

PART II.

CHAPTER I. THE MURDER TRIAL.

BILLY BYRNE squared his broad shoulders and filled his deep lungs with the familiar medium which is known as air in Chicago. He was standing upon the platform of a New York Central train that was pulling into the La Salle Street Station, and though the young man was far from happy something in the nature of content pervaded his being, for he was coming home.

After something more than a year of world wandering and strange adventure Billy Byrne was coming back to the great West Side and Grand Avenue.

Now there is not much upon either side or down the center of long and tortuous Grand Avenue to arouse enthusiasm, nor was Billy particularly enthusiastic about that more or less squalid thoroughfare.

The thing that exalted Billy was the idea that he was coming back to SHOW THEM. He had left under a cloud and with a reputation for genuine toughness and rowdyism that has seen few parallels even in the ungentle district of his birth and upbringing.

A girl had changed him. She was as far removed from Billy's sphere as the stars themselves; but Billy had loved her and learned from her, and in trying to become more as he knew the men of her class were he had sloughed off much of the uncouthness that had always been a part of him, and all of the rowdyism. Billy Byrne was no longer the mucker.

He had given her up because he imagined the gulf between Grand Avenue and Riverside Drive to be unbridgeable; but he still clung to the ideals she had awakened in him. He still sought to be all that she might wish him to be, even though he realized that he never should see her again.

Grand Avenue would be the easiest place to forget his sorrow--her he could never forget. And then, his newly awakened pride urged him back to the haunts of his former life that he might, as he would put it himself, show them. He wanted the gang to see that he, Billy Byrne, wasn't afraid to be decent. He wanted some of the neighbors to realize that he could work steadily and earn an honest living, and he looked forward with delight to the pleasure and satisfaction of rubbing it in to some of the saloon keepers and bartenders who had helped keep him drunk some five days out of seven, for Billy didn't drink any more.

But most of all he wanted to vindicate himself in the eyes of the once-hated law. He wanted to clear his record of the unjust charge of murder which had sent him scurrying out of Chicago over a year before, that night that Patrolman Stanley Lasky of the Lake Street Station had tipped him off that Sheehan had implicated him in the murder of old man Schneider.

Now Billy Byrne had not killed Schneider. He had been nowhere near the old fellow's saloon at the time of the holdup; but Sheehan, who had been arrested and charged with the crime, was an old enemy of Billy's, and Sheehan had seen a chance to divert some of the suspicion from himself and square accounts with Byrne at the same time.

The new Billy Byrne was ready to accept at face value everything which seemed to belong in any way to the environment of that exalted realm where dwelt the girl he loved. Law, order, and justice appeared to Billy in a new light since he had rubbed elbows with the cultured and refined.

He no longer distrusted or feared them. They would give him what he sought--a square deal.

It seemed odd to Billy that he should be seeking anything from the law or its minions. For years he had waged a perpetual battle with both. Now he was coming back voluntarily to give himself up, with every conviction that he should be exonerated quickly. Billy, knowing his own innocence, realizing his own integrity, assumed that others must immediately appreciate both.

"First," thought Billy, "I'll go take a look at little old Grand Ave., then I'll give myself up. The trial may take a long time, an' if it does I want to see some of the old bunch first."

So Billy entered an "L" coach and leaning on the sill of an open window watched grimy Chicago rattle past until the guard's "Granavenoo" announced the end of his journey.

Maggie Shane was sitting on the upper step of the long flight of stairs which lean precariously against the scarred face of the frame residence upon the second floor front of which the lares and penates of the Shane family are crowded into three ill-smelling rooms.

It was Saturday and Maggie was off. She sat there rather disconsolate for there was a dearth of beaux for Maggie, none having arisen to fill the aching void left by the sudden departure of "Coke" Sheehan since that worthy gentleman had sought a more salubrious clime--to the consternation of both Maggie Shane and Mr. Sheehan's bondsmen.

Maggie scowled down upon the frowsy street filled with frowsy women and frowsy children. She scowled upon the street cars rumbling by with their frowsy loads. Occasionally she varied the monotony by drawing out her chewing gum to wondrous lengths, holding one end between a thumb and finger and the other between her teeth.

Presently Maggie spied a rather pleasing figure sauntering up the sidewalk upon her side of the street. The man was too far away for her to recognize his features, but his size and bearing and general appearance appealed to the lonesome Maggie. She hoped it was someone she knew, or with whom she might easily become acquainted, for Maggie was bored to death.

She patted the hair at the back of her head and righted the mop which hung over one eye. Then she rearranged her skirts and waited. As the man approached she saw that he was better looking than she had even dared to hope, and that there was something extremely familiar about his appearance. It was not, though, until he was almost in front of the house that he looked up at the girl and she recognized him.

Then Maggie Shane gasped and clutched the handrail at her side. An instant later the man was past and continuing his way along the sidewalk.

Maggie Shane glared after him for a minute, then she ran quickly down the stairs and into a grocery store a few doors west, where she asked if she might use the telephone.

"Gimme West 2063," she demanded of the operator, and a moment later: "Is this Lake Street?"

"Well say, Billy Byrne's back. I just see him."

"Yes an' never mind who I am; but if youse guys want him he's walkin' west on Grand Avenoo right now. I just this minute seen him near Lincoln," and she smashed the receiver back into its hook.

Billy Byrne thought that he would look in on his mother, not that he expected to be welcomed even though she might happen to be sober, or not that he cared to see her; but Billy's whole manner of thought had altered within the year, and something now seemed to tell him that it was his duty to do the thing he contemplated. Maybe he might even be of help to her.

But when he reached the gloomy neighborhood in which his childhood had been spent it was to learn that his mother was dead and that another family occupied the tumble-down cottage that had been his home.

If Billy Byrne felt any sorrow because of his mother's death he did not reveal it outwardly. He owed her nothing but for kicks and cuffs received, and for the surroundings and influences that had started him upon a life of crime at an age when most boys are just entering grammar school.

Really the man was relieved that he had not had to see her, and it was with a lighter step that he turned back to retrace his way along Grand Avenue. No one of the few he had met who recognized him had seemed particularly delighted at his return. The whole affair had been something of a disappointment. Therefore Billy determined to go at once to the Lake Street Station and learn the status of the Schneider murder case. Possibly they had discovered the real murderer, and if that was the case Billy would be permitted to go his way; but if not then he could give himself up and ask for a trial, that he might be exonerated.

As he neared Wood Street two men who had been watching his approach stepped into the doorway of a saloon, and as he passed they stepped out again behind him. One upon either side they seized him.

Billy turned to remonstrate.

"Come easy now, Byrne," admonished one of the men, "an' don't make no fuss."

"Oh," said Billy, "it's you, is it? Well, I was just goin' over to the station to give myself up."

Both men laughed, skeptically. "We'll just save you the trouble," said one of them. "We'll take you over. You might lose your way if you tried to go alone."

Billy went along in silence the rest of the way to where the patrol waited at another corner. He saw there was nothing to be gained by talking to these detectives; but he found the lieutenant equally inclined to doubt his intentions. He, too, only laughed when Billy assured him that he was on his way to the station at the very instant of arrest.

As the weeks dragged along, and Billy Byrne found no friendly interest in himself or his desire to live on the square, and no belief in his protestations that he had had naught to do with the killing of Schneider he began to have his doubts as to the wisdom of his act.

He also commenced to entertain some of his former opinions of the police, and of the law of which they are supposed to be the guardians. A cell-mate told him that the papers had scored the department heavily for their failure to apprehend the murderer of the inoffensive old Schneider, and that public opinion had been so aroused that a general police shakeup had followed.

The result was that the police were keen to fasten the guilt upon someone--they did not care whom, so long as it was someone who was in their custody.

"You may not o' done it," ventured the cell-mate; "but they'll send you up for it, if they can't hang you. They're goin' to try to get the death sentence. They hain't got no love for you, Byrne. You caused 'em a lot o' throuble in your day an' they haven't forgot it. I'd hate to be in your boots."

Billy Byrne shrugged. Where were his dreams of justice? They seemed to have faded back into the old distrust and hatred. He shook himself and conjured in his mind the vision of a beautiful girl who had believed in him and trusted him--who had inculcated within him a love for all that was finest and best in true manhood, for the very things that he had most hated all the years of his life before she had come into his existence to alter it and him.

And then Billy would believe again--believe that in the end justice would triumph and that it would all come out right, just the way he had pictured it.

With the coming of the last day of the trial Billy found it more and more difficult to adhere to his regard for law, order, and justice. The prosecution had shown conclusively that Billy was a hard customer. The police had brought witnesses who did not hesitate to perjure themselves in their testimony--testimony which it seemed to Billy the densest of jurymen could plainly see had been framed up and learned by rote until it was letter-perfect.

These witnesses could recall with startling accuracy every detail that had occurred between seventeen minutes after eight and twenty-one minutes past nine on the night of September 23 over a year before; but where they had been and what they had done ten minutes earlier or ten minutes later, or where they were at nine o'clock in the evening last Friday they couldn't for the lives of them remember.

And Billy was practically without witnesses.

The result was a foregone conclusion. Even Billy had to admit it, and when the prosecuting attorney demanded the death penalty the prisoner had an uncanny sensation as of the tightening of a hempen rope about his neck.

As he waited for the jury to return its verdict Billy sat in his cell trying to read a newspaper which a kindly guard had given him. But his eyes persisted in boring through the white paper and the black type to scenes that were not in any paper. He saw a turbulent river tumbling through a savage world, and in the swirl of the water lay a little island. And he saw a man there upon the island, and a girl. The

girl was teaching the man to speak the language of the cultured, and to view life as people of refinement view it.

She taught him what honor meant among her class, and that it was better to lose any other possession rather than lose honor. Billy realized that it had been these lessons that had spurred him on to the mad scheme that was to end now with the verdict of "Guilty"--he had wished to vindicate his honor. A hard laugh broke from his lips; but instantly he sobered and his face softened.

It had been for her sake after all, and what mattered it if they did send him to the gallows? He had not sacrificed his honor--he had done his best to assert it. He was innocent. They could kill him but they couldn't make him guilty. A thousand juries pronouncing him so could not make it true that he had killed Schneider.

But it would be hard, after all his hopes, after all the plans he had made to live square, to SHOW THEM. His eyes still boring through the paper suddenly found themselves attracted by something in the text before them--a name, Harding.

Billy Byrne shook himself and commenced to read:

The marriage of Barbara, daughter of Anthony Harding, the multimillionaire, to William Mallory will take place on the twenty-fifth of June.

The article was dated New York. There was more, but Billy did not read it. He had read enough. It is true that he had urged her to marry Mallory; but now, in his lonesomeness and friendlessness, he felt almost as though she had been untrue to him.

"Come along, Byrne," a bailiff interrupted his thoughts, "the jury's reached a verdict."

The judge was emerging from his chambers as Billy was led into the courtroom. Presently the jury filed in and took their seats. The foreman handed the clerk a bit of paper. Even before it was read Billy knew that he had been found guilty. He did not care any longer, so he told himself. He hoped that the judge would send him to the gallows. There was nothing more in life for him now anyway. He wanted to die. But instead he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the penitentiary at Joliet.

This was infinitely worse than death. Billy Byrne was appalled at the thought of remaining for life within the grim stone walls of a prison. Once more there swept over him all the old, unreasoning hatred of the law and all that pertained to it. He would like to close his steel fingers about the fat neck of the red-faced judge. The

smug jurymen roused within him the lust to kill. Justice! Billy Byrne laughed aloud.

A bailiff rapped for order. One of the jurymen leaned close to a neighbor and whispered. "A hardened criminal," he said. "Society will be safer when he is behind the bars."

The next day they took Billy aboard a train bound for Joliet. He was handcuffed to a deputy sheriff. Billy was calm outwardly; but inwardly he was a raging volcano of hate.

In a certain very beautiful home on Riverside Drive, New York City, a young lady, comfortably backed by downy pillows, sat in her bed and alternated her attention between coffee and rolls, and a morning paper.

On the inside of the main sheet a heading claimed her languid attention: CHICAGO MURDERER GIVEN LIFE SENTENCE. Of late Chicago had aroused in Barbara Harding a greater proportion of interest than ever it had in the past, and so it was that she now permitted her eyes to wander casually down the printed column.

Murderer of harmless old saloon keeper is finally brought to justice. The notorious West Side rowdy, "Billy" Byrne, apprehended after more than a year as fugitive from justice, is sent to Joliet for life.

Barbara Harding sat stony-eyed and cold for what seemed many minutes. Then with a stifled sob she turned and buried her face in the pillows.

The train bearing Billy Byrne and the deputy sheriff toward Joliet had covered perhaps half the distance between Chicago and Billy's permanent destination when it occurred to the deputy sheriff that he should like to go into the smoker and enjoy a cigar.

Now, from the moment that he had been sentenced Billy Byrne's mind had been centered upon one thought--escape. He knew that there probably would be not the slightest chance for escape; but nevertheless the idea was always uppermost in his thoughts.

His whole being revolted, not alone against the injustice which had sent him into life imprisonment, but at the thought of the long years of awful monotony which lay ahead of him.

He could not endure them. He would not! The deputy sheriff rose, and motioning his prisoner ahead of him, started for the smoker. It was two cars ahead. The train was vestibuled. The first platform they crossed was tightly enclosed; but at

the second Billy saw that a careless porter had left one of the doors open. The train was slowing down for some reason--it was going, perhaps, twenty miles an hour.

Billy was the first upon the platform. He was the first to see the open door. It meant one of two things--a chance to escape, or, death. Even the latter was to be preferred to life imprisonment.

Billy did not hesitate an instant. Even before the deputy sheriff realized that the door was open, his prisoner had leaped from the moving train dragging his guard after him.