

### Break O'Day Iron

Reginald Wright Kauffman

CHAPTER TWELVE

Continued

"Are the cops after you?" whispered Jupiter. "State police?"

Here was help! Jerry's manner had unconsciously struck the one chord to which the inner contrivances of public chauffeurs always and everywhere responds.

He looked squarely into that suddenly sympathetic brown face. He oughtn't to have nodded — but he did nod.

"Licker?" murmured Mr. Jones. "Jupe," said Jerry, finding speech at last. "If you smash up on the way, I'll buy you a new auto, so help me! Come on, I tell you, this is the most important drive you ever took anyone on."

He jumped into the car. The car jumped up the street.

It was a vehicle that, in calmer days, would have excited its present passenger's derision — the overready derision of a man who owns no car at all.

But now Jerry warmly thanked Heaven for it and for the chance that had impressed something of his own fervor, however erroneously, upon Jupiter. The crazy motor did its best, and its best wasn't bad — for a while.

They left the town behind them; they breasted a steep and stony route. There was still a ruddy furnace glowing in the western sky. The way was clearly lighted, and the light showed fields of green tobacco and yellow wheat rising on the one hand, while on the other a brief incline fell off to the brawling waters of a deep creek — that creek which Rose had mentioned and which Jerry concluded was partly fed, underground, by Break O'Day Lake.

Then an explosion. "I knowed it!" wailed Jupiter. "That there tire's the rear right, an' it's the only new one o' the whole four!"

He jumped out. So did Jerry. But Jerry's side was the creek side of the road, and Jerry's glance, as he landed, was captured and held by something coming down the stream — something that tumbled over and over — something that just then was stopped by a rock.

Jerry all but fell to the brookside. He reached far out and caught a corpse. Brogans. An inflated skirt. A sunbonnet tied beneath the chin. Jerry dragged the body ashore. He lifted the bonnet — "Ye gods!" he cried. "Here's the 'tree' that nearly did for me the night before last! Twombly got to it, after all, Angie Silnn!"

The tire repaired, resolute Jupe turned the nose of his car back toward America: "You kin come 'long, er stay yhere, er go yo' own way on yo' tootsies. Ef you knowed Campbell lak I do, you'd come 'long. But suit yo'self, mister. Me, I'm goin' to town."

Jerry, on his side, had no choice. This time, he was sure, Twombly's hand had not hesitated. No matter how much it might look like drowning, Angie Silnn had been murdered — and Rose had been halled to that hut in the highlands. Jerry furiously saw the car rattle away. With every nerve taut, with every muscle straining, he ran.

Seconds became minutes — minutes seemed hours. This section of the countryside proved at once as desolate as that toward which Jerry toiled. No farms now — no houses — not even another traveler. The woods had closed in. Only the trees above; below only this rough road and along it the black and white of fatal Bruner's Creek. Nevertheless, the route was indeed the most direct as Jupe had declared it to be. It brought Glidden at last to the turnpike at a point between Ironburg and that at which the old cart track cut toward clearing and cliff.

There stood the shanty, more than ever like a tumbling tomb. But something strange rose before it; a parked touring car, silent, empty. Nothing else unusual — nothing stirred.

Jerry was unarmed. Almost without stopping, he picked up what looked like a tough stick that lay in his course. He ran lightly but, beyond that, took no precaution against giving alarm. Here was the garden, here those rusted tools. A weapon, after all! He snatched a spade and swung it against the closed door.

Jerry had expected a lock's resistance. Instead, the door flew open so readily that the spade clattered to the floor.

"I suppose this is that man you were telling me about, Twombly? — Come in, Mr. Glidden. I can't call you welcome; but I figured by your wire to Miss Walker that you might get here this evening, so we'll have to make the best of it."

Beside redheaded Twombly at a lamplit table the speaker sat — a gray man, but powerful. Gray hair fringed a bald dome; gray was his thin, savage face with its bulbous nose and mere slit of a mouth; gray eyes devoured Jerry through horn-rimmed spectacles. Yet the fellow combined the shoulders of a bull with the arms of a gorilla.

Carlin, of course. Who else could it be? Though Glidden had never before seen him — scarcely seen him now: "Rose!"

To be continued



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