

# CONVICT'S DAUGHTER

WRITTEN FOR AND RELEASED BY CENTRAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

RUTH RAY KANE

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

WHILE JIM was entertaining the party with his cowboy songs, Lona stayed beside Dinah, content to look on rather than to be part of the fun. She and Dinah were whispering together, smiling at the antics of Bobby Graves and the Jones boy, when the delinquent Pinky Malone appeared.

Pinky was a short, fat young man with a neck that fell in folds over his collar, and a girl's complexion—probably the origin of his nickname. He struck an attitude at the sight of Jim lolling on the piano bench and strode across the room with a scowl, bringing his light brows almost together.

"Ha! A rival!" he complained, and then the humor died from his eyes and gave way to a puzzled look as Jim was introduced. "Haven't I seen you before?" he asked, and a general laugh went up.

"You're supposed to use that one on his wife," Alice Davis told him. "Come on over here and tell Lona you've seen her somewhere before." She dragged him over to Lona's chair, leaning her tall bulk on his chubby shoulder ludicrously.

"I meant what I said of your husband," he told Lona when he had greeted her. He was evidently still mulling something over in his mind, and pausing beside her eyes went back to Jim speculatively. "There is something familiar—wait a minute! I've got it! Where does your husband work?"

"On the new bridge," Lona told him. "We've only been in town a few days. Perhaps you've seen him."

"He's a structural iron worker?"

"Yes. But why?" Lona stared at him curiously. Across the room the rest of them were pressing Jim for more songs, and Pinky leaned toward her and lowered his voice.

"There was a fellow showed me a picture of him today," he said. "A picture?"

"Yes. It was cut from a newspaper. No writing or nothing beneath it, just a picture. Has he figured in the news lately?"

"No. An icy hand clutched at Lona's heart, as she recalled those damning headlines of—was it only a week ago? She couldn't have these people finding out about her! It would be too cruel.

"It must have been someone who looked like him," she offered.

"A man came into the store—I'm in the clothing business on Main street, you know. He said he was looking for a fellow. He'd clipped his picture out of a paper and he showed it to me. I could swear it was Mr. Bennett over there." He was staring at Jim again.

"He said the man he was hunting was liable to be working as an iron worker," he went on. It's certainly a coincidence."

"I'll have to tell Jim he has a double." Lona tried to pass it off lightly. But beneath her smile her mind was in a turmoil. A reporter! He had followed them here. A

sudden weariness came over her at the thought. Just when she was beginning to live again. It wasn't fair! It wasn't just. It was persecution.

She wanted all at once to escape from the laughing crowd she had enjoyed so much only a few minutes ago. But, conscious of Pinky's inquiring eyes still on her, she had to smile and play up.

Jim had left the piano now and they were calling for Pinky. Strutting importantly, he sat down and began grinding out a dance tune. Couples began circling the floor, and Jim came to her and claimed her with quiet happiness in his smile.

She smiled back at him as they danced together, resolving to tell him nothing of her new fears. He seemed so contented, she didn't have the heart to upset him. She'd wait until tomorrow, she decided, and after he'd gone to work she'd go down town herself and hunt out this reporter if he was still hanging around. She'd appeal to him and tell him her story. Surely he'd be kind to her. She'd make him see, somehow, that she was entitled to her privacy now, that she had suffered enough.

"Have a good time last night?" Jim asked her, as he kissed her goodby beside the breakfast table next morning. "You seem sort of quiet."

"I'm tired," she laughed. "Guess I can't take it. I'm not used to parties, you know."

"We'll have that gang over here some time soon. Would you like that?"

"Oh, could we, Jim? I'd love it!" She brightened.

"Of course we can. What's a home for if not for parties?" He indicated the three cozy rooms with a sweep of his arm, then laughed self-consciously. "Home! Sounds sort of—funny, doesn't it? For you and me, I mean."

"It sounds grand," Lona told him, as she kissed him again, and started him for the door. "You'll be late," she chided with such an anxious frown that he laughed and came back to kiss her for the third time.

When he had gone she sat for a moment at the disordered table. She must get down town early, she thought, wearily, before that reporter had a chance to get to Jim at the bridge. He'd probably wait for him at lunch time.

Swiftly she began cleaning up the kitchen, and putting the tiny apartment in order for the day. When she had finished, she dressed herself in her wedding gown again, and arranged her hair carefully. She must make a good impression. So much depended upon it!

It was only nine o'clock when she turned the key in the hall door and slipped it into her purse. She walked softly, so as not to disturb Dinah, but the girl was already ensconced in her chair at the living room windows.

"Going out?" she called in her

melodious voice, and Lona tossed her a casual, "Only down town shopping." She hurried on without going into the room to chat with her. Somehow, she didn't want to talk, even to Dinah.

Down town she found Pinky Malone arranging a display of cravats in the front room of his clothing store in readiness for the day's trade. She hated to call his attention to the stranger she wanted to meet by asking about him again, but she had no other way.

Pinky stared at her when she told him what she wanted. "Funny thing, that," he observed. "The more I think about it, the more I'm sure it was Mr. Bennett in that picture. Do you suppose that guy could be a—a detective, or something like that?"

"A detective!" Lona laughed. "Of course not. He's probably some friend of ours from back in the city. Jim's rather careless about leaving a forwarding address. He seems to think his friends should be able to find him by instinct every time he moves. I'm afraid it's somebody we know and should see. That's why I'd like to know how to get in touch with him." Her words came rushing out, somehow. "You don't suppose he's left town, do you?"

"He said yesterday he was going over to the hotel." Pinky was still eying her thoughtfully. "He may still be there."

"The hotel. Thank you so much. I'll go straight over and try to raise him."

He insisted upon ushering her ceremoniously to the door and she could feel his eyes on her curiously as she crossed through the Main street traffic to the hotel entrance on the other side of the street. Conscious that she was being measured, she tried to walk jauntily, but her knees felt wobbly. In the last few weeks she had learned such a dread of reporters. It seemed odd to be walking up to one voluntarily.

There was a stranger by the name of Jack Price registered in Room 808. So the slow-voiced clerk told her. Yes, he had come in yesterday. Was he in now, Lona heard herself asking, her heart beating fast, he was sleeping, the clerk informed her, looking down his nose at her as if he disapproved of young women who inquired after men guests. He had left orders not to be called until ten-thirty. Feeling like a criminal with a reprieve, Lona went out into the street again, prepared to spend the next hour window shopping.

By the time the quaint town clock had pealed out two of its half-hourly warnings, she had calmed down a little. In this slow-moving, friendly town it wouldn't be possible to be really unhappy, she felt, with a sudden glow of confidence. Even a persistent reporter ceased to be a menace. When she went back to the hotel her step was quicker, more assured.

(To Be Continued)

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## CHAPTER 30

THE MAN called Jack Price had checked out. So the clerk told Lona the second time she called at the hotel hoping to see him. Just five minutes ago. No, he hadn't said where he was going. To the railroad station, probably. Leaving town. The eyes of the clerk bent on Lona were faintly scornful as if he resented her curiosity about one of his guests.

Lona smiled to herself as she went back out on the street for the second time that morning, and headed for the city market to pick up her groceries for the day. Fate must be taking care of her, she thought, gratefully. If she had actually talked with the fellow perhaps he wouldn't have gone away. As it was, she had been worrying about nothing. She was glad she hadn't bothered Jim about it, she thought, as she prolonged the momentous decision between steak with mushrooms, or chops with dressing, just for the pure enjoyment she got from wavering.

She decided, finally, on the chops, and went on up Main street feeling very housewifely and conscious of the package under her arm.



She had no presentiment of what was to come as she set the dinner table that evening in readiness for Jim's return from work. Looking back, later, she wondered how she could possibly have been so happy, so unbelievably happy.

The chops were neatly breaded, waiting to be popped into the pan, and she was arranging a bunch of velvety red asters from the Morris garden in a round blue bowl for the table center piece, when the creak of Dinah's chair sounded in the hall outside.

"Busy?" the girl sang out, and there was an odd hesitancy in her voice. She spilled almost apologetically as Lona helped her through the door and into the room.

"There's something I—ought to tell you," she began, evidently embarrassed. "I don't want you to think I'm prying into your affairs, but there was a—a man here a few minutes ago. He was asking about you."

"A man! Asking about me?" Lona's heart sank. "Was he—a reporter?" she brought out.

"A reporter?" Dinah sounded surprised. "I don't think so. He was hunting a man by the name of Rankin. He seemed to think that might be Jim's name."

"Rankin?" Lona shook her head. "I've never heard that name. What made him think that Jim—" She broke off, her eyes searching the bright face before her. "Did he have a picture cut from a newspaper?" she asked, tensely.

Dinah nodded. "I looked like Jim, too, Lona," she admitted, happily. "I told him your name was Bennett and that—that I was sure it wasn't Jim in the picture. It looked a lot younger than Jim."

"Younger?" Relief took hold of Lona. "Oh, then it couldn't have been Jim. It's some mistake. The only picture I know of was taken lately. When we were married, and I was in it, too."

"But it was Jim, Lona!" Dinah looked troubled.

"I could have sworn it. And the man was a detective!"

"A detective?"

"Yes. He left this card. He said he was going to the bridge to get a look at Jim when he leaves work. He's been called back to Chicago, he said, but he wants to see Jim before he leaves. He wouldn't say why he was looking for this—Rankin man."

For a moment Lona stared down at the piece of cardboard Dinah had thrust into her hand. "Jack Price, Western Detective Agency," it read, and a feeling that something had gone wrong possessed her. Something besides her own fear of reporters. A detective! No newspaper hunting copy would work through a detective agency. Could it be that Jim—after all, she knew so little about him. Conscious of Dinah's eyes following her every move, she put the card into her apron pocket nonchalantly.

"Thanks for telling me, Dinah," she brought out, and removing her apron, casually reached for her coat. "It's nothing to get hot and bothered about. Just some mistake in identity."

She smiled as she pulled her hat down over her curls. "I have forgotten the cream for the salad."

she told Dinah, lightly. "Would you mind waiting while I run down to the corner grocery? Jim hates salad dressing without whipped cream. I'll only be a minute."

"I have my own supper to get," Dinah reminded her, turning her chair with expert hands. "I must be going. I just thought I'd run over and tell you about—that man. He—I didn't like him, Lona. He asked so many questions, about where you came from, and about Jim's work."

"Don't let it worry you," Lona reassured her again. "It's quite an adventure, really. Imagine a real live detective in your own parlor! Wish I'd been here." She managed to laugh as she lifted the creaking chair over the Morris threshold, and Dinah laughed, too.

"He didn't look much like a detective," she complained. "He wasn't fat and he didn't chew a cigar. He was a disappointment." She laughed again, and her spirits seemed restored.

Once outside the house, away from the probing of the shining blue eyes, Lona's smile died quickly, and she set off downtown almost at a run. It had come to her as she held that card in her hand and listened to Dinah's stumbling account of the man's visit, that Jim ought to be warned. Why, she did not know. Surely there must be some mistake, she told herself, as she went down through town toward the bridge where Jim and the rest of his crew were waiting for the closing whistle. The man couldn't be hunting for Jim. It was someone else; someone who resembled him. That often happened. And yet . . .

Her feet quickened of their own accord as she followed her shadow down toward the river which lay broad and glistening in the late afternoon sun. She had not yet been down to the bridge when Jim was working, and as she came within sight of the towering span she wondered how she was to find him and keep him out of sight of the prying eyes that even now might be watching.

Halting for a moment on the old bridge that was to be abandoned when the new was completed, she stood looking out at the shining new structure in dismay. Squinting, she made out figures like running ants, busy on the girders high in the air above the swirling water. Mingled with the noise of the drivers and the engines, busy shouts rose now and then and, standing on tip-toe, her hands in her pockets, the wind from the river tumbling her hair about her face, she scanned the laboring figures one by one, her heart beating fast. She had never realized before how dangerous this work was, how spidery the framework of a new bridge, nor how great its height above the black waters.

She had to stand there almost five minutes before she located Jim

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## Czech Fuehrer



Following resignation of the Czech cabinet, General Radula Gajda (above), fascist leader, was named Fuehrer of the Czech people. First proclamation announced formation of a "Czech National Committee."

## Rules Prague



General Von Gablenz (above), one of the German troop commanders who marched into Prague as Hitler continued his push to the East, has been appointed military governor of the capital city of what was the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia. (Central Press)

## In Line for Throne



No crystal gazer can predict with any accuracy the destiny of this child. He is Prince Victor Emanuel, Prince of Naples, son of Crown Prince Umberto of Italy, and in line for the Italian throne. This is the latest portrait of the child.

## To Succeed Leahy



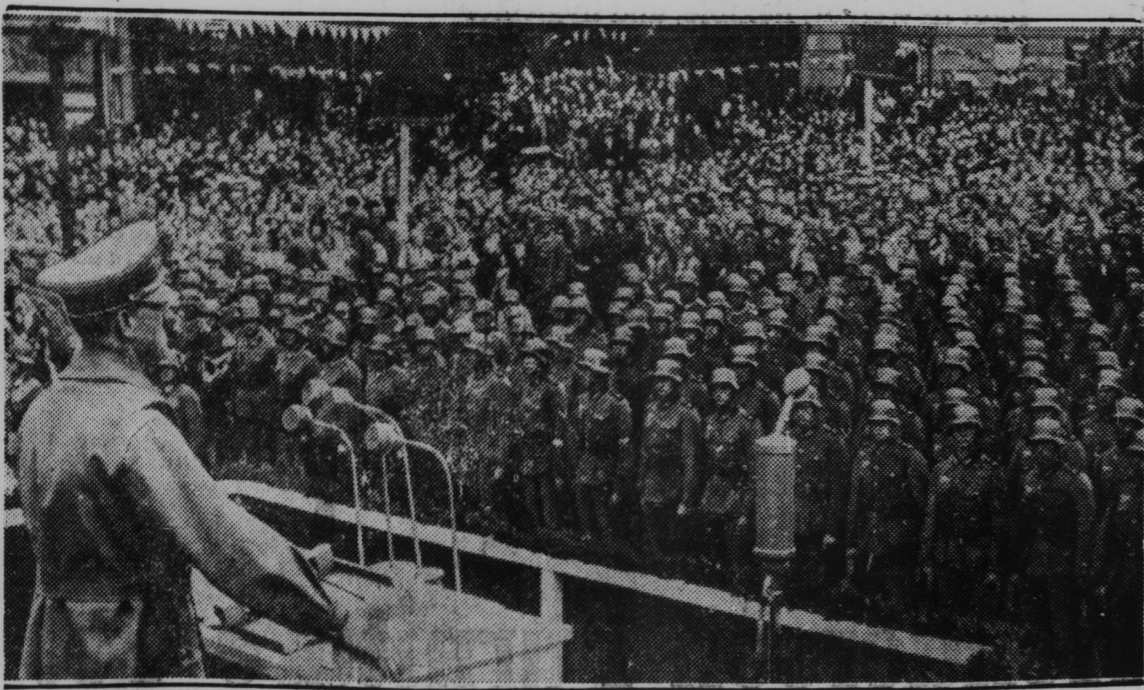
Rear Admiral Harold R. Stark (above) commander of cruisers, U. S. fleet battle force, is slated to become new chief of naval operations when Admiral William D. Leahy retires this summer. Stark, 59, was jumped over the heads of ten in move seen as an effort to place younger blood in the Navy's key positions.

## At Fourth Round of Labor Peace Parley



Officers of the American Federation of Labor confer during fourth meeting with C. I. O. leaders, in New York, in attempt to settle labor's differences. Both sides were silent on all proposals and renewed pressure from Roosevelt. Left to right, Matthew Woll, Photo Engravers' Union; T. A. Rickert, United Garment Workers; Daniel J. Tobin, Teamsters' Union, and Harry C. Bates, Bricklayers' Union.

## As Hitler Announced a "Bloodless" Victory



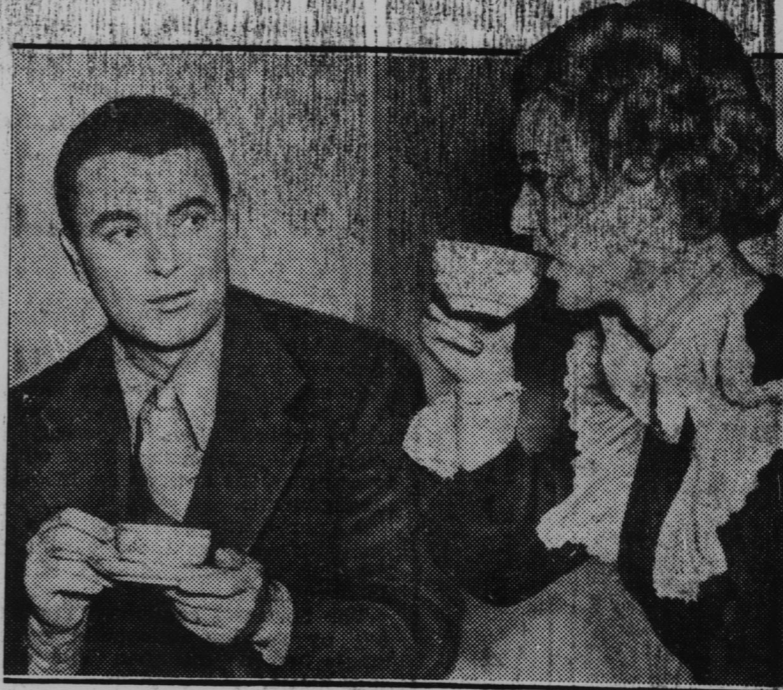
First German ruler of Bohemia since Charlemagne, Hitler sped by special train behind thousands of heavily armed Nazi troops to Prague, to announce the third of Germany's "wars without a shot." The Fuehrer is shown in a recent picture addressing his troops. (Central Press)

## In Mexican Contest



General Joaquin Amaro (above), former Mexican secretary of war and navy, is regarded as a likely candidate for the presidency, with the support of the anti-administration anti-Communist revolutionary party, recently organized. (Central Press)

## Reported Altar-Bound



Bette Davis, blonde screen beauty, is seen with George Brent, Hollywood actor, in a recent photo. As soon as Bette receives final divorce decree from orchestra leader Harmon Nelson, she will wed Brent, according to his sister, Mrs. Kathleen Watson. (Central Press)