

A STREAK OF YELLOW

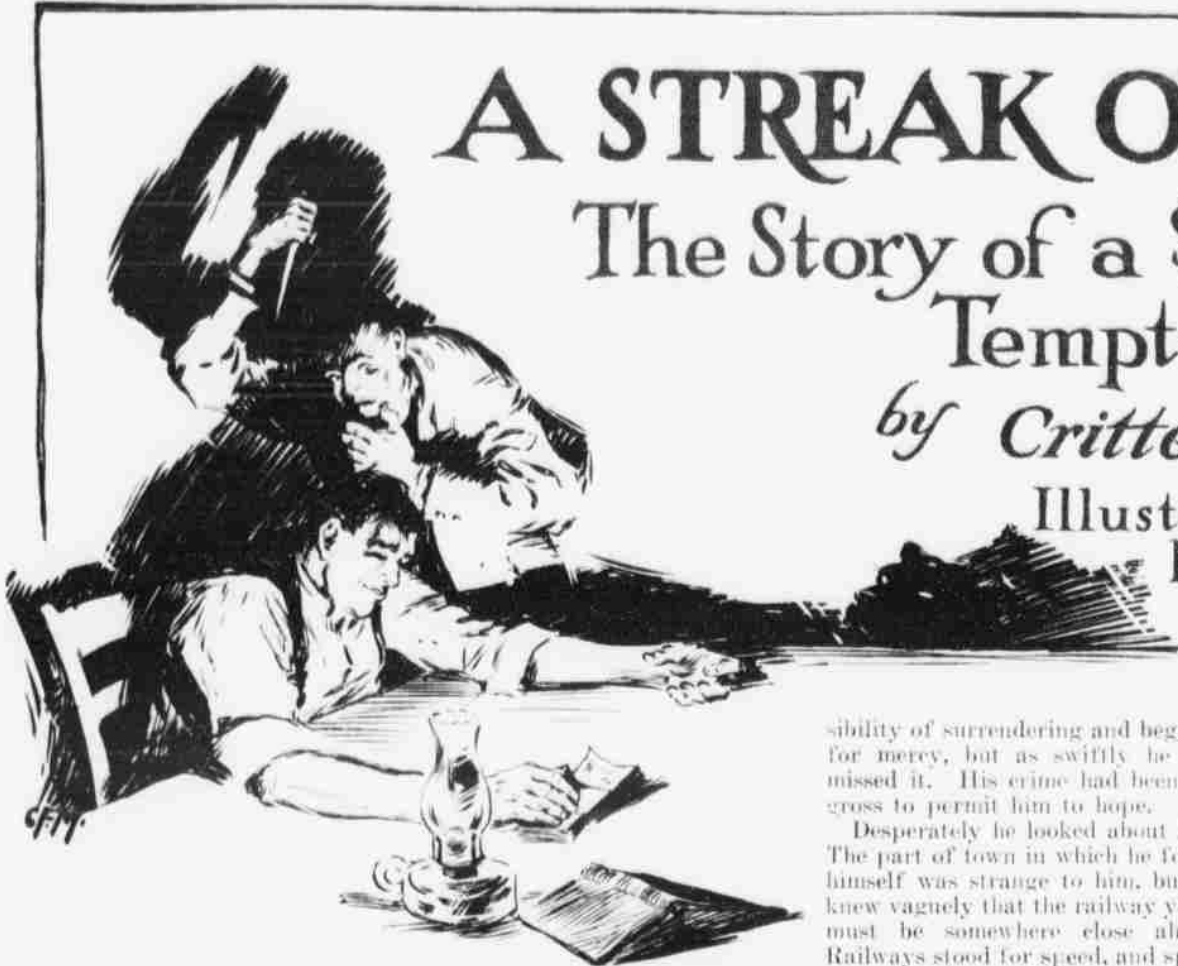
The Story of a \$10,000.

Temptation

by *Crittenden Marriott*

Illustrations

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THE hands of the big clock facing the door of the bank marked five minutes before three; Ford noticed them as he hurried in holding the small check he hoped to persuade the teller to cash without identification. There was nothing wrong with the check, but Ford feared that his non-acquaintance at the bank would prevent his getting the cash. The doors were about to close and the lobby was deserted excepting for one customer standing at the loan clerk's window. Most of the tellers had left their posts or were engrossed in balancing accounts for the day. No one seemed to notice Ford.

Somewhat apprehensively, he approached the window of the paying teller. As he did so the teller, in obedience to a call from the back, dropped a roll of bills on the counter and hurried from his cage.

Ford went on to the vacant window and stopped. Then he started. The bills that the teller had dropped lay against the wicket, temptingly within reach. Ford noted that they were of yellow denomination; he read the figures scribbled on the wrapper—\$10,000.

For an instant Ford debated with himself. Furtively he looked about him. No one was watching. What streak of madness seized him he did not know. But he put his finger on the bills, drew them from beneath the wicket, slipped them into his pocket, and walked quietly toward the door.

Before he had taken three steps he realized what he had done. But he did not dare to turn back, walking on dizzily, blindly. His foot was on the threshold when an outcry rose behind him, galvanizing him to sudden life. He did not stop to inquire as to the cause; he stopped for nothing. In panic fear he plunged through the door into the street and darted away.

HE was so near the door that under other circumstances he might have gotten away without having been seen clearly enough to be identified. But fate was against him. Not five feet from the door he plunged into a group of men who knew him well, brushed them aside and left them staring.

Along streets, up byways, across lots he raced, easily distancing the sporadic pursuit and losing himself in the convolutions of the crossways. Then with an effort he slowed down, realizing that running was the surest way to invite attention. His heels, however, kept jerking and his legs twiteling; scarcely could he restrain them from leaping forward.

He knew, none better, that the officers of the law would soon be upon his track, and that he must take instant action if he wished to make his momentary freedom permanent. Swiftly he considered the pos-

sibility of surrendering and begging for mercy, but as swiftly he dismissed it. His crime had been too gross to permit him to hope.

Desperately he looked about him. The part of town in which he found himself was strange to him, but he knew vaguely that the railway yards must be somewhere close ahead. Railways stood for speed, and speed was what he wanted. He hurried on, skulking through alleys and byways, questing with eager eyes till he found himself at the edge of the yards. Into them he slipped, passing between endless rows of cars, until he found a train of empties just pulling out.

As the cars clanked past him, he noticed that the door of one was ajar. He leaped for it, caught it, and clung on at the risk of his life till he could work the opening wide enough to insinuate his body. Then he flung it shut and dropped exhausted on the floor, worn out by the stress of his emotions no less than by his physical exertion.

FOR a long time he lay in a half stupor, his thoughts revolving in an endless circle. When at last full consciousness returned the black fear came with it. Painfully he dragged himself up and leaned against the wall of the car. Every nerve in his body was jangling. He scarcely felt the jolting of the car. Rough though it was, it was no rougher than the internal spasms that racked him. He was almost alone in the world and had no near kin to worry over him. But his vivid imagination pictured the humming telegraph wires weaving a net about his path; the police stations bulletining his description; the newspapers far and near heralding his crime. He felt himself the center of a blazed circle, ever-narrowing as the hunters closed inexorably in.

After a time, however, the darkness began to comfort him, as it would comfort any other hunted animal that had fled to its fictitious protection. Almost he began to hope; for the moment he was still free, he was hidden, flying from the scene of his offense. Perhaps—perhaps—he felt the banknotes in his pocket—perhaps—

With hope came hunger and thirst. He did not know how long he had been in the car, but he guessed that it had been hours. He took out his watch and held it to his ear, and was surprised to find it still running as smoothly and as steadily as if his world had not crashed about him. A narrow edge of white light was leaking through a crack at the door. He crept toward it and held his watch in the beam.

The hands marked eight—eight! With sudden fury he hurled the timepiece from him. Eight! Why! It was three o'clock when he had snatched the money and he had lived years since then.

"It's a lie! a lie!" he raged.

But he knew it was no lie.

The car began to jolt over a network of frogs. Ford heard the click of the wheels on the rail joints, the screech of the rubbing flanges, and realized that the train was stopping.

CAREFULLY he opened the door a fraction of an inch and peered out. The moon was high in the heavens. Its light showed open fields bisected by a country road that wound away into the night. Evidently the train was waiting at a switch. Ford was about to bury himself anew in the obscurity of the car when he heard the noise of booted heels grinding upon gravel and the shriek of a complaining side-door flung back on its hinges.

Desperately he peered out and saw three men examining a car up the track from him. As he watched they moved to another and then to another, coming nearer and nearer.

"Looking for me!" he gasped. "My God! They're looking for me!"

There was no time to lose. Mercifully a cloud slipped across the moon, and like a ghost Ford dropped out in the momentary darkness and slipped like a wraith into the road. A ditch ran along it and into this he plunged. Then, bending low, he ran until he could run no longer. The train was far out of sight when he stumbled and fell exhausted by the roadside.

When he struggled up, the moon came out brighter than ever and by its light he saw that he had fallen close to a group of buildings, one of which seemed rather imposing. Stealthily he began to move away. But at his first step a sudden clamor broke out



As the dog launched for his throat he struck straight and hard