

A Political Vendetta

By
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CHAPTER XIV.

The foam of passion and frenzy bathed Gideon Hope's lips. Like a madman he tore at the bars, raving out incoherent rage and defeat.

His prey had escaped him—and, too, booted and spurred for the flesh.

Well he knew that before he could reach the roof and descend to earth, Kane would be out of the building, speeding through the sheltering labyrinths of the plant to some point of obscurity.

Fear would lend him wings; money would purchase him the means of evading pursuit. Oh! this man must be overtaken—checked forever now!

Hope ran across a terra firma, running a race of reckless risks he never realized. He was out of breath, his clothing torn, his frame wrenched and bruised. He reacted quickly, then in a flash he acted.

Lightning quick he made for a tower a few hundred yards across the molding yard. An engine house, elongated from its base, and steam was hissing thence, but but slowly.

Through the open doorway Hope dashed. The man in charge was loitering on a bench, smoking a pipe. He stopped as he sawed him, brought him to his feet with a jerk and four mystic words—the secret passwords of the inner circle of that great industrial federation, "The Amalgamated."

The man stared at him in wonder.

"Hello!" he stammered.

"You understand?" retorted Hope in pistol-shot sharpness.

"What's up—a strike?"

"No, an order, positive—for the good of the society."

"All right."

"So you have the power to command."

Hope exhibited a disc. The man bowed in profound obeisance, as he traced its symbolic inscriptions.

"Turn on the arc lights—quick!" directed Hope—"over the whole plant, clear down the main road."

"That's queer!"

"You bet—it's a mystery, just the Amalgamated's business, er, he handed him over to Justice."

"It does."

"Then—here goes!"

He sprang to a dynamo crank. Soon the bright wheels were whirring, the sparks flying.

Magic illumination prevailed, where grim blackness had reigned, somber and dense, before.

"Light!" exulted Gideon Hope, and ran outside, darted up the tower ladder, strained his eager sight across the lawns.

The crystalline streaks of blinding radiance, pitter-patters of speed and endurance, and Gideon Hope was on his trail, bounding on the tracks of the fugitive's wolf.

One look, one sure estimate of course, distance, pitter-patters of speed and endurance, and Gideon Hope was on his trail, bounding on the tracks of the fugitive's wolf.

On and on, nearer and nearer—now partner and pursued were fairly clear of the plant lights, but the feeler though more frequent lumps of the vast switch yards still served to guide the forms, and the latter was almost continually in sight.

A fierce joy thrilled Hope. The very peril of being hunted, the clinging test of the works, a black speck was diving away.

"I have you!" shouted Hope.

A moving train of freight cars blocked the fugitive. He turned—at bay.

Kane snarled and showed his teeth. He glanced wildly about for a rock, a coupling-pin—any weapon of assault or defense.

None was at hand. His fingers hugged close to his breast the precious fortune so near.

"Give it up," said Gideon Hope, his eyes glittering with triumph as he advanced—"Ha!"

His desperate foe had counted death rather than surrender. Kane dropped to his knees. A last glance of bitter hatred he flung at his unrelenting pursuer. Then he threw himself past the moving trucks of a freight car, scrambling across the roadbed.

A howl of agony rent his lips. Quick and sure, infused with terrific courage and resolve, he might have got across the other rail, only that the money package slipped from his grasp.

Hope sprang forward to seize it, for it lay flat, freed for moment, directly balancing on top of the smooth, silver-clear rail.

And then—a grinding wheel struck it, moving quicker than human groping hands.

Squarely, evenly, the flange cut it in two—one-half fell outside the rail, one-half inside.

Kane snatched up one fragment, Hope the other.

A flash, a rustle, and the schemer threw himself free of the tracks on the other side.

When the train had passed he was nowhere to be seen.

Gideon Hope stood gazing all about the bright illumination of the works.

"I've got him!" he murmured. "But only for a time! I have clipped his wings."

—"I have robbed him of his power—half the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" And he waved the severed bank notes. "A part, waste paper—and without money what is he? A skulking, helpless fugitive!—Perez Kane, a brief respite, if you choose, but you are beaten, mine—

I shall rain the same in the end!"

At daylight Gideon Hope was his old, cold, critical, calculating self.

He had succeeded to the furious

reign of passion and recklessness. He felt that he held the reins of fate surely in his grasp. He had modified his plans, at the same time giving reinforcement to the power that must eventually enmesh and drag to justice the fugitive, Kane.

A score of trusty, willing aiders—those who has assisted in overthrowing the political ring of the state—were now secretly, diligently searching for a trace of Kane.

He could not go far—a fugitive—Hope realized, and after setting his new projects at work he calmly reflected over the labor done, the final results attaining from the closing up of all the strange plots he had woven to his like, and his efforts to his rights, the duped Albert Trammell and his beautiful daughter, Claire.

A faint new inspiration filled the man's soul as he comprehended that brisk, bright morning that he could go to Claire and inform her that accident—or rather subterfuge—had brought Kane to bay, and no longer need she continue her hateful part, nor her father remain in obscurity.

True, no tangible evidence sought for had been discovered by Claire that would surely incriminate Kane in the Everett Hope murder. But had he not "confessed?"

And Gideon Hope shuddered now as he recalled how sternly inflexible in his reso-

lution he had bidden pure, innocent Claire Tremaine go even to the altar with the arch-schmeier, but his secret must be wrested from him.

As he threaded a lane lined with sunned cedars, the two men came closer together, and then decreased the distance to the unsteady figure in advance of them.

When they had come to the most un-frequented and isolated portion of the winding road, the big yellow halftone of his companion abruptly.

"Get in among the trees," he ordered, in a hoarse whisper.

"Right, boss."

"Get abreast or ahead of him."

"And then?"

"Take your cue from me. If I can't manage him alone—"

"You can't; it's built for fight."

"He don't look it just now," muttered the other.

"Kane warned you: Two do the job, and make it miss!"

"I guess 't will be none!" wickedly grinned the big fellow.

He showed a lead-ended billy in the grasp of one hand. This leveled from the supporting wrist strap, he stole noiselessly toward Hope, as his companion darted in among the trees.

As a shadow swift and flitting was thrown across Gideon's path, the natural instinct of caution, of alert observation, aroosed him.

He half turned, staring vaguely—a

thundering sound cut the air.

Then—crash!

He experienced a stinging contact over the left eyebrow. The blow stirred him. He recognized that he was attacked, and immediately.

"You coward!"

"Easy—take it again!"

"She is not here, sir—she has gone!"

"Gone!" repeated Hope, blankly.

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"This morning—early."

"Where?"—a vague sensation of pain struck the speaker's heart.

"What's up—a strike?"

"No, an order, positive—for the good of the society."

"All right."

"So you have the power to command."

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