

## LUCK

"Come in," called Joe Turner, in response to a knock. The door opened, and in stepped a man who looked as if he hadn't had a shave for a week, and who, if one might judge from his attire, wasn't worrying about his looks. He closed the door and, after glancing about the room, took his seat on an upturned box that served as a chair. Neither spoke for a few minutes—something seemed wrong.

"Where've you been?" finally asked the visitor. "Did you know Jake's lookin' for you? He's got a big job on hand and wants you to do it. Figures that your usual luck will pull you through. It's a tough one and there's a lot o' luck needed. You've got it, so how about comin' along with me now to Jake's?"

"Sorry, Spike, but I can't go," answered Joe, in a determined voice. "I've quit that life. I'm goin' straight. I had a letter from my mother the other day and she thinks I'm all right, and wants me to go home. I wish to God I could, but I can't. I'm a crook—outlawed—so I'm goin' to straighten up and some day, with the help of God, I'm goin' back—clean, too."

His former crony looked amazed. Could he believe his ears!

"So you're goin' to ditch us. Goin' straight; oh yeah! gettin' religion, eh? Say, do you think you're goin' to quit Jake and the rest of us, who've pulled you along and helped you out of that killing deal with—"

"Cut it, Spike," broke in Turner, "I never killed Denver, and you know it. I was blamed because I was young in the game then. I robbed, bootlegged, lied, but never killed and never will."

"Well, I think you're scared, down-right yellow, but we'll take that out of you. Jake wants you, and if you know your onions, you'll be there to-night." And with a look of contempt he left the room.

Joe looked after him and then dropped his head in his hands on the table. What was he to do?

Five years ago, he had come to the city to make his fortune, as many had done before him. For a few years he was successful, and, becoming ambitious, he invested his savings in stocks, on the advice of his friends. In a short time he doubled his wealth. Then he had visions

of his mother, living in luxury, and of himself, possessing a big car, and living with his family in a magnificent home. But one day the markets broke. He began to lose. In an effort to keep up his margin, he put what money he had into the markets, but it was insufficient; he needed more. Where was he to get it? If he could only get some for a few days till the markets recovered. He might borrow from his employer, and this he did—without his knowing it. However, it was not enough, and he “borrowed” more, till finally one fatal day, the loss was discovered, and in fear of punishment Turner fled from his employer.

He had a little money, but this soon vanished; he could not go home. He had no friends, he was alone in a big city. And so he drifted on with the sea of humanity there until he ultimately found himself a member of the under-world, in a gang led by a notorious crook who was known to his followers, and to the police, as “Jake the Jip.” It was not long till Turner was well known. It was his exceptionally good luck in the face of danger that made him famous. No matter what he did, difficult or otherwise, he escaped arrest by the merest chance, and so it was not an uncommon thing that the hardest undertakings of the under-world were assigned to him.

Yet beneath his success—if one might call it that—Turner felt that he was not doing right, and that he must stop. But how could he? He wished to send money home to his mother, and at present he was making it easily, but if he abandoned his underworld life, it might be a long time before he could make money honestly. Yet that letter from his mother seemed to change everything, it gave him courage to alter his course. He would go straight, he would leave Jake and his gang, and start anew. But the visit from his partner-in-crime weakened his intention of reform. If he deserted, Jake would probably kill him. He was in a dilemma. Would he go to Jake's again? Yes, just to see what they wanted; perhaps his luck would carry him through.

So that night we find Turner seated on a broken chair in the rooms of “Jake the Jip.” The gang are all there but the chief, all are silent. Suddenly the silence is broken by the well-known knock, and the leader walks among his crew. He looks them over and his eyes fall on Turner.

"Well, you're here," he growls, "Spike tells me you're goin' to walk the chalk line. What's the racket? Been listenin' in to some parson? Perhaps we're not good enough for you, the pals who saved you from a trip up the river."

"You know Jake, it's not that, I'm quittin' be—"

"No, you're not," snapped the chief, "there's a job we want to pull and you're goin' to do it. You've got the luck, it's luck we want, and it'll pull you through."

"Aw, Jake," pleaded Joe, "I can't. You see—"

"See nothin'; you're goin' to promise or your body will be found all smashed up in a couple of days, and nobody'll know how it happened. Get me? What do you say?"

"What *can* I say?"

"Well, here's the job, kid. That big commissioner, who has been givin' us a lot of trouble, is goin' to speak tomorrow night, and it's up to us and you to bump him off. It's easy if you watch yourself. Your luck will stick, so why worry? There's a load of kale in it for us, the rest of the boys are willin' to pay us handsome if we succeed."

"I can't do it. I never killed a man and I'm not goin' to now," exclaimed Turner.

"You kill this fellow or *be* killed" commanded the Jip, "You're yellow, that's all."

"I'm not yellow. Never was. I was always game, but no killin'."

"Well, you're goin' to die yourself if you baulk. You're the doctor."

"What am I to do?" cried the unfortunate man in despair, "I must."

"That's the talk, you're goin' through with it, and don't forget a couple of the boys are followin' you till it's done, so don't try any funny stuff. Now let's get down to business."

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What a terrible night was that which followed! It was continual agony. Here was Joe on the point of turning, and he was being forced into a crime he had always tried to evade, one he never committed and never wanted to. He had thought he might be able to pay back his share of the plunder by just means, but he knew he could never restore a life. Yet it was his life or another's.

The problem tortured his soul. Sometimes he thought he might try to fail intentionally, then blame it on something else. Would his luck fail him when he needed it most?

At last the morrow came, and in the morning he arrived at Jake's, still undecided as to what course to pursue, seeing no way out.

"How do you feel?" greeted the chief.

"Not too bad," he replied.

"I guess you're O.K., but don't forget, we want no tricks; everything on the level. We'll be there, remember; I think you'll come through."

"It'll be all right, Jake; I'll stick."

"That's the talk. How's your nerves? Want a pill?"

"No, I don't need one. I can hit anything," and, as he spoke, he drew his gun and knocked a glass off a table in the far corner of the room.

"Good shootin', boy, get the big fellow the same way. Good luck."

He went at once to his room, where he shuddered, thinking of the horrible deed he contemplated, as he took his gun out again to reload it. As he did so, something fell to the floor. He picked it up. It was a small piece of metal. Many years ago he had received that little bit of tin, yet the day was still vivid in his thoughts. The medal brought back fond memories of the wonderful days of his youth. Yes, he remembered the day the kind father gave him that medal, but alas, it was all so different now; he was a crook. He attempted to banish the thoughts it aroused, but there was the medal before him. What if the killing he contemplated were necessary to save his own life—he was still doing wrong! Suddenly a thought struck him. It was the best thing he could do—the only right way out—for the house was watched and, should he tell some stranger, no authorities could help him, for he had no proof. Kneeling, he prayed, for the first time in years. Then he wrote home to his mother.

Two hours passed and we find him leaving a priest's residence. Immediately he made his way straight to the scene of the ceremony where the police commissioner was to speak. His mind was made up. He must go there or Jake's man would kill him, anyway. In a few minutes he took the position which had been appointed for him.

Some distance from him he saw Jake, with Spike and some others of the gang. A hush came over the vast crowd—a man was speaking, but Joe didn't hear him—he was waiting—waiting. Finally the words his ears were listening for came. "The Commissioner now will speak for a few minutes." The time had come. He waited. There were Spike and the rest, they were looking at him. The Commissioner had but a brief time to speak. Joe pretended to reach for his gun. Jake saw his confusion.

"He's fakin', Spike, the yellow cur," whispered Jake to his henchman, "give Tony the nod."

There was a cry, and Joe Turner fell to the pavement with a knife through his back. A policeman rushed to the spot and caught the man who had just stabbed Turner.

"He was goin' to shoot the Commissioner, officer; I just got him in time," cried Tony.

"I saw him lift the gun," Jake called out. "We all saw him, but couldn't get close enough to stop him."

"Who is he?" some one asked. He was a priest.

"Joe Turner—the lucky kid—one of Jip's boys. His luck wasn't good enough this time; it failed him at last."

"Ah, no, he was lucky to the end," remarked the priest, as he moved away.

They who heard him wondered.

—L.J.C., '30



Anger begins with folly, and ends with repentance.

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We often discover what will do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery.—*Smiles*.

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Cowards die many times before their death;  
The valiant never taste death but once.

—*Shakespeare*