

THE IRON CLAW

By ARTHUR STRINGER
NOVELIZED FROM THE PATHE PHOTO
PLAY OF THE SAME NAME
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SECOND EPISODE.
The House of Unhappiness.
ENOCH GOLDEN, with his millions, was a hard man. Those closest to him contended that he had experienced much to make him hard. Without friends or family, he faced that two-fold isolation which involved both the loneliness of the fighter who has given all his time and thought to success and the even more poignant loneliness of a luxurious home with no one to share in its magnificence.

Through this home Golden stalked, a grim and embittered man of 50, dragging his advanced years with an ever fiercer struggle for wealth. And the ironic gods of chance, seeming to realize that the accumulation of worldly riches only added to the burden already weighing down the aged millionaire's heart, permitting his ventures to prosper.

Those closest to him, again, even whispered that Golden's feverish activities in the world of finance were not without a well-defined motive. For it had been said that this silent man could not afford to remember the past. It was claimed that he studiously lined his unhappy eyes with his uncounted bonds, like a bandage, and that he had taken to work as weaker men take to drink, since once in the years that were gone, it was whispered, he had known the love of a young and beautiful wife and had warmed to the affectionate smiles of an even more beautiful child.

But fate, for some tragic reason, had wrenched both wife and daughter from him, and the broken man, afraid of his memories, had immured himself in the feverish dust of finance.

The one person who stood in any way intimately and personally connected with Golden was his young private secretary, David Manley. For young Manley, often enough known to his associates as "Dave," was both incredibly youthful and engagingly irresponsible. Golden, oddly enough, peculiarly liked this youth for his foolishness. It brought a breath of humanity into his granite world of greed. It marked Manley off from the sycophants who thought only on the millionaire's riches and schemed for their possession.

This youth was too much of an easy-going idiot, Golden held, ever to think seriously of his own self-interest. He was indolent and his office hours were erratic. He was brazen in his retorts and often enough laugh-provoking in his antics. His demeanor, in fact, was more that of a confidential secretary to a gray-haired millionaire. Yet with all his levity this same millionaire had found Manley's judgments were sound and his discernment often startlingly keen.

"That boy keeps the moss off my old bones," Golden admitted, when, one day, he asked young Manley into the gloomy splendor of his uptown home. Yet into that home this younger man had brought some semblance of a movement and companionship, and as time went on the man of silent gold found himself leaning more and more on this easy-going youth who seemed quite without one serious aim in the world.

Manley, however, was something more than a court jester. When need be he had his lucid intervals. There were, in fact, rare occasions when Golden even wondered if his young associate's antics were not a mask shrouding some ulterior and sterner design in life. But all such momentary suspicions seemed more and more without reason, and Golden found himself conferring more and more often with this youth who seemed business so light-heartedly and the millionaire himself so off-handedly. The thought had even entered the close-fisted old financier's head that some day Manley might fall heir to his useless millions, if only that disappointingly facetious youth would once become serious enough to attend strictly to business.

"For the boy's a fool! There's no doubt of that. And if I don't look after him, heaven knows what may become of him."

So Golden smiled a little as he stepped into his massively furnished library and found young Manley curled up in one of the great leather chairs intently working over a pocket camera and quite oblivious to the telephone bell shrilling from the rosewood desk beside him. Golden, as he seated himself at this desk and curiously answered the phone call, blinked with mock disapproval at the youth bent over the camera. Then he turned to the mail laid neatly on the desk before him and proceeded to go through it.

It was not until he heard Golden's great fat smile the rosewood desk top that Manley looked up. The man of millions was frowning over the letter still held in his hand.

"The conditions of these tenements is shameful. Times are hard and many we find are out of work. If you insist raising the rents, you threaten our settlement workers claim that hundreds of the poor will have to leave their homes. So, for the sake of the mothers and children alone, I implore you to reconsider your earlier decision. Sincerely,

"AMOS SCHOFIELD, D. D."

"The fool!" said Golden aloud. "They know as much about business, Manley, as you know about bond issues! Their inspectors come and order me to put up fire escapes and build wider light wells, and while they stand ready to split profits with the very ironworkers who stick up those fire escapes, they expect me—me, and it's always me—to take \$100,000 out of my own pocket and spend it on that warren of idlers and incompetents, that warren that's already taxed up to the hilt. How can I use my own money to subsidize such Golden still knows enough to run his own business!"

He stopped and looked at Manley, who was still whistling as he bent casually over his pocket camera.

"What's that gim-crack you're waster your time on?" he demanded, with the sharp impatience one might use to a child.

"Gim-crack!" laughed Manley. "It's the neatest thing in cameras that ever came into America. That's a new Swiss telescopic lens I've just been adjusting to it. Take a snap of a flea biting your ear 500 times away! And your income on those tenements, by the way, amounts to an annual return of just 43 per cent of the capital invested!"

"Well, supposing I turn them over

to you and see what you could make out of them!"

Manley ignored the sneer in the older man's words.

"I'd at least try to make decent homes out of them," the younger man said.

"Young man, I don't hire you to hint that my money is dirty money!"

"I don't need to!"

"And if you had the intelligence I once attributed to you you'd show more respect for the man who thought seriously of making you his beneficiary!"

Manley, putting down the camera, stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, young man, I mean what I say. If you could ever show a moment's serious interest in my business, you'd become the heir to that business and all that went with it!"

"But I have other things to remember," answered the ever-flippant Manley.

"What other things?" was the older man's curt inquiry, sung by the thought that even his munificence was being contemned.

"Well, this gim-crack, for one thing. And for another that letter in your hand there, about the tenements."

But Golden's patience was exhausted. "Get out of here!" was his brusque command. "Get down to Griswold's bank with these checks, and be quick about it!"

Whereupon Manley meekly took his departure. Ten minutes later, however, yet another figure was passing through the gloomy silences of Enoch Golden's home. It was a more purposeful figure than that of the lazy-eyed young secretary. And over the face of this intruder as he cautiously made his way through the great house was an odd-looking band of yellow cloth, cut in the form of a mask. The center of this, drooping apronlike apron to his upper lip, was marked by an inverted crescent, which at first glance lent to the partly covered face the faint suggestion of an ironically laughing mouth. Yet the unknown stranger was serious enough as he stopped before a door at the end of the second hall and pushed on one of a row of mother-of-pearl buttons. The door slid noiselessly back at that signal and an electric elevator rose automatically to his level. He stepped into it and pushed another button, whereupon the cage rose noiselessly. Once it had come to a stop he leaned against the apparently blank wall of the elevator shaft and studied it closely.

His exploring fingers plainly found the panel which he next touched. The panel flipped noiselessly to one side and he stepped into the room, so artfully fireproofed with pressed steel panels and grained to look like oak, which Golden had once used as his bedroom.

That room, although not used for years, was at the present moment far from empty. For pacing restlessly back and forth, as the stranger quietly entered, was a golden-haired woman of little more than 20. Plain as her clothing was, it in no way detracted from the slight air of refinement that adorned her toiled features and the beauty of her tenuous and troubled eyes. Yet the face under the mask smiled a little at her sudden movement and gasp of surprise as he confronted her.

"Are you still afraid of me?" he asked.

"N-no!" hesitated the girl.

"You can see, now, that I'm only trying to help you?"

Again the girl hesitated.

"But I don't even know who or what you are!"

"And you'd give a good deal to know that?"

"I have nothing to give. But still I should like to know."

"And I'd give a good deal," declared the other, "to know who you are!"

A barricaded look came into the eyes so intently watching him.

"I'm afraid I can't help you any, in that," she finally told him.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know myself."

"But if I said I wanted to help you find out, would you believe me? Would you do what I asked?"

The girl, questioning eyes once more studied him.

"I think you are honest. You seem honest," she finally acknowledged.

"Then will you trust me?"

"But what must I do?"

The man in the mask hesitated. To make things plain, apparently, was no easy matter.

"I want to take you to a man who may be interested in you, who may even prove to be very kind to you."

The pale face with the haunted eyes suddenly hardened.

"No longer ask for kindness from men," was her almost passionate retort.

"Oh, this old coudral won't be too dangerously kind, especially until the ice is broken. I warrant you that much. But with him, I'll also warrant, you'll face none of the affronts that you may have found in the Owl's Nest."

"Oh, why should he be interested in me?"

"Because you may remind him of a daughter he himself once had."

"Then what must I do?"

"You must put on a dress I have ready, one exactly like the one his own daughter used to wear. And I'd like you to let down your hair."

"But this seems so foolish!" demurred the puzzled girl.

"Yet it's such wonderful hair! And it may make an unhappy man less unhappy, and at the same time be for you a good thing."

So the girl still touched with wonder, was cautiously led to another part of the great house, where she let down her hair and dressed herself in a girlish little frock which she found already laid out for her. And the wonder was still in her eyes as the masked stranger enquired her quietly, "through" the house, and, as the aged millionaire bent low to unlock the bottom drawer of his desk, motioned her noiselessly into the library and into an armchair facing his desk.

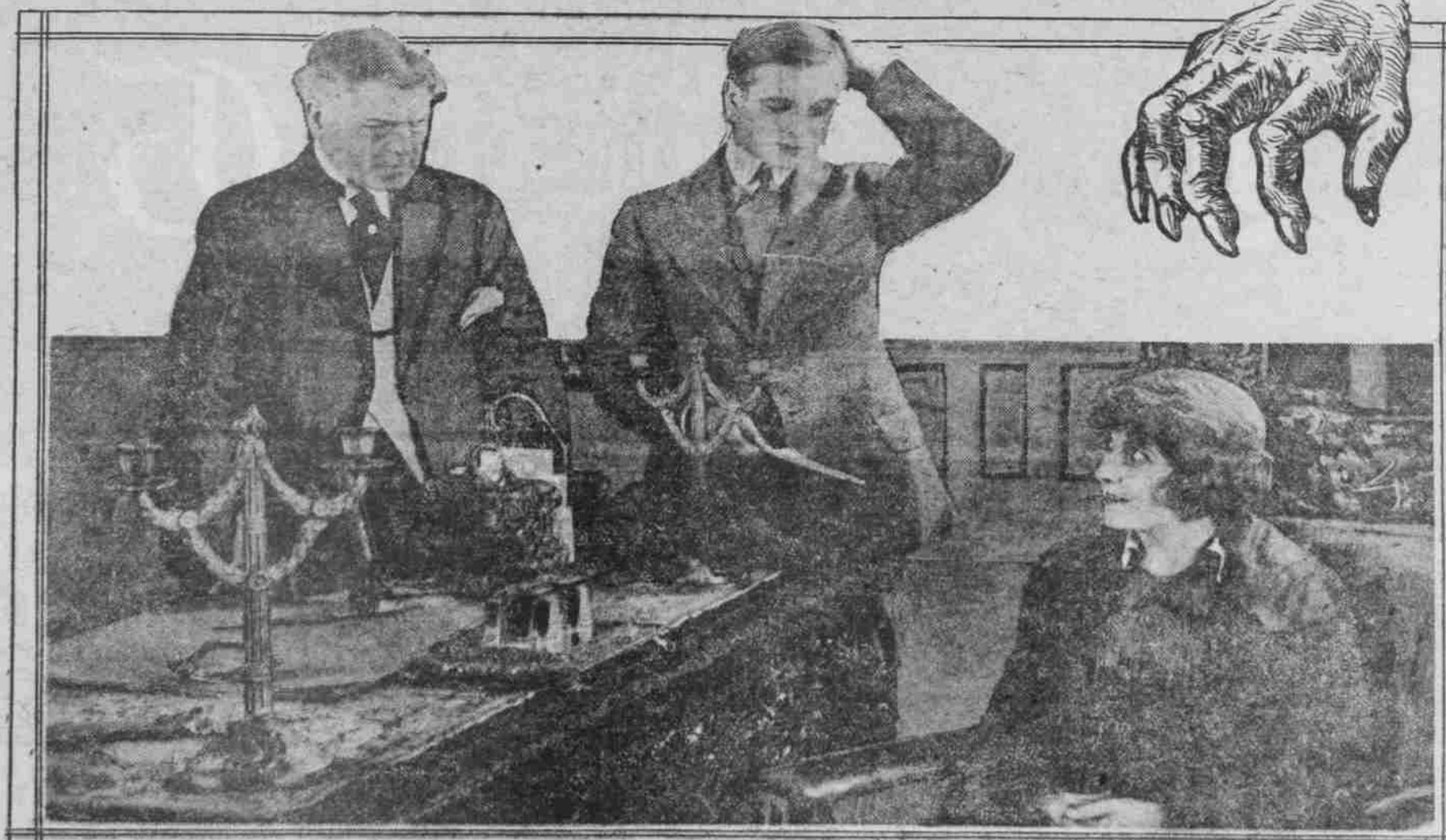
By the time Golden had raised his head again the mysterious stranger had slipped out of sight.

Golden, as he sat upright, stared for several moments in silence at the strange figure in the armchair.

"Who are you?" the grim-faced old financier finally demanded. But the figure remained silent. She scarcely knew what was expected of her.

Golden, studying her more closely, rose unsteadily to his feet.

"How did you get here?" he asked.



"Who Are You?" The Grim Faced Financier Demanded.

And passing a hand across his moistened brow he asked still again: "Who are you?"

"I don't know," answered the girl.

Mechanically the unhappy man reached to his desk drawer for the photograph which he kept there. His breath quickened as he stared from the picture to the figure in the armchair. Then he rose to his feet, and still staring hungrily at that mild yet clouded face, crossed to her side.

He held her face between his hands, peering into it. Then, with a weary shake of the head, he dropped his hands.

"It was too much to expect," he muttered. "Too much to hope for."

The grief-furrowed face touched the girl's hair.

"Oh, sir, what had you hoped for?" she managed to ask.

"I hope for nothing," was the broken man's reply. "But once I had a daughter, and I lost her."

"How did you lose her?"

"She was stolen from me, as a child."

"And what became of her?"

"God only knows! Yet for a moment I was mad enough to think, to hope. But I have no longer any right to hope," he added with sudden passion.

"All I ask is that once before I die I meet face to face that one-armed devil with his scar of shame!"

"One-armed, and with a scar?" cried the startled girl, leaning suddenly forward in her chair.

Golden wheeled about at her cry.

"What does that mean to you?"

"Why, it was a one-armed man with a scarred face who kept me a prisoner! It was he, Legar, who always told me my parents were dead."

"Legar?" repeated the bewildered millionaire. "Legar? But my man's name was Palidori." By this time Golden was once more on his feet, his excitement increasing every moment. "Yet men have changed their names. And this man had every reason to change his."

Even his quiet-voiced visitor was infected with that sudden excitement, for she rose to her feet as Golden rounded the desk which stood between them.

"Girl, let me see your arm!"

With trembling fingers he thrust up the filmy sleeve, staring breathlessly at the milk-white skin. Then a groan of disappointment broke from his throat.

"No, the mark is not there!"

"What mark?" asked the wondering girl.

"My daughter carried a scar on her

right arm. My men, when she was a child on Windward Island, caught and killed a shark. The child, when no one watched her, thrust a hand in between the brute's jaws. Those dying jaws closed on the flesh and an iron bar had to be used to open them again. And they said that scar would always stay with her."

The girl, wide-eyed, dropped back into the armchair.

"Why, I seem to remember," she said, staring before her. "I seem to remember years ago, rows and rows of sharp teeth and the sudden pain as those teeth came together."

"But the scar?" cried Golden. "There is no scar!"

"I seem to remember about that, too. It was long ago, after Legar had brought me across water, and then miles and miles in a railway train. I remember him taking me to a man who had iron round eyes, and showing him my arm. This man gave me something to make me sleep. But when I awakened my arm was sore again, for weeks and weeks. And when it healed the scar was gone. I remember—"

But she stopped suddenly, for the telephone bell came shrilling out a sudden call. Mechanically the man at the desk took up the receiver, his eyes still on the girl facing him.

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