

The Grim Inheritance

by Carl Clausen



An Unexpected Development

AUSTIN CRANE'S earliest recollection was that of having to take his medicine, literally speaking. Every morning his nurse would give him an orange-colored transparent capsule. He was warned not to chew it like candy, but to swallow it right down with the drink of water which she had ready for him. This recollection dated back to a period when he was between three and four years old.

The first nurse he remembered had

worn puff sleeves. Some years later, at the age of eight, Austin had come across a fashion plate in an old magazine. All the figures wore puff sleeves. He had wondered mildly to whom these ladies fed orange-colored capsules before breakfast.

Being an inquisitive child he had also wondered about certain other things. Why, for instance, was he not permitted to go to school with other children? The big handsome schoolhouse with its Doric columns had always fascinated him. When he rode past it with his tutor, and Gulp, the liveried chauffeur

slowed up the car at the school crossing, Austin would peer through the glass at the words, "Knowledge is Power" which were chiseled in gold letters above the door. As he watched the army of shouting children at play, an almost uncontrollable impulse to fling the door of the car open and to run out and join the shouting mob would sweep over him. He wanted to yell with them, to be yelled at by them and above all he wanted to be let in on his share of the power which was advertised in the golden letters above the door.

At such moments he vaguely felt that somehow or other life had cheated him, that there was something lacking in his existence which neither Gulp, the chauffeur, Sims, the butler, Mr. Henry, the tutor, or his mother could supply. He also felt that a sort of conspiracy to cheat him of something, he hardly knew what, was going on between these people and old Doctor Goldwin, who came down on the first of every month and looked over and left a fresh supply of orange-colored capsules with his mother.

It was on one of these monthly visits when Austin was eighteen years old that he overheard a discussion of himself between her and the doctor. He had not meant to be eavesdropping. He was coming down the soft-carpeted stairway when he heard the voices of his mother and the physician in the living room. Doctor Goldwin said:

"The boy is entering young manhood with every normal manifestation. You need not worry. He is a perfect specimen of manhood. His physical and mental status is decidedly above par."

Austin heard his mother reply:

"Rut suppose he wishes to marry some day—and the day must inevitably come?"

"I see no reason why he shouldn't," the doctor had replied.

Austin tiptoed back upstairs to his room. He pondered deeply upon what he had overheard. He wondered what they had meant.

If there was anything wrong with him he wanted to know it. He decided to speak to his mother about it that night after Doctor Goldwin had gone, but abandoned the idea when he remembered that in doing so he would indict himself for eavesdropping. The physician's words, "He's a perfect specimen of manhood," kept ringing in his ears. What did Doctor Goldwin mean? And why shouldn't he be a perfect specimen?

He crossed to the window and stood looking out into the Long Island Sound. In the cove at the foot of the garden his sloop lay moored. His mother had bought it for him two years before, and on fine days he and Mr. Henley cruised about the Sound in it. Beyond the wide, sun-hot expanse of the Sound the low cliffs of the Connecticut shore lay traced faintly in the late afternoon mist. He wondered what manner of people lived there. He felt suddenly a strong desire to go and see—to bolt from the odious restraint of his daily routine of lessons, exercises, and walks and to escape the spying eyes of Sims, Gulp, Mr. Henley and his mother.

Turning, he walked to the cheval mirror at the end of the room. He looked himself over critically. He could judge himself only by comparison with the few people with whom he came in daily contact. He knew that he was taller than Mr. Henley, the tutor, almost as tall as Gulp, the chauffeur, and that he carried himself nearly as straight as Sims, the butler; certainly with more ease. He knew that his blue eyes were much clearer than Gulp's and that his light hair was of much finer quality. He wondered if these were signs of perfect manhood. He had always rather admired the chauffeur's wiry hair and the way Gulp wore his cap pulled forward over his shaggy eyebrows.

HE had thought about this episode for weeks. He was burning to know about himself, but he knew that any move on his part in that

direction would be met by rebuffs. A hint dropped to Mr. Henley one day had elicited nothing but a hurried and ill-concealed anxiety to change the subject.

Austin gave up definitely the idea of questioning his mother, partly because he felt very sure that she was at the bottom of the conspiracy and partly because he loved her dearly and shrank from the thought of causing her pain. She was a fragile dark-eyed person with white hair, a quick eager manner and tiny soft hands that were always reaching for him with caresses. He admired her as greatly as he loved her.

An inkling of the truth came to him in quite an unexpected manner. During his mother's absence in New York one rainy day, and while Mr. Henley was writing some letters in his room, Austin stole down to the sloop unobserved by the rest of the household, cast the boat loose, hoisted the sail, and stood out into the open Sound in a brisk northwester with his eyes on the distant Connecticut shore line. He was a good sailor, and he had learned to handle the little craft with the skill of a veteran, so the increasing of wind did not disturb him. He merely took a reef in the mainsail and went on. He had no definite idea of where he was going. He merely felt the immediate need of the open, of wind and rain sweeping down upon him from illimitable spaces.

It was not long before he noticed that more clouds were gathering in the north. He wondered if a storm was coming up and in the same breath hoped that one was. He felt elated at the thought, curiously light, and free from restraint. Tiller in hand he watched the green seas come tumbling along the rail as the sloop heeled to the pressure of her sails. She clove the crested seas, shaking the spume and smother from her bows at each leap. Spindrift lashed his face. He shouted with exultation.

So engrossed was he with his newly-acquired freedom that he did not notice the

rapid foreshortening of all horizons, the shifting of the wind and the blotting out of the land, forward and aft. An hour later, after tacking about double-reefed in the teeth of the gale, he was forced to give her sheet and run off free. Another hour and he knew that he was being blown out to sea at the rate of ten miles an hour.

He was not frightened. His elation at his new-found liberty left no room for fear. For the first time in his life he was going about the business of living independently. He felt like one who had claimed at last some long deferred birthright.

After six days of knocking about the Atlantic with a box of sea-biscuits and a small breaker of water as the only food and drink, he was picked up by a Gloucester-man returning homeward, full to the deck with halibut. He slept in one of its bunks nearly all the way back to Gloucester while the stoop was towed astern. He was completely exhausted. The exhilaration was gone. His body seemed in the grip of some monstrous apathy from which he was unable to rouse himself. Even after being drenched with sleep he felt a curious disinclination to stir.

The authorities at Gloucester communicated with his mother at once. She arrived in her car, accompanied by Doctor Goldwin and Henley that same afternoon, with terror in her dark eyes, which Austin searched his tired mind in vain to account for. He had expected a scolding but none came. Doctor Goldwin gave him one of the orange-colored capsules and the four returned, a silent party.

Austin had never seen his mother so tender before. She cried nearly all the way down the coast. She took his face between her small soft hands and searched his eyes with a sort of breathless intentness that puzzled him. He tried to respond to her caresses, but they left him cold and apathetic. He was conscious even of a slight feeling of nausea at her demonstrativeness. He glanced at Mr. Henley

for an explanation of this extraordinary phenomenon, but the tutor averted his face as if loath to meet his questioning eyes. Drowsiness overtook him at last. He sank back in the cushioned seat and slept.

WHEN he opened his eyes the next morning he found that he was in bed in his own room. He lay for a long time trying to review the happenings of the last ten days but his brain refused to respond to any orderly survey. He felt no desire for anything except to lie prone, but he did not get any feeling of rest or relaxation from the thought of remaining in bed. He glanced about the chamber. He had a momentary illusion of being in a strange room. Even the most familiar object seemed remote and unreal.

He was conscious of being thirsty, but it took him several minutes to make up his mind to arise and search for a glass in the bathroom. As he passed the cheval mirror on his way back to bed he caught sight of himself therein and paused, blinking at the image he saw there: a sallow face with lacklustre eyeballs set deeply in narrowed slits. He ran his fingers through his hair as if by this motion to brush away the vision that confronted him in the mirror and noted that his hair felt curiously dry and brittle to the touch.

He stood staring at himself for some moments, then crept back to bed. He didn't understand what had happened and his mind was too tired to grapple with the problem. When the nurse brought him his capsule fifteen minutes later he swallowed it and said nothing.

During his convalescence he tried to screw up courage to get out of bed and look at himself in the mirror, and when he finally did get the courage to do so at the end of the second week, he saw there a well set-up youth with clear blue eyes, soft wavy hair and a healthy ruddy skin. He decided that he had dreamed that other image.

When he was twenty-two years old his mother died. The day before she had been well and happy. They had motored to Montauk Point and had lunched at a wayside inn. Upon returning she had complained of a slight headache and had retired early. The following morning, Elaine the maid had gone into her room to awaken her and had found her lying dead upon the canopied bed with her white head thrown back and her small hands clutching the silken covers. She had scarcely stirred. Death had been instantaneous and except for the tightly-closed hands, there was no evidence of pain or struggle. Her heart had simply stopped.

Austin was left in a daze by the unexpectedness of it; and the confusion of the household robbed of its governing hand, added to his misery. He stayed beside her until Doctor Goldwin arrived and ordered him to leave the room. Even then he could hardly tear himself away. He gave the still form on the bed one last look and stumbled downstairs after old Sims, then outdoors and down to the sloop.

He sailed on the Sound that afternoon, his mind a blank. When he returned he found that they had taken her away. Her room had been made up. He wandered about its crypt-like emptiness and touched her things one by one. On the dressing table there was a small silver casket containing a few long strands of white hair. She had told him laughingly one day that she was saving them toward a switch for old age. He touched the strands lightly with the tips of his fingers, now. They seemed still a part of her living, fragile self.

He opened the door of the clothes closet. Doll-like dresses hung there in orderly rows and a dozen pairs of tiny Cinderella slippers stood against the wall. Her warm eager personality seemed to be expressed in every pair, to be lingering in every last fold of each dainty garment. He wanted to gather them up in his arms, and take them to some

secluded spot and cry over them, but he couldn't cry....

A week after the funeral there was a meeting in the library between several men. With the exception of Dr. Goldwin all were strangers to Austin. The will was read by a heavy-faced man with a porcine brow and a flattened skull about which a fringe of coarse iron gray hair rode like a misplaced halo.

Austin listened, abstractedly. He gathered from the stilted, legal phraseology that he was the only heir; later that the heavy-faced man whose name was Stoddard, and who seemed to be a distant relative of his dead father, had succeeded in getting himself appointed by the court as administrator. In the discussion that followed the reading of the will, Austin discovered that his mother had lived far beyond her income for years and that the estate was heavily encumbered. The man Stoddard informed all present in somewhat pompous tone that he would do his best to save what was left of the Crane fortune.

Austin looked at the speaker and said nothing. Finance was a closed book to him, and an instinctive distrust of the man kept him silent. After much arguing pro and con it was decided that the servants were to be discharged, the heavily mortgaged house offered for sale and that Austin was to live with the Stoddards in New York until other arrangements could be made.

THE men gathered up their legal documents and brief cases and left. Doctor Goldwin alone remained. When the sound of their motor had died away in the distance the physician stopped pacing the floor and said:

"I'm going to tell you something, my boy—something that ought to have been told you long before this."

Austin felt a shock pass through his body as his eyes met the serious, kindly ones of the old physician bent upon him searchingly.

"Yes?" he replied, breathlessly.

"You have wondered often about certain things—I refer particularly to the medicine?"

Austin nodded. He gripped the arms of his chair. He was on the brink of a momentous discovery. The realization of it made him inarticulate.

"I am going to tell you what I consider necessary for you to know," the physician went on; "against my advice your mother kept it from you. I tried to make her see her error and to make her realize the danger she exposed you to by keeping you in ignorance of certain things but she wouldn't listen. Women are that way. Sentimental and unwilling to face the truths of life." He paused and glanced at the white face staring up at him from the depths of the cushioned chair. "There's nothing to be frightened at, lad," he said, "pull yourself together and listen to me."

"I am listening," Austin replied with an effort to keep his voice steady.

"Do you know what a CRETIN is?" the physician asked.

Austin shook his head.

"I am not going to go into obscure medical terminology that would only confuse you: A cretin is a man or a woman in whom, from some pathological defect, the cause or origin of which is as yet unknown, a certain gland functions improperly or not at all. By administering extracts of such a gland taken from animals, the missing ingredients can be supplied artificially and with the identical results attained in nature's most wonderful laboratory, the human body."

"You were born a cretin. This need not frighten you. There are thousands of them. We rub shoulders with them every day, but no one except the most intimate members of their families know it. They are being constantly watched and supplied with the missing ingredients which keeps them normal and healthy. It is only when deprived of these

through ignorance or by not being themselves informed about their affliction, that the tragedy of retrogression occurs.”

“What d’you mean?” Austin asked, breathlessly.

“I mean that they will return to the cretinous state if the supply of glandular extract is cut off or withheld. The retrogression begins almost at once. Even in a few days there is a marked change. The pulse becomes slow, the mind, sluggish. The body begins to shrink, the features change, the skin becomes dry and sallow and the hair brittle. If you could have seen yourself four years ago when we brought you back from your attempt at crossing the Atlantic in the sloop, after being deprived of your medicine for ten days, you’d know what I mean.”

“I did see myself in the mirror of my room,” Austin replied in a small, tense voice.

The physician started.

“And you’ve been carrying that picture in your mind unexplained ever since? You poor lad.”

“I—I thought that I dreamed it—afterwards.”

“I see. I understand. The recovery when the extract is again supplied is as rapid as the retrogression”

Austin was silent. The answers to a thousand questions crowded into his mind at once. But one question was still burning there unanswered.

“What would happen to me if this medicine was cut off entirely and forever?” he asked.

The physician held up his hand in protest.

“The picture would be too unpleasant for me to paint and for you to contemplate. Remember what you saw in the mirror four years ago and imagine that magnified a hundred fold? But there is no reason to fear its supply being cut off. It is easily accessible and not particularly expensive. I merely tell you

all this for your own protection and to warn you not to be without it anywhere for more than twenty-four hours.”

Austin Crane’s Readjustment

HIS life with the Stoddards in New York was a series of adjustments and compromises for Austin. Hitherto the world had revolved about him; now he found himself suddenly in the role of satellite. From the position of prince royal with every whim or wish anticipated and gratified, he had descended at once to the level of commoner. At home someone had always stood between himself and the realities of life. In the Stoddard mansion on upper Fifth Avenue, no one seemed to care what he did, nor when or how he did it. The most ordinary things which every man does for himself as a matter of course in the daily prosecution of existence, presented themselves as problems to Austin.

At first he was confused and unhappy but gradually his untrained mind began to adjust itself to the new manner of things. Little by little his dormant faculties began to react to the new influences and responsibilities. Each experience was a draft upon his resources that must be honored at once. It became a game, a fascinating sport, with his soul and integrity as the stakes.

He was quick to learn. He did not know that within the human brain lies the knowledge of all things, and that only by contact with problems this knowledge comes forth. He merely knew that he must learn or perish. He was confronted with problems which boys of ten had assimilated before their milk teeth were gone. His twenty-two year old mind bridged the chasm in an instant. There was nothing to unlearn. His brain sensitized to receive whatever might come its way, was like a virgin phonograph record awaiting the recording needle.

The Stoddard household puzzled him.

His dislike of the man Stoddard was deep-rooted and it increased as time went on. He had never encountered a human of predatory habits before. There was no precedent to guide him. His distrust was instinctive.

There was a Mrs. Stoddard, a florid coarse woman as heavy as her husband, with prominent china-blue eyes and a great pile of over-bright yellow hair which in spite of its elaborate dressing, always seemed in imminent danger of tumbling about her ears. Austin encountered her rarely except at mealtimes. She ignored him utterly. For both circumstances he was thankful. When she ate, her tiered chin reminded him of the pouch of a pelican. She seemed to divide her time equally between her suite of rooms in the east wing of the big house and her showy automobile.

The Stoddards were childless but there was another member of the household whose exact status Austin was unable to determine. Her name was Ann Barrert and she seemed to occupy the position of a servant, who was displayed as a poor relation only at mealtimes or when company was present for the sake of appearances. She also was a distant relative of Mr. Stoddard and had become indigent it seemed shortly after joining the household. She was a quiet, self-effacing creature, who rarely spoke except when addressed, and whose brown eyes Austin caught now and then regarding him with a sort of repressed warning across the table, or when he encountered her in the dim, cavernous hallways. He had the curious feeling that she was forever on the point of telling him something, but that she was not sure whether she ought to.

Altogether it was a strange household. A person of experience would have been warned, but in Austin's limited contact with life he had not yet encountered knavery. He felt merely a sense of restlessness and depression that was accentuated by the tomb-like air of the big house. Even the servants

were aloof and impersonal, not like old tender-hearted Sims and friendly, garrulous Gulp. The only person he felt anything in common with was the girl Ann. He was unable to account for this feeling, but there were times when he wanted to take her aside and tell her about his mother. At such times he wondered if her hands were soft and cool like his mother's.

Once a month He called at Doctor Goldwin's offices for a fresh supply of his medicine. He always looked forward to these visits. They talked about his mother and the old place on the North Shore of Long Island which the doctor informed him was being subdivided into suburban lots by the Stoddard Development Company. On one of these visits, Austin asked the physician if Stoddard knew of his affliction.

"No one knows about it except yourself and me," the physician replied. "You mustn't think of it in the terms of an affliction. If anything, you're a grade above the average, both physically and mentally. There's no reason why you shouldn't live a long and useful life. What you need is an interest. Get that and forget the other and you'll be happy."

He went to his desk and opened a drawer from which he took a slip of paper.

"This is the prescription for your medicine," he said. "I meant to give it to you last time you were here, but I forgot. You will find the address of the laboratory that prepares it on the reverse side. Don't lose it. In the event of my death, they'll supply it to you direct."

Austin gripped the arms of his chair.

"But you're not going to die—soon," he said in sudden panic.

The physician smiled.

"I hope not. But one never knows." He paused and regarded his frightened young visitor sternly. "You must stop depending upon others, Son. Go out and mix with people. Make friends. Go into some sort of business,

or learn a trade or a profession. Get away from yourself. Learn to love work, and to—love,” he added.

“I—I will,” Austin replied, as he folded up the slip of paper and put it in his pocket.

FOR days he thought about his talk with Doctor Goldwin. At home on Long Island his mother had set aside a small plot of ground for him for a garden. He had loved this little spot. On summer mornings he would awaken while it was still dark and lie waiting impatiently for the sun to rise, and then bolt his breakfast and hurry down to see how much his plants had grown during the night. He had felt an immense responsibility for their welfare. When a Spring gale broke one of his young trees he had wept over it for days. A month later new shoots had appeared below the break and the wound was healed over with rosin. On all sides he saw the constant feverish effort of all loving things to create, to perpetuate themselves against great odds.

“Learn to love work and to—love,” Doctor Goldwin had said. It was odd that, with this sentence running through his mind, Austin should think of Ann Barrett. When he met her in the halls, he felt the impulse to gather her in his arms. Somehow, she seemed to hold within her small, compact body the joy of creating, the promise of perpetuation.

He felt vaguely ashamed of himself. He was infinitely better equipped for battle than the poor broken tree.

The months that followed were busy ones for him. His talk with the physician awakened in him a desire to know all about himself and the world into which he had been so suddenly projected. He spent his days wandering about the city, observing what men had done while his mind had been asleep. He spent his nights in reading and study. His ability to assimilate was as great as his thirst for knowledge. He saw, noted, and mentally

digested.

He had been with the Stoddards a little over a year when the first inkling of disaster came to him. His monthly allowance was cut off. Stoddard explained to him in the library one evening a week or so later that due to unfortunate conditions over which he had no control, the remnants of the Crane fortune had been swept away.

“You mean that I have no money at all?” Austin asked.

Stoddard replied that because of his mother’s mismanagement such was the case, but added magnanimously that Austin was welcome to the hospitality of his roof until he could find something to do. Austin glanced at the mottled face of his distant relative. The man’s small furtive eyes seemed to flit about the room as if in an effort to evade his own. The young man wondered if the documents which he had signed now and then at Stoddard’s request, during the past year had anything to do with the loss of the money.

He went upstairs without a word. He had seen enough of poverty in his wanderings about town to make him thoughtful. Beggars had stopped him now and then with hands outstretched for alms, depressing-looking, slinking creatures in soiled garments into whose trembling palms he had dropped coins. The thought of what might become of him, if there was no money for his monthly supply of medicine, made his brain reel. He clutched the bannister for support.

At a turn in the dark hall he was confronted by the girl, Ann. Her finger was raised to her lips in an admonitory gesture.

“I was listening,” she whispered. “I heard what he told you in the library. Oh, why didn’t I warn you long ago? He stole my money and now he has stolen yours.”

Austin searched her face in the gloom. His mind was so full of his own problems that the significance of what she told him did not impress him at once.

“He stole your money?” he reiterated.

“Yes, yes. The court made him my guardian after my father’s death ten years ago. I’m doing the work of a servant here while they live in luxury on my money.”

Austin drew a deep breath. His distrust of Stoddard flamed into suspicion, then certitude, in an instant. He looked down at the small face upturned to his in the darkness. Pity for her made him forget his own problems. She seemed so small, so abandoned. He did not know how it happened but somehow their lips met, and at that moment life with its infinite possibilities was opened to him. He kissed not only her lips but her eyes and her hair, and when he finally released her, frightened at his own vehemence, she did not run away. They stood looking at one another as if a miracle, which their senses could not credit, had been performed before their eyes.

Then, at a sudden slamming of a door behind them, the girl turned and fled down the hall in the direction of Mrs. Stoddard’s suite.

Dinner was being served when Austin entered the dining room that evening. Neither Stoddard nor his wife as much as glanced at him when he took his accustomed seat opposite Ann, but he caught a quick interchange of looks between them as he unfolded his napkin. The girl raised her eyes to his for a moment, then dropped them again, hurriedly.

He ate mechanically and with no thought upon the food. Stoddard’s conversation with his wife was monosyllabic as usual, and he consumed his food with noisy indelicacy. His smooth, flat skull gleamed dully in the soft light. His heavy face had the peculiar mottled and flabby aspect of a toad’s belly, and the toad-like effect was further accentuated by the short neck upon which his head was thrust forward, slightly in advance of the rest of his body.

He never seemed more repulsive to Austin than at this moment. The young man

felt a sudden impulse to arise and denounce him and to sink his fingers into the bovine neck. The only thing that deterred him was the warning glance from the brown eyes at the other side of the table. They seemed to say:

“Not yet! Bide your-time. Plan; think!”

He slept not at all that night. His brain was seething with vague plans and half-formed ideas. He had no definite notion of what he intended to do. He only knew that the girl’s kisses still burned on his lips. For her sake he must find a way to bring Stoddard to account.

Crane Secures Employment

IT was with this thing in mind that he approached Stoddard the following day with the request that since he was now penniless, he might take him into his office to learn the real estate business. Stoddard regarded him in heavy-lidded silence before replying, then said:

“I’ll give you a try-out. But mind you, no foolishness. You’ve been pampered all your life. I don’t pamper my employees. I’ll give you a note to Kraft, the office manager. Report for work to-morrow.”

Austin found Kraft a medium-sized, very blond man with a bulging forehead, prominent glassy blue eyes and a nervous, jerky manner. He was known among his business associates as a booster. He was always “on his toes” about something, even if that something was merely an order for new typewriter ribbons. He expressed himself in detonations; his simplest remarks were minor explosions. He prided himself upon a brisk and business-like manner; he was merely a gatling-gun firing an unceasing barrage at some spot, the range of which was uncertain, but which he hoped to hit by the simple law of averages. It never seemed to occur to him that by purchasing a range-finder he could have saved himself a lot of ammunition.

He put Austin to work as a file clerk, not because he needed one, but because Stoddard had told him to create this position. The files of the Stoddard Development and Realty Company were like all concerns of this kind: a simple record of sales made and of property listed for sale. They were consulted only upon enquiry from some customer answering an advertisement or to compute Mr. Stoddard's very large income tax. The Stoddard Company were specialists in their line, "Realtors of the Better Kind," was Mr. Kraft's slogan. They handled nothing but large business (properties and development projects running into six or seven figures.

Austin's clerkship consisted merely of half a dozen trips a day to pull a card from the files and bring it to Mr. Kraft's or Mr. Stoddard's desk. The balance of his time was taken up in running errands about town. These errands were many and varied, such as taking documents to the Recorder's Office, making deposits at the bank, carrying papers to and from the title companies, delivering leases, serving vacating notices, putting up rental placards on vacant properties and "For Sale" signs on empty plots.

He began to get some insight into how modern business was conducted. He learned, observed, and paid close attention. He knew that he was holding his position at the Stoddard firm on sufferance only, and that Stoddard was watching for a slip as an excuse to discharge him, so he executed his commissions with diligence and attention to the minutest detail. His time was limited. Sooner or later the axe would fall. He watched every move of the firm. Nothing escaped him. He knew that an outright monetary reprisal was out of the question. The firm's business was done almost entirely by checks, and the limited amount of cash in the office safe was not worth his while.

He found that Stoddard did a good deal of trading on his own account in high grade

bonds and stocks. Also that the firm was not always overscrupulous how the offerers of them had come by them, as long as they were negotiable or bearer certificates and the price was right. In one instance he had been sent to the bank to cash a large cheque. The money, some four thousand dollars had been given to a hard-looking individual who had been in long and earnest conversation with Stoddard in his private office, and, who left behind him a bundle of securities identical with those mentioned in the headlines of a morning paper as having been stolen in the robbery of a bonding house a few days previously. Stoddard had put the bonds away in his safe at once and later had removed them to his safe deposit box at the bank. This fact gave Austin food for thought.

Certain plans had begun to form in his mind. They became crystallized almost at once, when one afternoon Doctor Goldwin summoned him to his office.

"I've some good news for you," the old physician told him, "Doctor Swartz from Vienna will be here in New York this summer. His gland operations are nothing short of surgical miracles. I haven't said anything to you about him before, because I did not want to raise false hopes in you, but after watching his work for the past four or five years, I'm convinced that if you have the courage to submit to his knife, you'll be permanently cured. His fee is ten thousand dollars. I guess you can manage that sum. I'll have a talk with Mr. Stoddard about advancing you the money."

Austin held his breath. The plan which he had worked out would be frustrated if Stoddard found out about his affliction. He considered momentarily the wisdom of confiding in Doctor Goldwin about the cutting off of his allowance, but decided against it. His plans required that he play a lone hand. The possibilities which the physician's announcement of Doctor Swartz' visit held for

him, sent the blood pounding to his temples. His future, Ann, life as a normal human being, the father of children—Ann's children....

"I'll see Stoddard, myself," he said, "please don't mention my—affliction to him. I'll get the money from him on some pretext or other. Promise me that you won't say anything to him about it," he insisted, earnestly.

"As you wish," Doctor Goldwin replied. He smiled indulgently at what he thought was a display of sensitiveness. "This is May. Doctor Swartz will be here early in August. I want you to be ready for him."

"I'll be ready for him," Austin said, "I'll have ten thousand dollars in your hands by the first of August."

"Very well. You must rest during the month of July in preparation for the operation. Get Stoddard to let you take your vacation early."

"I will," Austin replied. "Don't forget your promise Stoddard must not know."

"I've given you my word, my boy," the old physician said as he escorted him to the door.

Once outside, Austin realized that he had committed himself definitely to an obligation that would take all his sagacity to live up to, but the discovery that a permanent cure was possible made all other things possible. He could go to Ann with clean hands. If he had had any misgivings about the success of his plan, they were now swept aside.

There was no time to lose in putting the scheme in operation. His time was more limited than ever now. A certain amount of cash was necessary. This he secured from the pawning of his mother's jewels. He felt a stab of remorse at parting with them for even a few months, but he had to have money. With the proceeds he went to the fishing village on Long Island near his old home and left instructions with the boatman there with

whom he had left his sloop in charge for the past year, to overhaul the boat thoroughly for a long cruise that summer. This and the stocking of the boat with provisions took half of his limited capital.

He visited his old home while he was negotiating the repairs on the boat. The fine old grounds had been subdivided into building plots, and rows of small cottages all alike as peas, shut off the view of the Sound from the once wooded slopes. Knowing what he did of business now, he marveled at his own credulity in signing the papers which Stoddard had submitted to him from time to time, and to which he, Austin, had put his signature without as much as glancing at them. He saw how completely his utter ignorance of business had delivered him into Stoddard's hands. The man would hardly have been human to resist the temptation.

Austin shed a tear or two for the fate of the old home, then set his face resolutely toward the future.

THE weeks that followed were busy ones for him. As he worked during the day, only his evenings were available for his preparations. At a store in the Bowery district he purchased an entire new outfit of cheap flashy clothes, a tie that only a race track tout would have dared to wear, a soft Fedora hat with brightly colored band, and a pair of light tan button shoes that shrieked to heaven. He also purchased a pair of dark eye glasses of the variety known colloquially as "rubber-tired."

These things he carried to the stoop in a suitcase and stowed away in the small cabin. When the repairs on the boat had been consummated, he sailed the little craft into the East River one Sunday past Hell-gate, and moored it in the angle of one of the piers at the foot of Eighty-sixth Street near the ferry dock. The Stoddard house was in the Eighties, just off Fifth Avenue, a run of less than ten minutes on the Eighty-sixth Street crosstown

bus from where the yawl was moored.

His last move was to purchase a five hundred dollar bond of a certain public utilities corporation with the remainder of his money. The bond was one of those standard securities in which widows invest their life insurance money and which are as negotiable and almost as safe as United States Treasury notes.

It was early in June when all his preparations were perfected. He went over everything in detail. Every step he meant to take was planned out. The audacity and boldness of the plan augured well for its success.

On the evening of the fifth of June he approached Stoddard with the request that his summer vacation begin that following Saturday. The alacrity with which Stoddard granted the request amused him. He was not needed at the Stoddard Development and Realty Company and knew that he was kept on merely because Stoddard was just a little bit afraid of him.

"I would like to run down to Bermuda in the yawl. I may be gone two months or so, if you have no objection." Austin told him.

Stoddard's heavy lips parted in a wolfish smile. He considered how he could turn this circumstance to his own account when Austin returned, by letting the young man out on the plea that business was not what it ought to be. At any rate it gave him an excellent opening to dispense with his "protege's services."

"Take as long as you like," he replied with a magnanimous wave of his pudgy hand.

"Thank you, sir," said Austin, gravely.

He had a long talk with Ann that evening in a secluded corner of Central Park, where he had asked her to meet him. He told her many things, some of which stirred her to wonder and filled her dark eyes with tenderness and others that made her fearful for him.

He waved her fears aside. They clung to each other in the dusk of the warm spring evening. When they parted she said:

"Even if you do not raise the money for the operation, we can work together and save until we have enough. Nothing matters except that I love you."

"There are others to think of," he replied, as he kissed her tenderly and fiercely in the same breath. "For their sake I've got to win."

The following Saturday he packed up a few necessary things and departed for his yawl moored at the foot of Eighty-sixth Street. His mind became filled with a sort of subtle intoxication as he began to put his plan into operation. He had no intention of going to Bermuda for a month or so. He simply stayed aboard the well-provisioned and comfortable little craft and proceeded to deprive himself of his medicine. With the memory in his mind of the image he had seen in the cheval mirror of his room, when his mother and Doctor Goldwin had brought him back from Gloucester, the procedure took every ounce of will power he possessed. The enforced inactivity of one month which was necessary to accomplish sufficient retrogression to make him unrecognizable, would have appalled a less determined man. The result would have made a heart, less stout than his, fail.

A Strange Visitor

IT was on a very hot afternoon in the first days of July that Stoddard, perspiring in his shirt sleeves in his office received a bulky special delivery letter. He ran his stubby forefinger under the flap of the envelope, wondering mildly what its contents might be. When a five hundred dollar negotiable bond of a certain well-known public utilities corporation dropped into his hand, his pale blue eyes lighted with sudden interest and the interest was heightened by the contents of the

typed letter which accompanied it.

“Mr. J. C. Stoddard, New York City,”
he read:

“Dear Sir:—A pal of mine—never
mind who—advised me that you would be in
the market for securities of this kind if the
price was right I have \$200,000 worth of them
and my price is right. Thirty-three per cent,
discount for cash. If not interested, please
return the enclosed sample at once,

“Sincerely
yours,

“Joseph Scanlon,

“General Delivery, New York,”

Stoddard dabbed his bald skull with a damp, purple-bordered silk handkerchief. He turned the certificate over, examined it closely and held it up to the light. It was undoubtedly genuine. It carried six and one-quarter per cent, interest and was worth, he knew, fully one hundred cents on the dollar. He considered the letter ponderously. Two hundred, thousand dollars worth of these bonds at a discount of thirty-three per cent, would have netted him sixty-six thousand dollars, a very nice profit; but Stoddard was not a man to be satisfied with a nice profit in a deal that contained the elements of a “clean-up.” He knew that men who offered bonds of this kind at a knock down price were not in a position to dictate, so he came back at Mr. Joseph Scanlon, General Delivery, New York, with an offer of thirty-three cents on the dollar instead of thirty-three per cent, discount.

Mr. Scanlon’s answer was a typewritten howl of protest. He cut his price to forty per cent, discount. Stoddard raised his offer to forty cents on the dollar. They finally compromised on fifty cents, partly because the sum represented by this amount— or \$100,000— was within two thousand dollars

of all the cash Stoddard possessed in the world and perhaps partly because the writer of the letter was aware of this fact.

Mr. Scanlon explained that as for reasons of expediency, he was “lying low” in the Bowery district, and did not care to be abroad in daylight, because the sun hurt his eyes; he would call at Mr. Stoddard’s home address which had been given him by their mutual “friend,” with the package of bonds. Further, that if Mr. Stoddard would have the hundred thousand in a certified cheque ready for him at, say, eleven o’clock, on a certain night, the deal could be consummated without any fuss or feathers.

Mr. Stoddard agreed to all this except on one count. He was a careful man. A certified cheque would constitute a legal record of a transaction that might cause him some little embarrassment to explain away to an inquisitive prosecutor, if Mr. Scanlon should recover from his eye trouble and venture forth in broad daylight. The cash would be on hand in large bills, he stated by return mail.

Mr. Scanlon replied that although he hated to carry such a sum on his person after dark in a city like New York, full of unscrupulous characters, he would abide by Mr. Stoddard’s decision. As a postscript he added, that he’d bring two pals along to watch outside the house, and that if Mr. Stoddard knew what was good for him he wouldn’t try any rough stuff, or he, Mr. Scanlon, would make it his business to put a lily in his, Mr. Stoddard’s, hand forthwith.

Mr. Stoddard smiled grimly at this horticultural postscript. These underworld characters were a suspicious lot. He could afford to smile. He had no intention of pulling any rough stuff. He was quite satisfied with a profit of one hundred thousand dollars and a whole skin.

He did, however, take the precaution of having the money to pay for the bonds

delivered to his residence by an armored delivery car company, and immediately transferred it to his wall safe in the library.

At eleven o'clock that evening, the agreed time, his door bell rang. He answered it himself. The man whom he let into the darkened hall wore a soft felt hat with a brightly colored band, pulled down over his eyes, dark tortoise-shell eyeglasses, a blue double-breasted suit with broad stripes, and a pair of light tan shoes. Under his arm he carried a bundle done up in common brown wrapping paper, Mr. Stoddard's swift glance of scrutiny noted the ominous bulge of the right hand pocket of the striped jacket.

"Mr. Joseph Scanlon, I assume?" he asked, pleasantly.

The man nodded. He stood for a moment peering about the darkened hall in a listening attitude.

"Come into the library," Stoddard said, leading the way. "We're all alone," he added, reassuringly. "My wife is out and the servants have gone to bed."

THE man followed him slowly without a word. He walked with the peculiar shuffling gait of advanced age. Seated opposite in the better-lighted library, Stoddard got his first good look at him. He was a singularly depressing-looking man. The skin of his face which was of a waxy pallor, seemed to hang in folds that apparently could not be smoothed out. It gave him a peculiar wizened look in spite of the fact that he was quite evidently a young man. Although well above middle height he gave the appearance somehow of being shrunken and his movements and speech were abnormally deliberate. He sat staring at Stoddard through his darkened eyeglasses, his lower lip drooping askew in an uncanny half imbecile way.

"Let's see the bonds," he said, finally.

"Let's see the jack," the other replied forcing out each word slowly in a hoarse voice

as if the mere act of speaking was an effort.

Stoddard pointed to the wall-safe. "It's in there." He held out his hands for the brown paper package. The man made no movement. He said merely. "Let's—see—it."

Stoddard made a motion of impatience.

"I play square," he said.

The man reached for his hat, as if to leave.

"All right," Stoddard grumbled, "I'll show it to you." He went to the safe and opened it, then flipped the bundle of bills in the light of the table lamp, before laying them down.

The man's wizened hand holding the brown paper package moved forward slowly. He pushed the parcel across the table to Stoddard, then put the hand into the bulging right hand pocket of his jacket and leaned back in his chair.

Stoddard tore the brown paper off the parcel. He found that it contained some half a dozen neatly folded newspapers of a very, recent issue.

"What—what's this—?" He raised his head with an angry snarl but the snarl turned to amazement when he found himself looking into the bore of an automatic pistol which at the distance of the six feet that separated him from his visitor, looked to his bulging eyes like the end of a section of drain pipe.

"Pass—me—the—jack," the man said in his slow, emotionless voice.

Mr. Stoddard's lower jaw dropped wide. His pudgy hand moved to the bundle of currency, then came away with a quick cat-like movement, as if it had been turned. He took a step backward and slumped into his chair and sat staring at his visitor with the beads of perspiration streaming down his mottled face.

The man arose slowly, reached for the money and put it into his pocket. He stood looking at Stoddard for a moment, then said in

his peculiar hoarse, brittle voice:

“The telephone—wires—are—cut. Stay—where—you—are—for—five—minutes—or—my—pals—will—get you.”

Without another word he backed out and left the room slowly. When Stoddard heard the front door close upon him he arose halfway in his seat, but fear made him drop back. He knew that men of Joseph Scanlon’s type would stop at nothing.

He sat staring at the bundle of newspapers on the table until the minute hand of the clock on the mantel had advanced five minutes. At the end of that time he ran into the street screaming for the police.

Half an hour later, while men from headquarters were taking his incoherent statement, a sloop with her canvas spread to the midnight breeze, stood up the East river, past Hell Gate and headed for the Long Island Sound. The description which Stoddard gave to the officers of the man who had robbed him, tallied perfectly with the man whose hand was on the tiller of the boat.

Crane Returns from The Bermudas

SOME five weeks later, Austin Crane, bronzed and in fine fettle from his cruise to the Bermudas, presented himself at Doctor Goldwin’s office, for the preliminary examination before submitting to the eminent foreign specialist’s knife. Doctor Goldwin’s face was grave.

“You’ve heard the news, I suppose?” the old physician asked.

To Austin’s reply that he hadn’t, the doctor said: “Stoddard and Company have failed.” He told Austin about the robbery and gave him the details of the failure. “The police think that he staged the holdup himself to cover up his embezzlements of your money and the girl, Ann Barren’s. His description of the alleged bandit was so fantastic, that the authorities smelled a rat and took charge of his books. I’m afraid, my boy, that you’ll never get a red cent out of the mess.”

Austin drew a deep breath.

“It was lucky I got the ten thousand out of him before I left,” he said. “You think that the operation will be a success, Doctor? I’m banking on it. I want to get married—to Ann Barren.”

The doctor cleared his throat. He seemed to be thinking.

“There’s not the slightest doubt about it, my boy,” he said, finally. “I’m more than ever convinced since my talk with Doctor Swartz a few days ago.” He paused. “I’m glad the little girl will be provided for. I was wondering what was going to become of her.”

Austin smiled.

“She’s got a little money laid by that Stoddard failed to get his hands on,” he replied, “we’ll make out.”

The old physician gave him a quick, appraising look. His wise old eyes held Austin’s for a moment, then he drew his breath in sharply as if an idea had suddenly struck him.

“I—think you will,” he agreed, slowly.