

THE IRON CLAW

By ARTHUR STRINGER.
NOVELIZED FROM THE PATHE PHOTO
PLAY OF THE SAME NAME

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SYNOPSIS.

ENOCH GOLDEN lives with his wife and daughter in a modern Eden until their home on "Windward Island" is invaded by Dr. Ludwig Pallidori. Pallidori, by threats, compromises the wife in his effort to steal the secret of the island. Golden discovers them, drives the wife from him, and not only crushes Pallidori's hand that caressed her but brands his face. Pallidori in revenge opens the flood gates of the island and escapes with Margory, the child. Golden and his wife narrowly escape.

Twelve years later Margory has grown into beautiful young womanhood. Golden is a hardened millionaire. Pallidori, or as he now calls himself Legar, turns the girl over to Casavari, the "Laughing Mask," but she is rescued by a mysterious stranger who wears a laughing mask. He tells her he is the "Hammer of God."

The girl is taken to Golden's home by this stranger and thrust into Golden's study. But just as he discovers who she is she is spirited away again. Manley, his frivolous young secretary, traces her to the "Owl's Nest," where Legar and his evil companions live. She is rescued from there by the mysterious stranger by the remarkable expedient of encasing her in a brandy cask and driving off with her.

Legar then threatens Golden with robbery, and after setting off an explosion under the Third National Bank calmly walks away with \$50,000, under the guise of a forced letter. He escapes with the money.

Manley is kidnapped from Golden's home to the Owl's Nest by Legar. In the meantime Margory has been locked in the big vault at Golden's home by Legar, who escapes with the missing half of the chart indicating the treasure on Windward Island. The Laughing Mask, hiding in Legar's limousine, snatches this from his hands, however, and escapes. Manley returns to the house and with the aid of Margory's trained parrot, who repeats the safe combination, releases Margory—alive, but unconscious.

Golden receives the "Spotted Warnings" from Legar, demanding that he give him the missing portion of the treasure chart of Windward Island. He laughs at the warning and sends Margory to his sister's country home for safety. En route the machine collides with Legar's auto and Margory is rescued by the Mysterious Mask, who takes her to her mother. Golden, fearing Margory is in Legar's hands, and receiving a final warning from Legar, keeps the demanded appointment on the 14th floor of the Central Tower building.

Manley arrives on scene after a thrilling ride in an aeroplane to the tower roof, in time to see Golden in a struggle with a dark figure. The bit of yellow paper escapes their grasp and flutters to the street below. Manley grapples with a third figure. Golden clutches for the elusive paper on the edge of the abyss and there a dark figure slides over the cornice and drops 300 feet to the street below. Who fell?

SEVENTH EPISODE. "The Hooded Helper."

MARGORY GOLDEN'S serene self-willed Aunt Agatha disliked animals almost as much as she disliked mystery. And about her tranquil Cedar home she felt were transpiring events altogether too inexplicable to remain long to her liking.

So when Hannah, the plump but less practical-minded caretaker of that erstwhile abode of tranquility, tremulously announced that a stranger in a yellow mask had left a bright-colored parrot, answering to the name of Tito, at the door for Miss Margory, the bird in question was viewed with open disfavor and Margory was subjected to many disturbing interrogations.

None of the girl's answers proving satisfactory, however, her firm-willed maiden aunt proposed that they proceed with their interrupted game of "Preference." But a green parrot's instinct and enigmatic cry of "Look out for the Iron Claw!" was so consistent with so tranquillizing a game, and the owner of the house finally and firmly commanded the departing Hannah, who "slept out" to carry the disturbing creature off to her own cottage for the night much muzzling. But her feathered charge, harping with parrotlike joy on its newly learned phrase of "Look out for the Iron Claw!" proved anything but a cheering companion, once the shades of night had closed about Hannah's humble cottage. In the morning, the roughly aroused woman, in fact, determinedly gathered up her loquacious guest and deposited it in her chicken coop.

There Tito would have spent a quiet and uneventful night, in all likelihood, had not a certain mildly predeceous negro answering to the name of Rastus, who had been handed to her suburban home. For one of the by-products of this dusky lady's activities as a scrubwoman was the gathering of those trifles which find their way to the waste baskets and refuse cans of the city. And he only harvest, on this occasion, was a half portion of a time-yellowed code chart and map, which, having blown from the dizzy balcony of the Central Tower building, lay unnoticed in the gutter of Broadway until spied by a busy Rastus. He was, at the time, punning over its foolish list of words and meaningless maze of lines, contemptuously consigning it to his waste-paper basket. And it was with a gesture almost as contemptuous that Rastus Watson, Jemima's lord and master, flung the same sheet of paper down on the kitchen table, where it was placed before him as the extent of a day's "pickings."

Now, Rastus, who was of much portlier frame than his spouse, was a firm believer in the efficiency of forced feeding. And since the day's harvest had been a lean one, and the larder showed distressing signs of emptiness, that plump-bodied negro possessed himself of a worn gunny-sack and announced his determination of acquiring a few pullets while hunger ran high and the moon swung low. Instinct combined with fate to lead Rastus by the nose, take him stealthily over the backyard fence of the aforementioned Hannah, and from there to the door of the padlocked coop. There, after a moment of cautious reconnoitering, he discovered the vulnerable point of the coop to be its window, on the southern side. The moon being low, Rastus decided to make the haul a good one. If in the excitement of that conquest the lightness of one bird tossed into the bag escaped his attention, it was perhaps due to the haste with which he tried to make off with his prisoners. He was blinking cautiously about to make sure the coast was clear, when a voice startlingly close to his own portly carcass called out with a sudden warning:

"Look out for the Iron Claw!"

"Owl's dat?" was the answering cry of the tinkling flute. "I'll get you!" announced the bedfellow voice behind him. And at that threat utter and unreasoning panic seized the terrified Rastus, who, with a throaty howl of agony, charged across a newly dug garden and bounded like a round jackrabbits down a moonlit alley bordered with shadowy fences.

At the end of this alley Rastus plunged through a narrow gate, and charged bodily into the peaceful beer garden, belonging to the roadhouse of one Antonio Dibello, where sat four men in quiet conference about one of the little iron tables well out of public ken.

These men showed prompt resentment at this unheeded interruption to their talk. But as the parrot, with its head thrust through a hole in the gunny-sack repeated its shrill cry of "Look out for the Iron Claw," these men rose in a body to their feet. Their leader, who,

in even the dim light from the garden showed himself to be a one-armed man with a strangely scarred face, sprang for the terrified negro. Rastus, however, was in no mood for either interruption or argument. He merely emitted a whoop of reawakened terror and headed for home.

There he burst in upon the astounded Jemima and collapsed with a quivering groan of exhaustion. But before Jemima could either understand the nature of his ailment or investigate the contents of his gunny-sack, a second and even more violent earthquake took place. Legar and his men dragged the quaking and gasping Rastus to his feet, shoved him into a chair, and snatched out the loudly protesting green parrot and wonderingly examined it.

"Where did you get that parrot?" was the quick demand of the man who wore an iron hook where a hand ought to be. Rastus merely wheeled and shook in the legs and showed the whites of his eyes. It was, indeed, several minutes before he was so much as awakened to the fact that he was not in the grip of the law. But once convinced of that fact, he became voluble enough in his protestations to oblige the "white gentlemen" with any information they desired. He even led them to the white gentleness back to the neighborhood of Hannah's chicken coop.

There were certain phrases of that hurried pursuit, however, which had not entirely escaped the attention of a circumspect stranger who had motored casually about the quiet streets of Cedarburg on the evening of the neighborhood of Hannah's chicken coop. He hurriedly returned to his home, and there, in a room which he had scarcely recovered from the shock consequent upon the sudden invasion of her cottage when she discovered herself confronted by still another stranger. And the fact that the white gentleman's yellow mask did not add to her immediate peace of mind.

For lying overlooked on the floor, close beside a battered water bucket, he caught sight of a familiar-looking oblong of yellow paper. In another moment he was on his feet, and he demanded: "Where did that paper come from?" he demanded. For he knew that it was the long sought Golden chart which he held in his hand.

"Dat done come from mah offus sweepings," explained the other. "But mah Rastus allow it hain't even wuff a green tradin' stamp!" "Four Rastus may be right," was the stranger's quiet reply. "But it's worth this much to me." And Aunt Jemima found a \$10 bill thrust into her astonished pink palm. "That is yours, my good woman, if you do just one thing, and do it quickly. I want you to go to the sheriff's, wake him up, and get him to the house where that woman called Hannah works. Tell him to get there in a hurry and to bring his men, or there'll be murder done in this village before the sun rises!"

The man in the yellow mask waited for nothing more. A minute later he was off, running shadowlike through the darkness. Shadowlike, too, he approached an ivy-bordered bungalow in which three women were quietly playing "preference" in the light of a green-shaded reading lamp. But the man in the mask, preferring to leave that peaceful game undisturbed, stole quietly in through the back of the house, looked himself in a small room above stairs, and there adroitly but quickly made a fistful of the map.

Before the map could be completed through strange events were already transpiring directly beneath where he sat. For Margory Golden, glancing up from her game, stared idly into the old-fashioned mirror of bevel plate facing her from the opposite wall. And peering in at the window reflected in that mirror she saw a bearded face seamed with an unmistakable scar. The move she quietly decided upon was to call the strangely reticent chauffeur of her strangely elusive deliverer and ask him to make ready for an immediate flight to the city. She watched that chauffeur as he threw on a heavy bearskin coat and cap, wound a muffler about his neck, and started for the garage. She watched him as he stepped out into the darkness. Then the bear-skinned figure became the center of strange and unlooked-for activities, for it was plain that several men, lurking there in the darkness, had sprung upon him. It was equally plain that they lost little time in overpowering him, for before the startled woman could rise to the aid of the man who she found that some of peace invaded by a group of audacious-eyed ruffians headed by Legar himself.

At the same moment another unexpected intruder entered the room. Only this time it was the oddly interruptive figure of a man of mystery known as the Laughing Mask. And before any move could be made or any word spoken he was close beside Legar and calmly confronting him. Much to his quiet authority, no doubt, arose from



"In Another Moment, Manley Felt, the Knife Would Plunge into the Breast of the Softly Breathing Girl: He Fired."

the fact that in his right hand he held a short-barreled and ugly-looking automatic pistol.

"Not a move from any man here!" he cried out as he faced that threatening circle.

"Before we start any shooting around here," the Laughing Mask calmly suggested, "I want just a word or two, Legar, with you. I know what you're after. You want Golden's portion of a Windward Island chart. Well, I have that chart, and I have it with me. But there is no reason why women should be dragged into this fight. So the first thing you have to do, if you want that chart, is to allow Margory Golden and her mother here to return quietly to the city with my chauffeur, and return tonight!"

Legar's lip curled. "So you're getting ready to strike a bargain?" mocked the other. "Then suppose I hand you over this gun! Would that persuade you I was sincere?"

"The gun and the map together," was the prompt demand. "And then what?" inquired the Laughing Mask. "Then you wait in this closet until I make sure it's the map I've got," announced the audacious Legar. The Laughing Mask stood apparently studying his opponent. "And on these conditions you promise there will be no acts of violence in this house, there will be no interfering with these ladies, and no attempt to interrupt their return to the city!"

"Watch him, men!" Legar ordered as he took the gun and map from the Laughing Mask's outstretched hand and stepped to the closet door and turned the key in the lock. "I await your decision, gentlemen, in the jury-room," mockingly announced the latter as he stepped into the closet. Quick as a shot Legar shut and locked that door. He clutched the map. "By God, I've got it!" exclaimed Legar. "Let out that driver in the bearskin first," he commanded, "and if that fool in the mask tries to move plug him one. For I've got a little personal reckoning with him, later on!"

He handed the automatic to one of the men and motioned to him to unlock the closet door. Then he ordered the chauffeur to step out. "Now, you beat it with these ribs and beat it quick!" was the brusque command to the man in the bearskin coat and cap. That chauffeur had not taken six steps across the room before a sudden cry broke from one of the men standing close beside the card table. "Your map's gone!" was the bewildering message that fell on Legar's ears as he leaped to the table side. The man in the bear skins at the same moment stepped out through the door. "That's the chauffeur!" cried one of the men. They switched makups in the closet, and the main guy's got away!"

For one second Legar stood stunned and motionless. Then, with his jaws set, he sprang for the lean-faced chauffeur, already edging along the wall toward the door. At the same moment that the man with the automatic ran toward the center of the room, leveling his gun as he went, a shot rang out from beside the open window. Legar, realizing the outcome, with one sweep of his hooked arm flung the green-shaded lamp from its table, jumped through a window and vanished from sight.

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The Shell of Deceit. Margory Golden, all things considered, was once more in very excellent spirits. There were even moments when young David Manley considered those spirits as both deplorably and disturbingly excellent, due, thought he, to the presence of young Count Luigi de Espares.

He had come, as more than one impoverished young nobleman had come to America to dispose of those canavases and curlics which, if they had not once graced his own ancestral halls, had at least been conscientiously made, on the far side of the Atlantic, after models bearing every earmark of the authentic. And one of the treasures which he had succeeded in disposing of to Enoch Golden was a full suit of medieval Japanese armor, complete even to the long-bladed Kagi-saki dagger and grotesquely fashioned metal face mask.

"That leering metal face David Manley had hated from the first moment he saw it in position at the far side of the somber Golden library. The ugliness of that metal monstrosity, in fact, seemed accentuated by the soft-toned canvas painting which stood immediately behind it. And Manley hated it more than ever as he stepped into the room and saw Margory smilingly contemplating it from the chair beside her father's table. "It seems so mysterious," was her answer. "It keeps suggesting something which I can't quite define and I was just wondering if I hadn't solved the mystery, even as you came in through the door."

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"You mean this man Da Espares?" Manley asked with a wince. "No, not exactly. But the leering metal face makes me think of the Laughing Mask, and now I'm almost certain I know who this Laughing Mask is. "Who's curious which, if they had not once graced his own ancestral halls, had at least been conscientiously made, on the far side of the Atlantic, after models bearing every earmark of the authentic. And one of the treasures which he had succeeded in disposing of to Enoch Golden was a full suit of medieval Japanese armor, complete even to the long-bladed Kagi-saki dagger and grotesquely fashioned metal face mask.

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regions of the house. And he did not breathe freely until, quickly opening the side door into the library, he caught sight of Margory herself, in a narrow-backed Jacobean chair, bent low over a book which lay open on her lap.

She sat clearly outlined in the bright fulcrum falling over her carelessly-posed body, leaving her in a luminous shower from the single wall light, which she had left turned on immediately above her. He could see the polished metal of that armor flash venomously in the strong sidelight.

Just then a scarp of incredulity burst from his lips. For as he stared at the metal hand holding the long-bladed dagger, he saw, or thought he saw, that hand slowly raise, as though some miracle had endowed its insensate links and plates and embraced with life. That the very body in his body seemed to curdle with sudden horror, for now there was no doubt about it. The mallet hand holding the glimmering knifeblade above the softly breathing girl was slowly but surely being lifted, higher and still higher. And in another moment Manley felt, it would surely strike.

Quick as a flash he caught the automatic from his pocket, swung it up and trained the barrel on the glinting high lights-along the mallet fist. Then he fired.

There was a muffled shout of pain, a short scream of terror from the startled girl, and answering calls from above stairs as the uproar echoed through the midnight house. But to all these Manley paid scant attention. With 18 steps he had crossed the Room. Then he flung himself on the suit of mail, twisting it about and sending it toppling from its stand. But one glance showed it to be empty. The framed canvas that stood behind it he jerked from the wall. Then an exclamation of wonder burst from his lips. For, in the wainscoting at each side of where the canvas had hung he discovered two holes cut, not a yard apart, and sufficiently large to admit of a man's arms being thrust through them.

Some enemy, secreted behind that wainscoting, had thrust an arm into the metal shell of an ancient holding dagger, and had lifted it to strike down the girl so close beside it. And that enemy, Manley resolved as he battered down the panel and crowded his way through into a narrow passage-way, he would discover and capture or know the reason why.

Yet that passage, which led to the abandoned conservatory and from there back to a long unused butler's pantry, proved to be entirely empty. All that rewarded Manley's frantic search was a sleeve button and a shred of cloth torn from a service coat, caught on a nail where the latter itself made against the wainscoting. And by the time he had pushed his way back to the library Golden and De Espares and Wilson were already there.

"Where's Wrench, that new footman?" he demanded. "I saw Wrench in the upper hall, sir, two minutes ago," was Wilson's prompt reply. He was off the next moment, running with all his speed through the house, with his automatic in his hand as he went.

It was not until he had mounted a second and then a third flight of stairs that he came to a stop. That was close beside the door of Wrench's own room. And listening there he heard the sound of movement within.

He did not wait a moment. Backing quickly away, he shouldered against the wooden panels with all his weight. The lock gave, and he went staggering into the room.

There, bent over a suitcase, he caught sight of Wrench himself. One glance at that startled man's pale face, and a glimpse at the sleeve of the service coat from which a button had clearly been torn away, convinced him that all his vague suspicions of the past were had been only too well founded. And he wasted no words on argument. He leaped to that startled figure, thrust his automatic against the waist line of the service coat and commanded Wrench to back up against the wall. As he did so a sudden about sounded from the door behind him, and he instinctively glanced about to ascertain the meaning of this about. Wrench, seeing his chance, knocked the menacing automatic barrel so one side that it sprang bodily on Manley's head as he did so an unexpected strangely mantled figure glided into the narrow room. It was a figure wrapped and hooded in heavy black robes, and it was at its strange coveries would have revealed the fact that it was a portiere quickly torn from its fastenings and improvised into a mask to conceal its wearer's identity.

It was not until that hooded figure had joined in the contest that Manley became aware of the second portiere, which his newer opponent carried. For this portiere was deftly thrown over the young secretary's head and suddenly drawn tight about his neck.

Manley himself, maddened by the thought of that culprit's escape, swung about on his hooded assailant with a fury that sent the latter also retreating toward the hall. That unknown enemy even sought to escape as his colleague had done, but at the stair-head Manley overtook him, and they went down the stairs, a tangle of limbs and striking fists and portiere ends.

Manley fell sprawling, tangled in many yards of velour, and landed on the covering head and shoulders of the astounded Wilson, who, at that sudden assault, promptly and vociferously shouted for help.

When Manley, stunned for a minute or two by the fall, once more opened his eyes and blinked inquiringly about him, he saw both Golden and his wife and Margory herself clustered at his side. "Did you get him?" he demanded. "Get who?" asked Enoch Golden. "That murderous blackleg, Da Espares?" was Manley's reply. "But Count Da Espares has nothing to do with this," protested the girl, with a frown of disapproval. "He's been helping us, as he always helped us!"

"Yes, as he will tell you himself!" Per at that moment a suave and smiling, the count joined the wondering circle.

"Ah, monsieur, I keep watch above, as you ask, he explained with a shrug. "But nothing happen. I see nobody. Then mon dieu, I hear the tumult, and come down to you. But I cannot comprehend. So tell me, monsieur, I beg, what has happen?" Manley rose stiffly and slowly to his feet. "But what do you mean by this, anyway, Manley?" demanded Enoch Golden. "Oh, I guess he's merely the guy that put the Laugh in the Laughing Mask," was Manley's embittered yet enigmatical reply. (To be continued next week.)

The Friends of Fancy

By Ben Hur Lampman.

Old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, old books to read.—Alonso of Aragon.

Lay the book down—you have come to the end; It was pleasant to wander awhile with the friend. The folks of its fancy have walked with you, phrase, Through sunshine that dappled the glorious days— Grieve not that you come to the parting of ways. Sometime, when the morn is met up with the May, When birds are so happy that heaven leans down And listens and laughs to the madrigal lay— When the magic of roses enamors the town— You will know they have never quite wandered away. Lay the book down, with a smile or a frown— They will remember—so lay the book down.

Lay the book down—here's the finis he wrote— With the tug at your heart of a passing regret, With a laugh on your lips or an ache in your throat— They will remember, though you may forget. They come to console when the lashes are wet. Sometime, when the thrush has fled South with the breeze, When the leaf spirals down to a death in the rain, And the bird-nests of Summer are wrack in the trees, They shall meet you and greet you and comfort again; And you shall be comrade with many of these. Lay the book down, with a smile or a frown— They will remember—so lay the book down.

Lay the book down—here's a toast to the pen! To the trail that it traced and we followed awhile, By meadow and mountain, or valley and fen, With never a limp at the end of the mile, And a nook, here and there, where we lingered to smile. Sometime, when the lamps of the twilight enthrall, When day wavers out like a wraith in the gloom, By the shelf where they slumber we'll linger and muse—

Then turn to the latest chair in the room; No one shall prescribe us the chapter we choose! Lay the book down, with a smile or a frown— They will remember—so lay the book down.

