earlier in the game he wouldn't have needed to dig for

Legar and His Confederates.

ten years through that sand, looking for his precious treasure! Now it's my chance, and I want that paper. And unless you want your secretary to come home a rather unpleasant thing to look at, you're going to have that map in my hands in half an hour. So tell me quick, what your answer is. Do I get it?"

For one moment the girl sat silent, breathing quick through parted lips.

"Yes, I'll bring it," she at last said over the wire. Then she sat motionless, with her hands gripping the desk edge for several minutes. When she moved it was with the quickness of a sudden and clear-cut decision.

"Give me police headquarters," she called out as she caught up the receiver. The next minute she was explaining to the desk official at Center street the news of Legar's latest threat and the need of forestalling it. Then, after another interval of studious thought, she crossed to the vault and began a hurried search for the document which Legar had described as being stored away there.

She found it at last, in a package of faded deeds and papers to do with Windward island, and while one glance at it persuaded her that it was indeed a chart of the island, the fact that it represented only one-half of this island tended to convince her that Legar had spoken the truth.

But she had no time to deliberate over that discovery, for her next move, she felt, should be to call the servants and warn them against any midnight intrusions.

She crossed to the rosewood desk to carry out this plan, and her finger was even extended to press the bell button when a sudden soft movement at her shoulder caused her to swing sharply about.

Confronting her, with a slightly triumphant smile on his deep-scarred face, stood Legar himself.

"I am intruding, I know," he began in his suavely acidulated tones, "but there was a possibility, you see, of your friends in uniform interrupting our meeting beside the Soldiers' monument!"

The girl's fingers, as she edged away along the desk, closed determinedly on the scrap of manilla paper still held in her hand. The vault door, she saw, was also still open. But that was not the thought troubling her. The vague fear at the back of her mind was whether or not she was too late to save Dave Manley from the danger threatening him. And she edged still farther away.

Her movement was arrested by the ringing of the telephone bell close beside her.

"Answer that phone!" he suddenly commanded.

The next moment a great load seemed to lift suddenly from her heart, and a renewed wave of audacity swept through her body, for the voice that spoke to her over the wire was the triumphant voice of Manley himself. Manley declaring that he was free and that he would hurry back as fast as wheels could carry him.

"Who spoke then?" cried Legar, his face clouded by a move which apparently was an unexpected one from his standpoint. But the wine of hope now singing through the girl's veins made her more crafty, more ready to face Legar with his own weapons. Instead of answering him her hand moved out to the bell button, for with the ringing of that bell, she felt, would surely come help. And once the slip of manilla was back in the vault, and the door locked, she now had little to fear from Legar. So when she fell back, as he sprang forward to strike her hand from the bell, she saw that her retreat lay in the direction of the vault door.

Her pursuer, however, was in no mood for equivocation. He seemed suddenly to foresee her intention. For without warning he leaped towards her, as an animal leaps for its prey. And with one sweep of his maimed arm the iron hook at its end was snared deep in the folds of her clothing.

"Give me that map!" he said, in a voice husky with blind and unreasoning rage.

Margory Golden, however, had no intention of giving him the map in question. She fought against him, with all the strength at her command, knowing that any moment now would bring the needed help.

But Legar, with his hand on her throat, hurled her back against the heavy vault door, shook her as a terrier shakes a rat, snatched the yellow sheet from her fingers, flung her staggering into the maw of the open vault, and with a throaty and beastlike cry of triumph swung the great steel door shut, even as the partly-dressed Wilson ran gaping in through the library door. Yet Legar took time to throw back the tumbler lever and spin the dial before turning to confront that wide-eyed servant. Then, hearing other approaching steps, he dove through the second door, scurried like a pelted hound through shadowy rooms, slipped eel-like through a quickly opened window and escaped to the street.

There he ran for a dark-bodied car standing in the deep tree shadows, and with a gasp of relief flung himself up into the cushioned seat.

As he did so a masked figure sitting crouched close back in the hooded gloom of that seat suddenly threw out a hand and garroted the startled Legar against the leather upholstery, on which he began to writhe like a caterpillar on a cabinet pin. But with an equally deft second movement the man in the yellow mask snatched the oblong manilla paper from his opponent's hand.

"This," blandly announced the man of mystery as his garroting fingers relaxed and he stepped down to the running board, "is one of the rare moments when I have the pleasure of trumping your ace!"

And the all but apoplectic Legar lay back gasping for breath as that stranger dropped lightly from the speeding car and vanished shadowlike into the night.

At the home of Enoch Golden, in the meantime, the terrified Wilson had regained both his feet, his presence of mind and a presentable portion of his dignity. His frantic shouts for help had brought the rest of the servants flocking to the library, and his equally frantic efforts to describe what had taken place did not add to the peace of that litle group from below stairs.

"I tell you, Tibbins, Miss Margory's locked in that vault, and there's no one in the 'ouse as knows 'ow to open it!"

Cries of horror burst from that suddenly arrested circle.

"Someone telephone for the police!" cried the second man, as Wilson shouldered out through the group swarming and gesticulating about the vault door. "Yes, the police!"

He had the instrument in his shaking hand when the door opened and David Manley stepped quickly in, with Tito, the green-bodied parrot, on his arm.

"What's wrong here?" was the newcomer's sharp demand.

"It's Miss Margory, sir," began the quavering-voiced butler.

"Well, what about Miss Margory?"

"She's locked in that vault, sir, and no one in the 'ouse knows the combination!"

"Good God!" cried Manley, suddenly transfixed. Then he ran to the vault door, flinging the others aside.

Flinging off his coat, he bent over the dial. The silent group circled about him. And still he worked, worked with every nerve on edge, every sense alert, for time, he knew, was precious.

"I said silence there!" he called out sharply, for his whole mind was directed to the faint click of metal against metal in front of him. But louder than before the green-bodied bird on its broken perch repeated its cry.

"Twenty-one — thirty—forty-two—sixty!" was the shrill and monotonous cry of the parrot, with one eye cocked ceilingward.

Manley suddenly wheeled about.

"What in God's name does that parrot mean? . . . Wait! . . . It is . . . it must be"—But instead of finishing that declaration he repeated the bird's cry. 'Twenty-one, thirty, forty-two, sixty."

In the next breath he was facing the vault door, with his trembling fingers turning and spinning the glimmering dial.

Then, without breathing, and with colorless face, his hand grasped the tumbler lever. And not one of that group moved as he put on that lever the pressure that would tell the tale.

It was Celestine the parlor maid who indorsed her Latin temperament by falling back in a dead faint as the metal door swung open. But no one, at that moment, was thinking of Celestine.

"It's all right," Manley called from the darkness of the inner vault. "She's alive—she'll be around in a minute—only somebody get some water!"

(To Be Continued.)