

THE CRISIS

Battery Park early in the morning—a heavy fog was rising off the East and Hudson Rivers. Everywhere the reek of tar sifted through the chilly morning air of early autumn. A night ferry-boat was passing on the East River, and the melancholy “Honk, Honk” of its fog horn drove home the feeling of loneliness clutching at the heart of a man sitting on one of the benches.

The appearance of the person in question struck one as being both good and evil. He was a man under thirty with a well-shaped and open countenance; his body was tall and muscular. His clothing was of a good quality, even rich. It would be difficult to guess what his vocation was until one glanced in his eyes, the hard, metallic glitter of which stamped him as belonging to that degenerate class—the gunmen of the New York underworld. In his hand he gripped a sheet of writing-paper. It was a letter from home.

Jack Parker had been a promising youth, and everyone who knew him had foretold that he would succeed in life. His father had been a retired doctor with a fairly comfortable income, but in Jack's last year at college the old doctor had died leaving his wife heir to his estate. Jack graduated from the state university, and came to New York two years before this story opens to seek employment and success. Young Parker obtained a position in a broker's office on Wall Street. Unfortunately the set of young people with whom he associated had a great deal more money to spend than he had, and it taxed him to his utmost to keep up. His mother had sufficient for her support, so therefore Jack used every cent of his salary, and finally drew upon the small amount which he had in the bank. A friend of his, opportunely as he thought, introduced him into a group who carried on a bootlegging business. Parker eagerly proffered to join them.

A short time afterwards he got into his first scrape. The gang managed to get him clear but he lost his job in Wall Street. He then plunged into bootlegging in earnest. The steps from that to racketeering and then to gun-carrying came about as naturally as they have time and again before. He became immersed deeper and deeper until at last he became a trusted lieutenant of one of

gangland's great rulers. His college education was one of the main reasons for his rapid promotion.

The night before that on which we see him in Battery Park he had received a letter from his mother, stating that she had lost all her possessions in the stock crash. She wrote that she was selling the old house, and that she was coming to live with him in New York. It was then that he saw his guilt in its worst aspect. He could never face her and it would be impossible to bluff her for an indefinite period of time.

All night he had walked the streets pondering, despairing, and contrite. It would do no good to confess and try to reform, for the machine-gun of gangland always cut down the deserter. There was no solution in that direction. Little by little a plan formed in his mind, but it was so desperate and insane that he rejected it, but still again it came back. He came into Battery Park and looked drearily through the mist for nearly two hours. But at last his mind was made up. His mother was everything to him. Either she must know him a criminal with no hope of reform, or he must die with his name clear. She would grieve at his death, but yet she would be proud of him for she would never know of his gangster life.

He rose and walked out of the park and crossed over to Broadway. He walked up Broadway until he came to Courtlandt Street; turning up that street he entered the Hudson Terminal. He boarded a subway train going over to Brooklyn. Getting off at De Kalb Avenue he ascended to the street. A few blocks farther down he entered a small but clean restaurant where he greeted the manager and waiters familiarly.

He sat down at a small table in one corner. A waiter came over and asked in a curiously high voice, "Well, Mr. Parker, what will you have this morning?"

"Just the same as every other morning, Jim," answered Parker good-naturedly; then more seriously, "Where's the boss?"

"He's at the back," replied the waiter in a low tone, "do you want to see him?"

"Wait until after my breakfast, and I'll go in and see him myself."

A half hour later Jack rose, and going towards a small door at the back of the restaurant he entered a small office. At a desk sat a tall, heavy-set man. He was about fifty years of age, and he was very richly dressed.

His face was of the intellectual type whose expression was sometimes marred by a look of cunning and stealth. This was young Parker's chief, Joe "Rat" Morang.

"Lo, Jack," was his greeting, "what's on your mind?"

"Joe, I can't show up tonight at the racket. You'll have to get Harvey to command the expedition."

Morang's eyes narrowed. "What's up, did you get a tip?"

Parker spoke quietly. "Don't say that again, Joe; no one ever accused me of squealing and got away."

The Rat's suspicions subsided. "Have you got any excuse? I can't let anybody out who comes in and says that he can't do this or that. Come clean."

"An old pal of mine is in trouble up in Buffalo," lied Jack smoothly, "and I am the only one who can clear him. I'll have to leave this afternoon. I'm not the kind to go back on a pal."

"If that's the case, all right; but don't pull this idea too often. You tell Harvey what's to be done. Tell him that the Chase National is sending a special armored car over to the National Park Bank. It will not be very heavily armed as they do not want to excite suspicion, but it will carry nearly eight hundred thousand dollars! I got this straight from McCall the vice-president of the Chase National. Tell Harvey to take about twenty men and to watch all entrances around the street where he attacks. He'll disable the car at first with a bomb, then sweep it inside with machine-guns. After that it will be easy to break in and get the cash. The men guarding the entrances to the street may have to use their machine-guns. A few blocks from the National Park Bank would be about the best place."

"All right," responded Parker, "I shall tell him so. Well, I guess I had better move along. So long." Saying this, Jack left the room and after paying his bill, he put on his hat and top-coat and left the place.

He signalled a taxi, and giving the address of his apartments in upper Manhattan, leaped in and settled back in the cushions. He must make his preparations quickly, he thought to himself, if he wished to succeed, and he must succeed because of his mother's sake. He looked out on the traffic vacantly, his mind perfecting the plan already formed in his brain.

The taxi stopped before a large apartment house.

Parker stepped out, and after paying the driver, ascended in the elevator to the fifth floor. At the end of the hall he unlocked his door and entered his suite. It consisted of five rooms which included a bedroom, library, sitting room and two rooms for his valet who at present was away for a week.

Jack closed the door quietly and stepped across the library to the large safe which stood there. He opened it and drew out a small machine-gun built on the rifle style, and which could be handled with great facility. It was in perfect condition so he replaced it in the safe. He then went out again to see Harvey and give him his instructions. Harvey lived up at Fordham when he stayed in New York so that when Parker returned it was past lunch time.

By his order lunch was brought up to his apartments. After he was finished, he lit one of the exquisite cigarettes which he had specially made for himself. He leaned back in the deep chair before the fire-place, and his fertile mind grappled with the problem of saving his honor unblemished for his mother's recollection. After looking over his accounts he discovered that he had slightly over twelve thousand dollars in the bank; counting everything he was worth about fifteen thousands in cash. This was not a great deal for him, but he was accustomed to spend as he received his money.

One cigarette after another he smoked until he had the plan completely formed. Then he crossed to one of the book cases, and taking down Lucien's "*Dialogues des morts*" he began to read.

About a quarter to six he went downstairs and took a taxi for lower Broadway, where he looked over the place where the action was to take place. He knew exactly in what windows Harvey's machine-guns would lurk when they would begin their destructive fire on the armored car and on all daring citizens who ventured to approach.

Walking a few blocks cross-town, he entered a garage and hired a closed car, as it would betray him if he used one of his own. It was now past six o'clock and growing dark. Driving over to his apartments he took down the machine-gun, which he had looked at earlier in the day, and drove swiftly down-town. He parked his car on the corner of a small side-street which jutted into Broadway, and about twenty-five yards from where the attack was to take place. It was now a quarter of seven, but he

knew the gangsters would not arrive until a few minutes before seven. Walking into a nearby drug-store he called up the nearest police station.

"Is this the captain?" he inquired.

"Yes, what do you want?"

"There are three or four men gathering on the corner of Church and Barclay Streets. It looks like trouble. I wish you would send some men over."

"How do you know they mean trouble?" asked the captain, "who are you anyhow?"

"Never mind who I am, but you had better pay attention to what I said." Parker smiled grimly to himself and hung up. Barclay Street was a few blocks from where the armored car was to be attacked, and, as a result, he would have sufficient time to finish out his plan before the police came to scatter the gangsters and save the money.

Parker went back to the car, and getting in he released the safety catch of the machine-gun and vigilantly waited. Broadway at this time of the night was fairly crowded. Some were going home from work, some from shopping. Morang had counted on this. "The more witnesses, the safer you are" was one of his maxims.

Parker looked at his wrist watch. Two minutes to seven. Although he had not seen Harvey or his followers, he knew they were at their posts. A few moments later he saw the armored car coming down Broadway. Harvey showed in the doorway of a store with something in his hand, but before he could throw that object, which was a bomb, Parker's machine-gun broke into fury. Harvey fell, nearly cut in two; a half dozen gangsters came from another shop and ran towards Jack's car with their revolvers flaming. He met them with a barrage of bullets. Other gangsters' machine-guns converged their fire on the car. Parker was shot through and through, but he held on until the gangsters fled. He then collapsed.

When he regained consciousness, he saw Sergeant Jackson bending over him as he lay on the counter of the very drugstore from which he had telephoned the police.

"Listen, Jackson, and don't interrupt me." Parker spoke with difficulty. "My mother will start for New York in a few days. She doesn't know that I was a gangster. I did this job so that the police would in return do me the favor of never letting her know. Tell her I died in an accident. My will is in my pocket. I once lived

straight. God——have——mercy——.” The generous but strangely warped soul of Jack Parker had passed.

* * * * *

In a small Wisconsin town an old lady lives in a comfortable and happy home. She lives alone, but she still possesses a letter from Police Headquarters telling how her son died trying to save another. Truly he did die to save another.

—D. MacD., '33



A man that speaks too much, and museth but little, wasteth his mind in words and is counted a fool among men.—*Tupper*.

A brave man knows no malice; but forgets in peace, the injuries of war, and gives his direst foe a friend's embrace.—*Cowper*

It is not what he has, or even what he does, which expresses the worth of a man, but what he is.—*Amiel*.

