The IRON CLAW

by ARTHUR STRINGER

AUTHOR OF "THE OCCASIONAL OFFENDER," "THE WIRE TAPPERS," "GUN RUNNERS," ETC.

NOVELIZED FROM THE PATHE PHOTO-PLAY OF THE SAME NAME

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island Pulsifer surprises Mary Gordova in the act of signaling to a ship which steams out of sight. Gordova tells his father by breathing his face and Pulsifer, in a rage, kills him. Mary and Pulsifer escape from the island and Mary tells Pulsifer that he is the murderer of her father. Pulsifer, in a fit of rage, throws Mary into the water. Mary is rescued by a native fisherman and taken to the island of Oleff" rescues an eighteen-months-old baby from a burning house. The baby is Mary Gordova. Pulsifer is now living on the home of Enoch Golden, millionaire. Golden's daughter, Nan, and Pulsifer are engaged. Golden's secretary, Lagar, is in love with Nan. Pulsifer is also in love with Nan. Pulsifer is also in love with Mary Gordova, their foster sister, but regards her lightly. The Masked One appears at the Golden home and tells Nan that Lagar loves her. Nan tells Lagar that she loves Pulsifer. Lagar, who is a member of the Windward Island Mystery Society, tells Pulsifer that he is a member of the Society. Pulsifer laughs at the idea. Lagar leaves.

SEVENTH EPISODE

"THE HOODED HELPER."

Margery Golden's serenity and self-willed Aunt Abigail almost collapsed almost as much as she disliked mere Margery's entrance into the parlor. And when her transport of delight had somewhat subsided, she proceeded with the scene as close behind him as she could.

"Who—what iron claw?" demanded the sweating Easton.

"I'll get you!" announced the bodiless voice behind him. And at that threat utter and unreasoning panic seized the terrified Easton. He, with a throaty bellow of agony, charged across a ninety-foot garden and lawn and like a rotund jackrabbit down a wooded alley bordered with shadowy fences.

At the end of the alley Easton plunged through a narrow gate, and dashed boldly into the peaceful garden belonging to the readiness of Mrs. Antonia Botello, where a dozen men in quiet conference about one of the little iron tables were out of paying the key.

These men showed prompt resentment at this unheralded interruption to their talk. But as the panting Easton in loud threat through a hole in the picketwork, because of the cries of "Look out for the Iron Claw," these men, with the exception of the one of their leader, who lay down on the ground from the garden tongs shoved himself to be a concerned mass with a strangely-scarred face, sprang for the terrified negro. Easton, 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 astound Mr. Jenkins and collapsed with a quavering groan of exhaustion. But before Jenkins could either understand the nature of his ailment or investigate the contents of his pockets, Easton in second and even more violent irruption took place. Lagar and his men dragged the quaking and gasping Easton to his feet, shoved him into a chair and snatched up the gunstock. From this he took a long look at the mutilated green parrot and wonderingly exclaimed:

"Where did you get that parrot?"

was the quick demand of the man who bore a iron hook where a hand ought to be. Easton merely wheezed and shook in the lean and shrewd the whites of his eyes. It was indeed, a most extraordinary bird, and one as much as awakened to the fact that he was not in the grip of the law. Its eyes continued of that fact, he became visible enough in his protestations to allege the "white gen'lman" with any information they desired. This was to those white gentlemen back to the neighborhood of Hassack's chicken coop.

The engrossed were they in their discoveries, that they failed to avoid the quick attention to Easton himself, who took advantage of that diversion to disappear.

There were certain phases of that hurried pursuit, however, which had not entirely escaped the attention of the streamboat stranger who had remained casually about the scene of the of Cedarton earlier in the evening. Amid Jumbo Watson, in fact, had sincerely recovered from the shock temporarily upon the stabbing invasion of her cottage when she discovered herself confronted by still another stranger. And the fact that this stranger was a rather small and old to her immediate peace of mind.

"All I want to know, by my good woman, is where those men are taking that parrot!"

"Don't talkin' him back t' what he done got out back," explained that new grove. The streamer started for the front. Then he paused, dead stock.

"Where did that paper come from?" he demanded. For he knew that it was the long-sought Golden chart he held in his hand.

"Dat door come from mah office in Jamaica," explained the other. "And mah fiancee allows it hain't even well a green tradin' stamp!"

"Your fiancee may be right," was the stranger's quiet reply. "But I'm worth this much to me." And Amos Jenkins found himself left behind and into her astuffed pink palm. "That's for you, my good woman, if you just one thing, and do it quickly. I want you to go to the sheriff and have him up, and get him to the house at once. Tell him that woman called! Jessie 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 shadowline through the dark. Shadowline, too, he approached an ivy-bowered bungalow in which some women were quietly gathering escaped his attention; it was perhaps for the best that he did not. He had to make off with his prisoners. He was thinking cautiously about it, to make sure the coast was clear, when a voice startlingly close to his ear portly earcase called out with a sudden warning:

"Look out for the Iron Claw!"

"Where did you get that parrot?" repeated the voice so close behind him.

"Look out for the Iron Claw!" repeated the voice, and Easton, with a throaty bellow of agony, charged across a ninety-foot garden and lawn and like a rotund jackrabbit down a wooded alley bordered with shadowy fences.

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She Was Sitting in Front of the Suit of Japanese Armor.

Easton Watson, Jemima's lord and master, flung the sheet of paper down on their kitchen table in disgust when it was placed before him as the climax of a "picture."

Now, Easton, who was of much portion frame and his owner of the firm's believer in the efficiency of forced feeding, drank the day's harvest's had been a lean one, and the harder showed discerning signs of starvation that plump-bodied negro possessed a fondness for a generous and an appreciation of the determination of angular Jemima when hunger ran high and the money was low. Insistence combined with force to induce her to eat, take him steadily over the backyard fence of the above mentioned Botello and from there to the door of the padlocked coop. It is the opinion of the committee that the lightness of one bird tossed into the coop "preference" in the light of a green-shaded reading lamp. But the man in the desk, preferring to leave that peaceful game undisturbed, stole quietly in through the back of the house, locked himself in a small room above stairs, and there adroitly but quickly made a facsimile of the map.

Before that map could be completed though, strange events were already transpiring directly beneath where he sat. For Margery Golden, glancing up from her game, stared idly into the old-fashioned mirror of bevel plate framed her. For the face she had seen was Lagar's.

The move she quietly decided upon was to call the wrangely retinued chauffeur of her strangely elusive admirer and ask him to make ready for an immediate flight to the city. She watched that chauffeur as he threw on a heavy horsehair 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 then that several men, lurking there in the shadowy recesses, leaped upon him. It was equally plain that they lost little time in overpowering him, for before the startled women could rise from their card table they found that home of peace invaded, by a group of as many more ruffians headed by Lagar himself.

The latter bowed ironically to the startled girl as he curtly ordered his men to his advance towards her, though, was interrupted by the suddenly renewed struggles of the chauffeur, who, as he tried to break away from his captors, called loudly for help. Lagar, looking

"Where Did You Get That Parrot?"

nonchalantly about, crossed to a door, swung it wide, and with a curt command to his men shoved the chauffeur into a closet.

"Throw that grizzly in here until he learns how to keep quiet!" was their leader's curt command.

"And now, my girl, I guess it's your turn again!" was his next stinging remark of elucidation.

It was at this same moment that those words were spoken still another interesting event was taking place. Only this time it was the far more instructive figure of that man of mystery, known as the Laughing Mask.

"Not a move from any man here!" he cried out as he faced that hurried, startled circle, gun in hand.

It was Lagar himself who stepped back a pace or two, closely watching the automatic.

"Before we start any shooting around here," the Laughing Mask calmly suggested, "I want just a word with Miss Lagar, with you. I know you're after. You want Golden's portfolio. So do I. But I'm not going to tell you what I have that chart, and I have it. Nor Margery Golden and her mother here to return quietly to the city with the chauffeur and stenographer."

Lagar's lip curled.

"And then you'll as quietly hand me over the paper, I suppose?" he sneered.

"I'll hand you over the paper," was the quiet Laughing Mask, for since you're so keen it was necessary to be plain to you."

The gun and the map together," the unmoved Laughing Mask.

"Then you will in this case need it. I make sure it's the map I've got," announced the audacious Lagar.

"I want your decision, gentlemen, in the next forty seconds," snorkling Laughing Mask announced as he darted across the room to the green-shaded lamp and placed the sheet of yellow paper down on the card table close beside a second piece which he had taken from his pocket.

"By God, I've got it!" exulted Lagar. "Let out that driver in the rear alone first," he commanded, "and if that fool in the mask tries to move, plug him one."

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 boat it with those rifles, and boat it quick!"

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.

"The map's gone!" was the bewildering message that fell on Lagar's ears as he looked to the table side. The man in the bear skins at the same moment, in that confusion, made the door open.

"That guy gave you a copy, a fake one!" was the astounded cry.

Lagar gave one glance. Then, with his cat-like leaped for the closet door, flung it open, and sprang boldly on the chauffeur. He dragged that it out to the table and swept the hand of fellow that covered the second piece of map.

He then, with a sudden triple effect, a chorus of shouts and the clattering of heavy boots on the floor through the house. For the sheriff had at last arrived.

Lagar, knowing what that meant, with the sweep of his hooked arm flung the green-shaded lamp into the air. It shattered through a window and vanished from sight.

The Shell of Deceit.

Margery Golden's coolness could not be equaled, was once more in very excellent spirits. There were circumstances when young David Winslow considered himself a most superior sort of fellow, and distinctly agreeable.

For the girl's happiness, he felt as he stared at the mutated hand holding the long-bladed dagger, he had not thought he saw, that hand slowly raise, as though moved above her as he downed its inexorable links and plates and weapons with a gesture of such very blood in his body seemed to curdle with sudden horror, for now there was no doubt about it. The mailed hand holding the long, thin-bladed blade above the softly-breathing girl was the hand that surely knew that dagger and still higher. And in another instant, Master Bob, 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 blade that was poised above the girl's breast.

There was a muffled shout of pain, a short scream of terror from the startled girl and something fell with a clang to the floor. Then he flung himself on the floor, and with a single bound, leaped to the side of the man in the armor. He had, in his excitement, struck at the wrong hand, and the dagger had fallen from the steel gauntlet.

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He Knew.

Little Edward was listening carefully to the conversation of his elders, puzzled over the many long words he did not understand, when he heard his grandfather call a certain person an optimist. Edward brightened.

"Oh," cried he, "I know what that is!"

"Well, Edward," said his grandfather, "what, then, is an optimist?"

"Why," cried Edward, "he was the fella you with spectacles!"

Sprang Bodily on Manley.

While the menacing automaton was on one side and sprang bodily on Manley. As he did so an unexpected and strange and mantled figure glided into the narrow room. It was a figure wrapped and hooded in heavy velour and only a second more of the strange newcomer 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. But Manley, as he fought with Wrench, had still time to register this fact, or the further fact that a rent had been torn in the portiere to serve as an eye-hole for the head which it so completely covered.

It was not until that hooded figure had joined in the contest that Manley became aware of the second portiere mask. A sense of strange uneasiness at that portiere was darkly thrown over him. He felt that the mask and cloak of velour had in it some subtle menace