

THE IRON CLAW

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"The Hand of Peril," Etc.

(The Marvelous Story, Hitherto Unpublished
From Which the Pathe Photoplay of
the Same Name Was Made)

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FOURTEENTH INSTALLMENT

The Octopus Bomb.

MARGORY faced the supreme dilemma of her life. Pungent, multifold, she had faced before, or been added to overcome them through the unflinching help of the man in the yellow mask. But now more than mere bodily peril held her in the thrall of indecision. Yet a decision had to be made at that quickly.

The girl walked slowly to the still open window and stood out, but the mental problem that engrossed her preoccupied her attention to the exclusion of everything else. Then a voice behind her spoke:

"Can you see any of them?"

Margory turned to the man in the yellow mask, who stood close behind her.

"No," said Margory, in answer to his question. "We have a few minutes' grace. Do you think it surely the wisest thing to do, do you think it necessary beyond all doubt that I go away with you? I know you must realize what that must mean to me—I cannot but think of father."

"I have thought of everything you have said—everything you have even thought," said the Laughing Mask gently. "But it is no longer safe for you to stay here. I must go away. It is no longer safe for me, and if I am not here to shield you from Legar."

"Yes," murmured Margory, "father believes so implicitly now that these crimes of Legar were perpetrated by you. That police captain has so thoroughly convinced himself. And this policeman has said over and over again that he will not rest until he has captured you. Indeed, you are in terrible danger now. Not half an hour ago I heard father telephoning to the captain and planning to find you. You should not have come here."

"I had to come. I had to tell you this. And I had to tell you your father's vault. The thing that I must clear my name. By the way, of the crimes Legar has fastened upon me—Legar's confession."

"Then, come, let us hurry," said Margory.

The two of them then stole quickly down through the shadowy house to the library. She had gathered up a few things into a handbag—things she might need in her flight with the man in the yellow mask. The thought of this boldness of all the steps she had taken to escape the Iron Claw of Legar and all that it symbolized to her, made her a bit paler than was her wont, but her lips closed firmly in resolution. And as the man at her side held up the heavy portiere at the library door for her to pass, she looked up into his eyes, shining through his mask, and smiled gratefully into them.

But the moment of reassurance passed, and in its stead there arose in the depths of her mind a vague apprehension—at what, she hardly knew, except, perhaps, at the impending return of the police and her father.

The Laughing Mask went swiftly through the shadowy house to the heavy door swung open. But the next minute, a single alarm swept through Margory's body, for the call bell of the telephone on the rosewood desk suddenly rang out through the room. By this time the Laughing Mask was within the vault, but the shrill of that bell brought him out into the room.

"Don't answer it!" warned the girl. "But Wilson, or another of the servants, will surely come to answer it," explained the Laughing Mask, as he moved toward the only door that he had not looked on entering the library.

"The confession—have you got it?" asked Margory, not heeding what he had said, so great was the tension of her mind.

"It is where it is safe," quietly replied the Laughing Mask.

"Then I'll shut the vault door," she said.

He stood watching her as she crossed the room to the vault and swung to the heavy safe door. He saw her gloved hand go up to the nickel-plated handle, to throw on the lock. Then she did an unexpected and a startling thing.

With an oddly birdlike movement of the head the girl stopped and stared intently at his figure, clearly outlined against the dark folds of the portiere behind her. She caught up, of locking the vault door, she took four swift steps to the heavily carved teakwood table to her right. In another moment she had caught up the Roman lamp of solidly cast bronze, and, with all her strength, hurled it at the awaiting portiere behind him.

"Legar!" was her cry. And at the same moment she uttered a shrill cry of warning.

It was time. From behind one of the folds of the portiere she had

glimpsed an iron claw at the end of a preternaturally long arm. And as this iron claw was lifted high in the air she cried out as she caught sight of the glint of a naked steel knife blade, long and slender, held in some inexplicable manner in the clutch of that circle of iron.

Her warning was sufficient. Lightly the Laughing Mask leaped to one side. At the same time the heavy lamp struck the upraised tangle of wood and steel and dashed the tangle to the floor. The man in the mask leaped to the center of the room, placing himself between the girl and the door, as though to shield her body with his own, for by this time Legar was in the room itself. And as he advanced he drew a revolver from his pocket.

But the man in the mask was more agile than his enemy. He swung Margory about in a twinkling and whisked her back to the vault, where with one tug of his free hand, he swung the vault door open. Legar fired but the bullet ricocheted harmlessly against the open safe-front of steel.

"Father keeps a navy revolver in the coin drawer of the vault here," whispered Margory, as the man in the mask pushed her more deeply into the shadow of the protecting door.

At the moment that the Laughing Mask swung about and tugged open the coin drawer, Wilson and a round-eyed footman, having heard the sound of the shot and having previously failed to get any answer to the telephone, came running to the library door. But before they could open that door, Legar, realizing that his time was short, had taken matters into his hands. Charging boldly against the still half-open vault door, he swung it shut upon the Laughing Mask and Margory before they had time to realize his intent. Then Legar threw on the lock, spun the dial and wheeled around to cover the two white-faced and gasping-mouthed servants with his revolver.

"Stir one foot, either of you, and I'll be your last move on this earth!" he cried, as he edged guardedly toward the door, still covering them as he went.

Legar saw the confusion of his hopes and of his many schemes almost before his eyes. His escape was assured and Margory and the Laughing Mask were prisoners within the vault where they would meet the most horrible of all deaths—by slow suffocation. Legar's scared face became livid with triumph, his eyes shone in a gleam of ultimate, complete vengeance. The two servants fell back before him in a terror that was now abject. With a flourish, he drew his revolver and pointed it at the door and would have reached it himself, had he not at that moment heard the entrance door of the Golden mansion flung open and the noise of many feet sounding on the stairs a minute later.

Slamming the room door shut upon Wilson and the footman, Legar, his face of triumph gone from his features, stared frantically around the room. He dashed to a Persian screen of ancient design, its panels fashioned in sixteenth century tapestry, and crouched behind it, as he drew his revolver.

As Legar found his precarious hiding place the door of the room opened and Enoch Golden entered amid a clatter of hurrying feet and a babble of voices. Wilson for the third time tried to explain to his master what had happened. Almost inarticulate from excitement, he turned to Mr. Golden and to the officials from the Central Office alternately.

Wilson spluttered his explanations as best he could, but the more he was piled with questions the more excitedly confused he became. Finally he managed to make it clear, at least, that Margory was shut up in the vault.

"Margory! My daughter shut up in a vault, you say, Wilson?" cried her father.

"Yes, sir, shut up in there with the man in the yellow mask, the man as these officers, sir, have been looking for!"

Golden strode over to the vault door. His face was pale and he breathed hard as he stooped over the lock dial. But his fingers were shaking so as he began to fidget over the combination that he bungled and was forced to turn the intricate mechanism back to its beginning. Again he started it, now working feverishly.

Within the vault Margory and the Laughing Mask were as if in a tomb. The girl, fearless-souled though she was, and inured to peril since the Iron Claw had first fastened its clasp on her destiny, nevertheless had always before been able to see and to face the danger that may have threatened her.

Now the impenetrable gloom of the vault that enclosed her made her fearsome. There was no knowing with what she and her companion might come face to face when that vault door was finally opened—if, indeed, it were to be opened. She clung to the man in the mask, and murmured her fears. For neither could yet hear the almost soundless click of the lock dial as Margory's



"Father believes so implicitly that these crimes of Legar were perpetrated by you," whispered the girl, anxiously. "Even now you are in terrible danger."

father worked at it; the mechanism was far too complicated and the inner levers had not yet begun to respond.

The man in the yellow mask—if he felt any fear for the outcome of this, his most precarious adventure among the innumerable strange predicaments that his self-appointed guardianship of Margory Golden had brought him, he gave expression to none. He reassured her gently and shielded her even, for her seeming lack of confidence in him.

"Have you forgotten, my dear, that I have the confession of Legar?" he whispered to her. "That alone means safety, for it will take care of most of the crimes which the Iron Claw has fastened upon me. The rest, well, they will take care of themselves. And if they do not—"

The man in the mask said no more. Both he and Margory now distinctly heard the clicking of the levers of the inner mechanism of the dial lock, and quickly he took from a pocket and handed to the girl a little, hard, black oval. In her hand, it felt to her touch to be like a cake of soap. Only there were what seemed to be tiny tentacles upon it.

The clicking levers were beginning to work more rapidly. In another moment the great vault door would swing open to what?

"Quick, Margory," he whispered, "what I have just given you is what I have called the octopus bomb. It will save us, if the need should be dire. If there should be no other means of escape. It will save us—it will save me if I alone should be menaced—as the octopus saves itself."

As the man in the mask finished the rapidly spoken words the door of the vault swung outward. Margory stepped forward and the agonized look on her father's face, as this gradually spread before her vision, once her eyes had become accustomed to the light after the swift transition from the dimness of the vault, impelled her to rush to his arms.

The detective, with whom the room swarmed, paid no heed to Margory. Their quarry emerged from the gloom to catch up her destiny. Nevertheless, he glanced about—from revolver muzzle to revolver muzzle, all leveled at him. Margory glanced back at the Laughing Mask as he stood, thus facing this desperate denouement. Then she cried out, involuntarily, for one of the detectives had stridden up to the vault door, and with a gesture, commandingly stopped him.

"One moment, if you please, gentlemen. There is no need for this."

Legar had flashed across the room like a missile from a catapult. Three of the detectives were knocked from their feet. The others gaped at the shattered window. The captain was the first to recover his wits. He shouted an angry command, one of his men threw up the battered mask and the rest leaped out. But Legar had had a full minute's advantage of them. They could still see him, and opened fire, but the range was too long a one.

Inside the Golden library the detective who had tried to disclose the identity of the Laughing Mask was again intent upon solving this mystery. That is why he had remained behind.

"If you have nothing to hide, take off your mask," he demanded. The Laughing Mask told him there were often reasons why a man could not seem to be what he was or could not be what he seemed. There was the strongest possible reason, he said, why he himself kept his name and his personality hidden from the world.

The detective was of the true Central office type—a bulldog's jaw, a pair of beady eyes and no great quantity of brain behind those little eyes. The bulldog's jaw was now set and the beady eyes were fixed on the yellow covering that hid the face of the Laughing Mask. The bulldog's jaw opened for a brief space and these words emerged from them:

"It's no use; your time's come. Off with the mask, I tell you!"

The Laughing Mask looked straight into the beady eyes before him and he saw that the man was not of the sort that is open to argument or persuasion. Then he looked steadily on, beyond where Margory stood, behind the detective. His glance held a strange significance for her and she understood its full import when, raising his hands in a gesture of despair, he slowly lifted them to his face as if to lift the yellow mask.

Margory understood his glance and interpreted his gesture aright. She deftly slipped the octopus bomb from her handkerchief, in which she had held it, clutched tightly within her fingers, ever since she and the Laughing Mask had left the vault. As the detective strode forward to peer more closely at what he expected to see revealed, Margory hurled the bomb to the floor.

The next moment the room was filled with an impenetrable cloud of black smoke. Completely enveloped every one and everything in the library. The detective and Golden both made a leap for the spot where the Laughing Mask stood. But their hands grasped only the smoke-filled air. The detective uttered a growl of rage, and beating his way about the room as though he were a blind man fighting in the dark, he sought to come to grips with the quarry that had eluded him.

Gradually the black, sootlike pall rose to the high ceiling of the library, disclosing Margory, her father and the detective to one another. But the Laughing Mask had vanished as completely as though he had flittered through the floor. The doors of the room were closed and none of the three in the room had heard the doors opened or shut. Nevertheless, the detective dashed to the door leading to the adjoining reception hall and flung it open. Golden followed and both ran through this spacious chamber and on to the stairs. Margory, still apprehensive for the safety of the man in the yellow mask, ran after the searchers, who were fairly baffled.

As soon as all three were clear of the reception hall the Laughing Mask emerged from a large ancient Roman vase which Golden had once bought with a number of other almost priceless marbles at the sale of the Count de Rivaz's service of the century collection. Probably in the hundreds of years of the vase's existence it had never been put to such use as this. The Laughing Mask had found it a curiously apt refuge at the crux of a great peril. Now, swiftly, he climbed from out its great

sheltering bowl and stepped noiselessly back to the library. The shattered glass of the window, whence Legar had made his escape, met his eye. The route that Legar had taken he could take; indeed, he must take—there was no other.

Silently the Laughing Mask lifted the window and climbed over the sill. In another moment he had leaped to the ground below. But he had not reckoned upon the quick discouragement that overtakes that limp arm of the law known as a central office detective. The half dozen of the type, with their chief, who had pursued Legar when their revolvers failed to stop him, had quickly given up the chase. Legar made for the thick hedge on the Golden estate when once he had outdistanced his pursuers and then he had found an almost impenetrable thicket. There he waited, revolver in hand, but the detectives had lost the trail. Not twenty yards from Legar, the detectives gathered at a council of confusion. And at last the captain said:

"Well, we'll get the other one anyhow."

And with that, the party of detectives started back to the Golden mansion. They were walking briskly when the captain quickly motioned to his men to hug the wall of the house. Something at the shattered window of the library had caught his attention. It was a man's back. The man was outside the window sill. The captain then recognized the hat of the Laughing Mask. The captain halted his men, who were still some fifty feet from the window. The Laughing Mask straightened up as he reached the ground beneath the window, and, for an instant, again he faced his enemies. But in a flash, he turned and darted around the corner of the house.

Again he doubled around the third side of the house and then came to where he had started. The Laughing Mask knew well the psychology of the central office. It was a boy's ruse, he had employed, but his estimate of central office brains proved to be the correct one.

When the captain and his men reached the back house corner, they stopped to search the vista down the second house wall. Already the Laughing Mask was around the next corner and it did not dawn on the detectives that the man they were hunting would do anything but make for the hedge as Legar had done.

As a fact, Legar was still where he had eluded pursuit. He knew he had once more escaped and a look of satisfaction had stolen over his features as he glanced from out the hedge and saw his pursuers disappearing.

Then, stealthily from the pocket into which he had jammed it as he had seized it in the Golden library, he drew forth the confession that he had sought so long. He held it to the light so that he could read it and then, with his claw, he tore the paper to shreds.

The Laughing Mask, too, had beaten the detectives. He ran with all the fleetness of foot that his athletic build and slim strength could muster, out beyond the Golden grounds and down the nearest street to the trolley line. As he reached the tracks a car, just from the barn, came to a stop and the Laughing Mask boarded it at a leap. The conductor of the car had gone to the signal box near by. As the man finished setting the signal, the Laughing Mask saw the group of detectives at the head of the street at right angles to the tracks dashing toward him. In another minute they would reach the car. Before that they would be able to attract the attention of the motorman and conductor with a revolver shot. It was a matter of seconds for the Laughing Mask and every second must be made to count.

He slipped his revolver from his coat pocket and ran through the car. With a bound he was upon the front platform and slipped the catch of the door behind him. As the motorman faced about the Laughing Mask's revolver was thrust into his face.

"Start the car—now!" cried the Laughing Mask.

Instead the motorman lifted the controller handle from the box and would have struck the Laughing Mask's revolver hand, but the latter stepped back and thrust the motorman off the platform with a terrific shove of his foot. The motorman tumbled over in the dust of the roadway and before he could regain his feet the Laughing Mask had the spare controller handle out of the tool box and had started the car at full speed.

Leaving the controller box for an instant, he gazed backward. The detectives had stopped a passing automobile and were piling into it. The car gained momentum, and soon it careened along the rails, swinging around curves with two wheels in the air and ever bettering its speed.

Nevertheless, the automobile, now driven by one of the detectives, could not be outdistanced. The Laughing Mask had the trolley car going like a runaway, dashing down grades with every kilowatt of power turned on and thus increasing its momentum. But the slight upgrades were killing their theft of what speed was being gained. The automobile steadily grew larger to the Laughing Mask's vision as he now and then glanced backward.

The automobile was now scarcely more than a hundred yards behind. The car was approaching another slight upgrade, preparatory to dashing across the highest bridge on the road. As the car struck the level stretch of track at the entrance to the bridge abutment, again its momentum drove it at fresh speed. Now it was gaining on the automobile, the car full of detectives, in its turn, struck the up grade. A new plan flashed through the Laughing Mask's mind. He looked back to measure the distance between the car and the automobile. The car gave a lurch as it struck the bridge switch frog. In another moment it had left the rails, and then it hurtled against the guard rail, smashed it and plunged downward.

The car disappeared from the sight of the detectives in the pursuing automobile. Golden gave an involuntary cry. Another minute and they, too, would be plunging down the tracks. They stopped, and all seven of the men peered over the side of the car, but there could be no trace either of the trolley car or of the Laughing Mask.

The searchers went down the driveway to the waterworks, where they lay the wrecked trolley car, smashed to splinters. The detectives scattered along the bank of the river, hunting for some sign of the Laughing Mask, but there was none.

"We have hunted all along the shore," reported one of the detectives to the captain, "but there is no sign of the Laughing Mask's body. It must have been carried on down the river and over the falls."

For the policemen and Golden the quest was ended. They drove back to the Golden mansion and then the captain and his men took their leave. Golden, still somewhat unnerved at the fate that he believed had befallen the Laughing Mask, could not recall only a meager impression of Golden mounted the stairs of his home.

Margory, wide-eyed, stood at the stairhead. What Golden had just seen was still pictured, in some sort, on his face.

"Father," she cried, "what is it, what has happened?"

"The Laughing Mask," he said, "has met a terrible death."

And then he told her what he had seen. She looked into his face, incredulous, amazed, horror-stricken. "You say it can't be!" she gasped, like one in a dream.

"I saw it with my own eyes," said her father.

He gazed at his weeping girl, then fell into his arms, her face shaken by convulsive sobs. (To be continued next week)

FANCY FA

Beautiful Models F
Furnished

Even more amazing in essence" of Worth's from the airy bouffancy of summer skirts, are the various "undulings," gowns, and lounge robes the modern daughter of cond to the quaint June, are these varieties being prepared for the vacation wardrobe. The air, chignon negligees, clouds, and gossamer vintu blown into space, the 1918 devotee's still source of joy and an thing is too fragile or for recognition from the underlings.

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There are any number of new overdone mode favor just now. One made of white satin, it has a panel front in which are run sev encircling sides and b of lace and hand-e width to the hem, wh measures six yards ex

But that is nothing, chiffon or net underl ten to eighteen yards of narrow ribbons, and lace edgings. Daint claim is the slip illust wear. The lace of the flounce, and of posed over a founda silver tissue hands, shoulders and adjust the waistline, and bo

FOOTWEA OF

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Boots have come among the "tremendous feminine wardrobe—size, of course, but in make and so varied as which to select and choice of the correct tume that a great de be given to the subje

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Read It Here --- See It At The Pantages Theatre