

The LASH of CIRCUMSTANCE

by HARRY IRVING GREENE
Author of "Yosonie of the Wilderness"
Illustrations by Magrue G. Kettner
Copyright 1910 by W.O. CHAPMAN

SYNOPSIS.

Abner Halliday, a miserly millionaire, is found gagged, bound and insensible in his room, his safe rifled and \$40,000 missing. The thread of the story is taken up by his nephew Tom, living in the same house as other relatives, including Bruce Halliday and pretty Clara Winton. Bruce, who is a bond broker, has been trying to raise \$50,000 to put through a deal and save himself from financial ruin. He has applied to his miserly uncle and to others for the loan but has been refused. Tom sends for William LeDuc, an old-time friend connected with a detective agency. In relating the story Tom reverts to his acquaintance with a Mrs. Dace, a wealthy widow, whose business agent is Richard Mackay, a bolder and political boss. Tom is jealous of Mackay and is deeply in love with Mrs. Dace. Bruce Halliday warns him to shun her as an adventuress. Tom sees Mrs. Dace and Mackay together. He afterwards meets the woman at a horse race, and, happening to mention that Bruce had a tip on the winner, she gives him \$500 to place on the race. The tip goes wrong and she loses her money. Later Tom invests in stocks. He makes some money, and returns the lost \$500 to Mrs. Dace. It is at this juncture that the theft of the \$40,000 from old Abner Halliday occurs. LeDuc meets Clara Winton. Bruce learns that the key which Mackay's dealings with Mrs. Dace make Tom more jealous. The detective intimates a suspicion against Bruce Halliday as the thief. This Clara Winton indignantly repudiates. Mrs. Dace accepts Tom as her fiance, and encourages him to invest in certain stocks. Tom has a row with Mackay and the latter threatens revenge. The detective announces to the thief that he has discovered the person who stole the \$40,000 from old Abner Halliday. Tom asks the name of the culprit. Sternly and emphatically LeDuc declares that it is himself.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"I have nothing further to say at present than to repeat that you will regret your idocy later," was my frigid comment. He laid aside the card case as having been disposed of and began toying with the bookmaker's ticket.

"Being now thoroughly convinced of your guilt I began worrying my head for good, tangible proof of it; proof that would convince 12 men who would be naturally prepossessed in your favor at the beginning because of your appearance and good record. I hated to believe you capable of a thing like this, but was forced to; and as you know when I tackle a man in any contest, friendly or otherwise, I am going to down him if I can; leaving the matter of what I will do to him after I have thrown him dependent on a good deal upon his own actions. If he yells quits I am always inclined to help him up, but if he wants to fight it out to the end of course I am not going to give up. Now your devotion to Mrs. Dace was well known about town and when I became advised of it I began thinking hard. It went without saying that it was costing you money to court her, and I did not believe that your salary was sufficient for you to be able to keep up the pace long on that alone. Therefore I naturally wondered where you got the rest. When in tracing you backwards I found out that you had been to the Derby, another bright thought occurred to me. You remember the mysterious man who came to your house with the forged note and got the suit of clothes you had worn on that day? Well, that was another artifice of mine. I wondered if there could possibly be any evidences in your pockets of a gambling transaction on that event. I know from personal experience how apt a man is to carry around expired passes and worthless truck of that kind for a considerable period before destroying them, so I sent an employee of mine to your house with an order written on one of the cards I had found calling for the Derby day suit, not knowing how else to describe it. He got it without trouble, and I intercepted him on the way to the tailor and searched the pockets. In them I found your worthless ticket on Eagle Boy. You had bet \$1,000 on that race in the hope of winning ten thousand; had lost and failed to destroy your good for nothing ticket."

"I suppose in your infinite wisdom you also know that I had money left me by my father which I was at liberty to use as I saw fit," I broke in cuttingly. He acknowledged that he possessed that information.

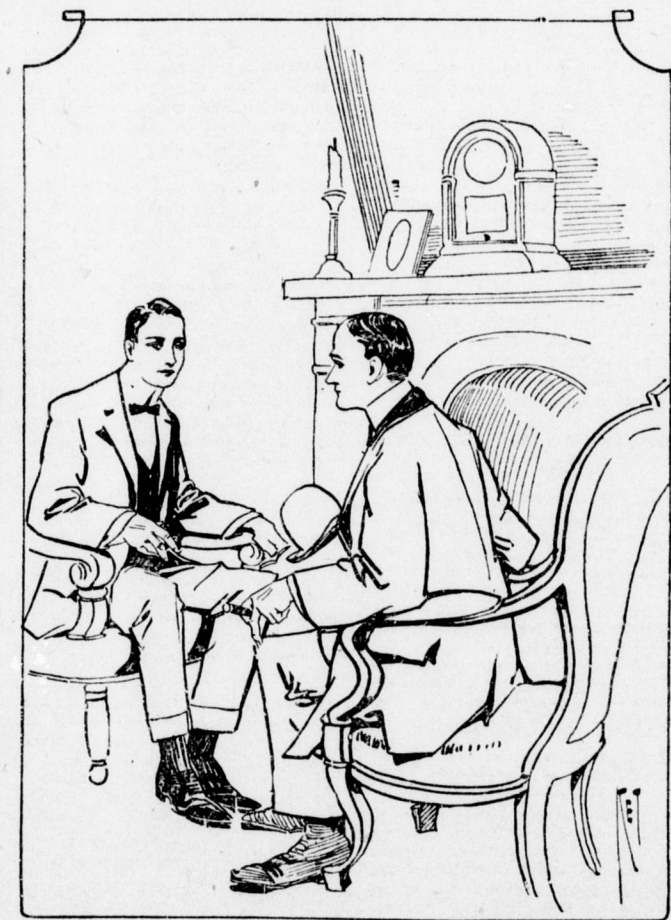
"Yes, I found out that you had something in reserve; but the most important fact I conveyed to me was that you had taken to secret gambling in the hope of winning enough to enable you to keep up your new life. And knowing somewhat of the nature of men, I knew it was improbable to suppose that having made a big loss you would stop without an attempt to regain it. There is no public gambling to any extent going on in town except on the board of trade and stock exchange; so the chances were if you were doing anything along that line it would be at one of those places. By a few days' shadowing you I ascertained that you went to a certain broker's office, and having found that out it did not take me long to learn what medium you were backing. It was the same stock that Bruce went broke on the day before the robbery, and I knew in the nature of things that you had gone broke at the same time he did. You were, therefore, as hard hit as he, but showed splendid nerve and never turned a hair or let a hint drop. I had now uncovered your sudden des-

perate plight at the exact time when you became possessed of the knowledge that your uncle had this large amount of money in an old, weak safe—the combination of dire extremity and sudden opportunity. It was your last hope and you went after it as a drowning man goes after a floating oar. You got it, and for a time it buoyed you." I writhed in my helplessness.

"And you supposed I conjured burglar tools out of the air by a wave of my hand, together with the skill to use them." He smiled retrospectively.

"No, I still had that difficulty to overcome. For a little while it had me stumped, and then I chanced to recall that you went for a year or so to a technical school and learned a good deal about the use of tools. Now, I knew that many young men keep their kit after leaving such places, and I wondered if you had. I also remembered having noticed a sort of a tool chest in the basement on the day I examined the premises, and I now concluding that it was time for me to know what was in it. Therefore I burglarized your basement by forcing the back door, picked the lock of the chest and examined its contents. Among the tools I found one of exactly the size of the one that had bored the safe, and upon closer inspection found that a bit of it had been broken off in the operation, and that bit of steel you now see on the table before you. I found it on the morning I went over the room. You will remember what a painfully minute scrutiny I made of everything—even using my magnifying glass." He gathered up the card case, the ticket and the bit of steel and placed them carefully in an envelope which he deposited in his pocket. He then turned to the piece of soiled paper and the lump of grayish matter.

"I had now the chain of proof connecting you with the crime forged with the exception of one link, which could I supply would make it practically unbreakable. On one of the mortgages which had been blackened by burnt powder was a fairly good imprint of a right thumb. I tore off the fragment of paper containing it, and by placing it under the microscope could distinctly trace the lines. Of course such lines are not the same on any two persons in the world; and could I get an imprint of your thumb and by comparison find that they corresponded, there could then be no further doubt as to your hand being the one that had rummaged the safe. But this was a difficult thing to do without arousing your suspicions. I finally got around it, however, by organizing our burglary for the double purpose of getting the print and calling to your attention the probability of your having lost your card case in



"It Was Your Last Hope and Went After It as a Drowning Man Goes After a Floating Oar."

your previous climb. I told you at the time that I expected to get the proof from one who would not suspect that he had furnished it until I denounced him, and I guess I was correct. I don't believe it entered your head that you were making the evidences as you went along by which I could send you to the penitentiary. Neither did you suspect that I meant you when I told you if I ever unraveled the knot it would be because of the assistance and clues you had given me. Incidentally I might say that the office we burglarized belonged to a friend of mine who loaned it to me

for the purpose. I had you jab your thumb against the ball of soft putty and got an excellent impression of it, which I have had experts compare with the faint lines on the blackened paper. They assure me that they were both made by the same thumb."

It was a good thing that LeDuc had possessed the foresight to render me helpless and secure my revolver. In the frenzy of the moment I certainly would have used it upon one or both of us. I turned upon him desperately. "Do you think any jury would believe such evidence as that and convict me?" I demanded huskily. He wrinkled his forehead.

"I am sure I don't know. One can never tell. Do you want to give a jury the chance?" I made no answer and we sat in silence, the coldness of death upon me, my companion unmoving, but lynx eyed. Then once more he addressed me, and through his tones ran the old familiar friendliness of days long gone by.

"I know that you are not a criminal at heart, Tom. I am sorry, very sorry for all this, and I should regret very much to see you go to the penitentiary. But if you wish me to assist you, you must make a clean breast of the affair. Have you any of your uncle's money left?" I could only groan. Despairing and helpless I threw myself upon his mercy.

"No, I used it for further speculation after I was wiped out the first time. I was way ahead of the game until today, but now I am wiped out completely. I am penniless and in debt. I can repay absolutely nothing—can offer no compromise. You will have to do as you please with me," LeDuc whistled.

"I wondered if you had got bitten today for the second time when I read that Underground had blown up. So that ends my prospects of getting any fees for a lot of hard work." He looked quite downcast for a space, then brightened up and continued more cheerfully.

"But really that does not matter so much after all, for I can worry along without it. If I could only have found that some one besides an old friend had done this thing I would not be dissatisfied with my job. But there is a thing or two which I don't understand. I don't believe you had a duplicate key, for I don't believe you ever contemplated such an act until you were driven desperate by the calamity. I have gone upon the assumption that you quarreled with your uncle the day before the robbery on purpose that you might have an excuse for throwing down the key and absenting yourself from the house during the night. That being the case, how did you enter?"

"When I left the house after the quarrel I threw the catch which prevents the door from locking. Of course it would snap shut as usual, but could then be opened from the outside by the knob. I had no idea that any one would think of looking to see that the door locked itself when it was shut on that day any more than any other, and of course no one did. I was therefore enabled to come in without a key, and when I went out after replacing the tools, and with the money in my pockets, I restored the door to its usual condi-

The detective drew it from his pocket and looked at it reflectively.

"I showed it to you that day downtown merely to create the impression in your mind that I had Bruce under suspicion and had not thought of you in connection with the matter. He probably threw it there thoughtlessly in his trouble as he entered the house on the morning we were all there together. Now I am satisfied that you drugged the poor devil, and I know that you had the cabman send him to that resort. That was bad enough in itself, but when I remember also that you tried to fasten suspicion upon him I am inclined to lose all sympathy for you which I might otherwise have. To my mind your treachery in that respect is by far the worst element of your offense. I can understand how a man's infatuation for a woman may sometimes lead him to dishonesty or even bloodshed, and under those circumstances I am liable to have a lot of charity for him. But when he attempts to put a friend whom he knows is innocent into a felon's cell and thus destroy him and the happiness of a sweet woman, he does an act unworthy of any one who possesses the semblance of humanity or decency."

"LeDuc," I cried brokenly, "what- ever else I say you may believe or not as you see fit, but when I tell you this I want you to believe me implicitly. I had absolutely no idea of trying to fasten it on Bruce. I told you and everybody else from the beginning in the strongest language that I could command that I did not for an instant believe that he could be guilty. Neither would I have permitted him to be punished for the crime. If he had been tried and convicted I should have confessed, come what might. But I knew he would not be convicted, because I was certain if he had no other alternative he would tell where he spent the night. I did not know how he came in possession of the key, and simply told you of having seen him have it, because I wished to appear as telling you all that I knew, and having no idea but that Bruce would immediately account for it. I admit that I dropped a drug in his cocktail, and that I was the one who told the cabman where to take him after he fell unconscious upon the seat, but that was for an entirely different purpose than to try to incriminate him. I made him unconscious merely out of fear that he would return to my uncle's house in another attempt to borrow money and possibly roll into my bed for the night as he has sometimes done, thus interfering with my plans. And I had him conveyed to the place he was taken to instead of to where he was known for the reason that I did not wish his friends to see him in that condition and think he was intoxicated. I had no idea that he would be suspected of this affair, for I did not know he would be so obstinate about refusing to tell where he had been, nor did I know that he would deny having had the key; while as for the cigarette I had nothing to do with it. Therefore I supposed he would awake in the morning, come away, and that no harm would have been done. And when I feared that by reason of several accidents he was in danger of being suspected, I said everything I could to clear him except to acknowledge my own guilt."

"I am glad that you have explained that the way you have. I like you a whole lot the better for it. But how about your mentioning the fact of the money to Mrs. Dace, and why did you cough as you choked your uncle? Was that an attempt to implicate Mackay?"

"You may look at it in that light if you choose. I utterly despised the man; knew that he would do me all the harm that he could by fair means or foul, and did not care what happened to him. I did it with the idea that it might possibly furnish a false clue for you to tire yourself out on."

"Anything more?" he urged as I paused. Utterly within his power I made this last appeal.

"Only this. Knowing that I am a criminal and by all law should go to prison for many years, probably to die there, I have this to say in justification of myself. Until I committed this crime I had always been an honest man with no thought of being otherwise and with no desire to harm a living thing. But because of my love for a woman for whom I would this moment gladly give my life, and because I could see no other way of gaining her except by speculation, I fell into temptation as many a better man has done. Driven onward by a love at whose command I would have faced hades itself, I used my own money first, losing \$1,000 upon the race in the attempt to win a large sum, and the rest in the first break in that stock. In my desperation I committed this crime as the only means of getting more funds with which to win that for which I would have staked my life as readily as I did my liberty. Had I succeeded, I should have married this woman and lived an honest life thereafter; having lost I will bear whatever punishment comes to me without whimpering; and should I live through my imprisonment will seek to atone for my crime in my after life. I would like to have you believe what I say. His hand fell upon mine as softly as a woman's."

"I believe you, Tom, and would trust you to the minute with every cent I have in the world. As you know, it is one of my theories that it is better to save a naturally honest man who has gone wrong and make a good citizen out of him again, than to wreck him by the disgrace of his having been a convict. You have learned your lesson and I have no fear of your ever becoming a rogue again. But you have resigned your position forfeited all claims to con-

sideration upon the part of your uncle, and ought to keep as far away from him in the future as you reasonably can. It seems to me as if there is but one thing for you to do, and I want you to do it. Go away and make a new start somewhere else where everything you see will not be a reminder of this period in your life. You will be able to do better work, and more hopeful work, among other surroundings. Your secret will be safe with me. I will tell your uncle that I have been unable to recover the money and will throw up the case. Will you agree to do as I have suggested if I release you?"

It was my only way of escape, and the wisdom of the advice seemed to beyond doubting. With my bosom almost bursting, and staring straight ahead through dimmed eyes, I assented. "I will go almost immediately. But there is one thing which I must do before leaving. I must first see Mattie—Mrs. Dace, I mean, and have a long talk with her—perhaps several of them—and that may delay me for a few days. I love her better than all else in the world, and if she really

union when my disaster came. Whether I have any doubt but that Mackay was infatuated with the woman, saw that I was winning her and started out to get rid of me. He probably learned of my speculations, and knowing that if he could wreck them it would effectively dispose of me so far as she was concerned, ruthlessly tore down the fortunes of many that I might be crushed in the crash. And he succeeded perfectly. Mrs. Dace, being convinced by him that I was ruined, and probably having been wavering somewhat between us; preferring me, but being tempted by his wealth, hesitated no longer when she became satisfied that I could not give her what she had made up her mind to have. Realizing as I did all along that we never could have been happy without considerable money, I would not have blamed her particularly for making the choice that she did had not Mackay been a married man. Even as it is, I bear her no ill will and do not believe that she was an immoral woman. There was a great deal of good in her, but she was selfish and cared little for the suffer-



"Under the Horror of That Moment All Strength Left Me."

care for me, maybe she will give me another chance to recover myself financially. Of course, she will never know that I did this and perhaps—perhaps—" My voice broke and I choked as I vainly attempted to finish my sentence. I heard the click of a lock and felt the handcuff fall from my wrist.

"You have something more to learn which it hurts me to tell you, but which you must know. I have taken it into consideration in deciding to let you go. It is a part of your punishment, and while it will be bitter you must bear it like a man. You will hardly see Mrs. Dace again. Richard Mackay has left the city for parts unknown, deserting his family and taking Mrs. Dace with him. The yellow evening papers are full of it."

With the floor beneath me heaving like the deck of a reeling ship, I staggered and fell upon my knees before the bed, burying my face in it. Under the horror of that moment all strength left me and I sobbed brokenly.

CHAPTER XVII.

There is little more to tell. In the few following days I managed to scrape enough together to take me to the foreign country where I am now beginning life over, and have probably weathered the storm as well as could reasonably be expected. But of course I will never again feel just as I used to, and I don't believe that I will ever fall in love with another woman. In a business way I have done fairly well, having worked conscientiously for the last three years, and being once more on the road to moderate success. I have never seen or heard from Mrs. Dace since the time I left her shopping in the store upon the day when I stepped from paradise into hell at a single stride. She is probably floating down the Nile or yachting on the Mediterranean with Richard Mackay; enjoying herself to a greater or less extent, and I have no doubt thinking quite often of me. The thought of it still gnaws me most of the time, but of one thing I am confident to this day. And that is that she was really very fond of me and would, as she herself said, have preferred to spend her life with me rather than anybody else had I possessed sufficient money. Therefore she wanted me to succeed and encouraged me to desperate chances, knowing as I myself did that it was the only chance of achieving fortune quickly; she not being one of the kind that is content to wait for what possessed sufficient money. Had I won, I have no doubt that she would have married me and that we would have been happy had the money lasted. And I also believe that she was upon the verge of consenting to our immediate

ings of others provided she gained her own pleasures. The only fear I have of ever again committing a crime is in case I should happen to run across that black scoundrel Mackay. If I should see him I am afraid I might run amuck.

Bruce and Clara are married and are happily spending the money of dead Uncle Abner, who cut me off with a shilling. And that brings me to the reason for writing this confession. Uncle Abner having passed into the great beyond, I no longer have any fear that I will be prosecuted, and I never would be able to feel that I had made my fullest reparation unless I cleared Bruce. For in some way a few things leaked out, and while his friends have clung to him with the greatest loyalty, there are others who have always looked upon him with more or less suspicion since the night of the robbery. And I know that the consciousness of this is a cloud that forever hovers upon the horizon of their otherwise bright lives, and it is, therefore, my moral duty to dispel it. As for myself, it makes little difference if the truth is now known, as none of my former acquaintances know where I am and I shall never return to my old home.

Nor do I ask forgiveness or make apology beyond this statement. I was not a thief by nature and am thoroughly repentant. But I was young and madly enraptured with the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and took desperate chances to gain her. And my love for her, though passion filled, was pure. I wanted her for my wife. As I stole for her, so would I have slaved for her; fought for her; died for her. Therefore I only ask that you judge me as you would be judged had you been in my place. Caught helplessly in the maelstrom of love and gaming, I went down in the vortex.

THE END.

Extenuating Circumstance.

Ted was an excitable youngster, and to adequately express his feelings had acquired the use of words forceful, but improper. In a fit of temper one day he used some of his most violent terms to his mother. She said nothing, but Ted knew well the signs of preparation for a just rebuke, corporally administered. He said, "I know you are going to whip me, but before you begin remember I said it in a very pleasant tone of voice."

Wisdom of Father.

Pretty Daughter—But I can't understand why you object to Clarence, father. Isn't it better to dwell in a cottage with the man I love than to dwell in a palace with one I hate?

Wise Father—Certainly, my dear; but Clarence hasn't the cottage.