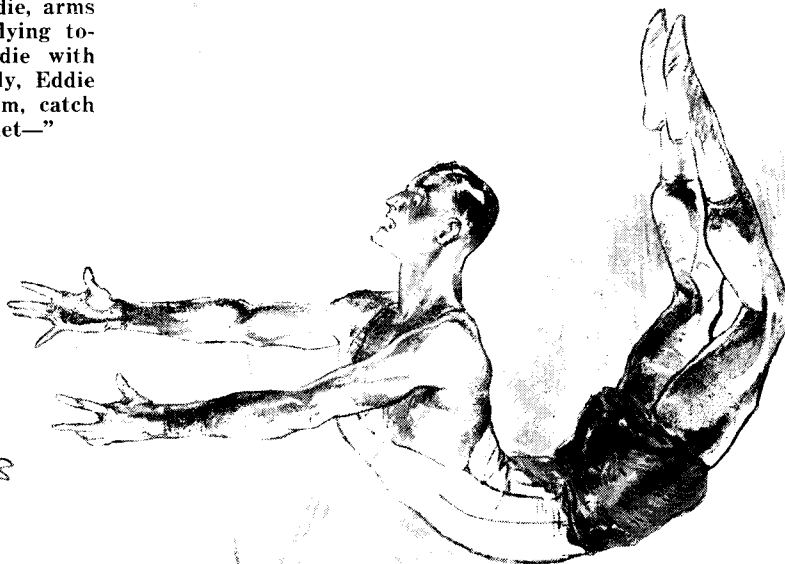
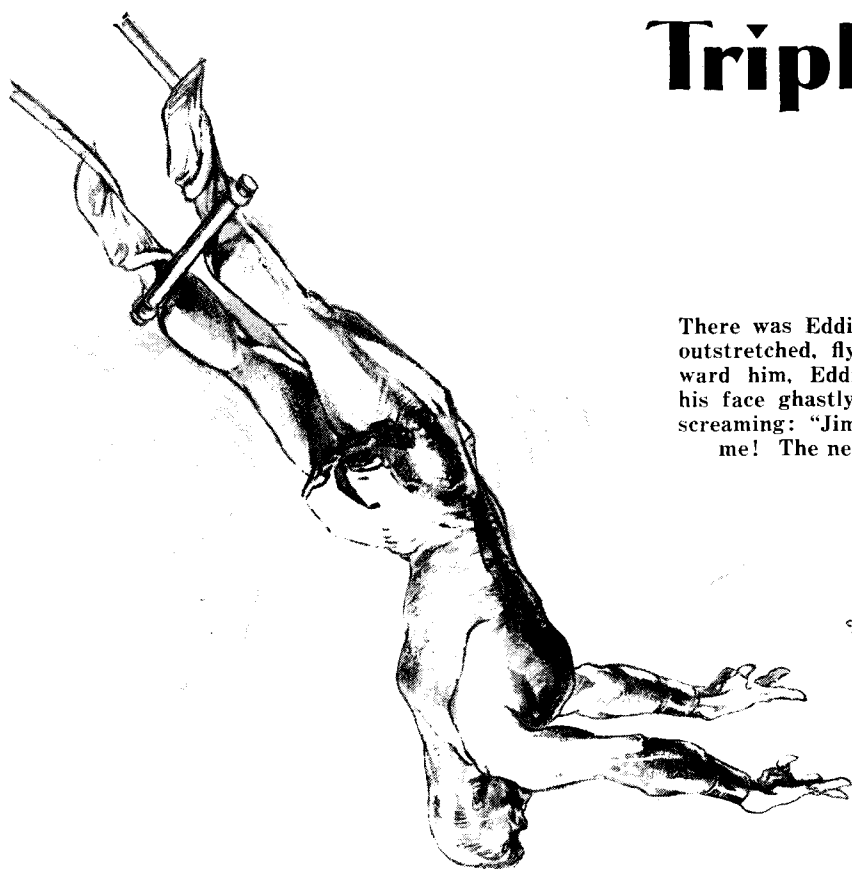


Triple Somersault

A Short Short Story complete on this page

By Courtney Ryley
Cooper

There was Eddie, arms outstretched, flying toward him, Eddie with his face ghastly, Eddie screaming: "Jim, catch me! The net—"



FOR eleven years Jim Slade and Eddie Dunn had been partners of the air. Eddie was the flier of the act. Far the more youthful and engaging of the pair, his graceful evolutions caused the applause to roll thunderously up from the close-packed seats of the Grand Amalgamated Circus. That's why Jim Slade, as time passed, had come to a feeling of resentment which at last had boiled to hate. Jim Slade got no applause.

He was the catcher, who swung continually from his trapeze to toss Eddie into space and to catch him safely when he came hurtling back from the "double and the twist" or even the triple somersault. He was the backbone of the act, bulky, unattractive insurance for Eddie's daring and grace. His work was not spectacular. He only swung, head down, heavy shoulders set for action, great, strong hands extended—and wondered what that audience would think about their Adonis of an Eddie if some day these huge arms should fail, allowing Eddie to fall—from the triple somersault, for instance. Even a safety net is dangerous, if struck from a wrong angle.

SO JIM SLADE swung and caught, swung and caught, twice each day, swung and caught and thought, but said nothing. Eddie didn't know that his partner had come to hate him, just as Jim didn't know that Eddie looked upon himself only as the representative of the pair, acknowledging the plaudits on behalf of both of them. Then one day the act halted momentarily for the clearing of a distracting commotion on the hippodrome track below.

The show was being "railroaded" shortened for an early loading because of a long run to the next town. An iron standard, projecting from the carless arms of a hurrying roustabout, had struck the boss property man in the temple, knocking him, unconscious, to the ground. The excitement lasted only a moment. Then some men came with a piece of canvas and carried the boss away. The band played with new ardor,

the property men went back to their positions, standing with one arm about the wooden poles which supported the net, in instant readiness to tear down at the shrill of the substitute boss's whistle; the audience shifted, forgot the injured man and looked up once more. Always the show must go on.

Eddie swung off his platform and flew lazily across space to the grasp of his partner. Then, hanging there, he looked below.

"Poor old Pokey!" he said. "Boss property man at last, and scared to death with stage fright."

"Yeh, he's only half-baked anyway," grunted Jim. "Trying to work and boss at the same time."

"Sure. No brains." Then: "All right; give 'er the gun."

They swung together, then Eddie went forth to his own trapeze, working mightily for momentum. High toward the top of the tent he soared, while Jim swung and watched and envied. Then his sleek figure shot upward and out, to double somersault, twist mightily and catapult onward to where Jim's great hands closed in upon him and returned him to his own trapeze with the ease of a boy tossing a ball. Then came the roar of applause—Eddie was bowing as usual. Jim looked away, downward, anywhere except at Eddie. Wild, horrible desires often came over him in moments like this, when Eddie smilingly took the applause. If only once he would admit that it was really Jim who counted!

Below, Pokey, the substitute boss, ran here and there distraughtly, trying to be all over the tent at once and failing.

Across the way, Eddie gracefully hooked his trapeze within reach, tested its balance and took off anew, swinging higher, higher, still higher until the ropes stood almost at right angles. Then his hands loosed and he shot forth into the beginning of the triple, while on the catcher's trapeze Jim Slade suddenly galvanized. Pokey had made a mistake. He had blown his whistle, and dumb men, paid to obey blindly, had leaned their weight against the stand-

ards which held the net. Already it was falling, while up against the sky of the tent Eddie was swirling into the second of his somersaults, a twisting, unknowing ball, directionless, dazed by speed, tumbling on through space.

AND now the net was down! Jim Slade stared below, gaping. The net was down, and it could not come up, even though Pokey, cognizant now, strove frantically to right his ghastly error. It's slow work to raise a net. No doubt now as to what might happen to the man who fell, head down, sixty feet to the ground!

A flash of fire went through Jim Slade. The triple catch was difficult; there'd be no blame if he missed. Eddie was turning now into his last convolution; a moment more and he would plunge toward him. Jim's eyes gleamed strangely. So he was only a catcher,

eh? It'd be different next time. Next time he'd pick a partner who wouldn't steal the act. Just a miss of a half inch, a quarter of an inch, a touch of the fingers before Eddie went down—

And then there was Eddie, arms outstretched, flying toward him; Eddie, with his face ghastly, screaming: "Jim, catch me! The net—"

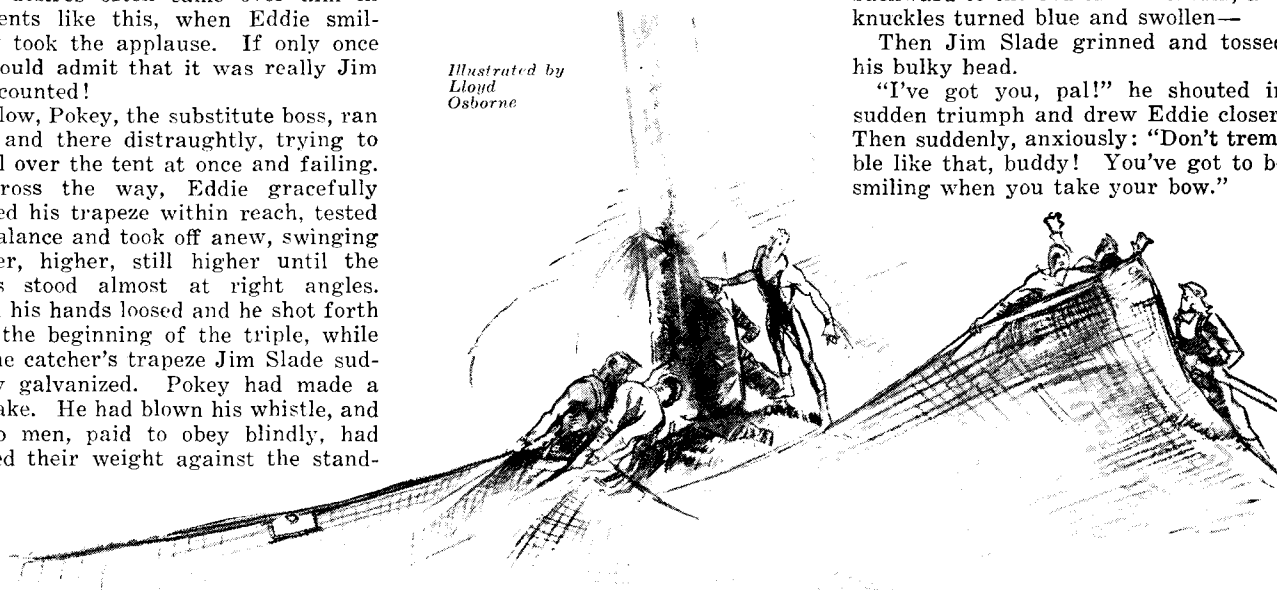
Again fire swept Jim Slade's heart, a different fire. Eddie, who always had leaned upon him, boyish, harebrained Eddie, calling to him for help, trusting to him above all in time of danger! His giant leg muscles suddenly pumped against the trapeze bar until the ropes bent, he literally bolted through the air—he did not know how far nor how he did it. There was the smack of contact—a coughing curse went over Jim's white lips with the realization that his catch was short; his heavy fingers were not on Eddie's wrists, but on the hams of his hands, digging in, slipping—slipping—

They tore deep into the other man's flesh. They dragged their way to Eddie's palms, while muscles stood forth like carvings. They slipped to the fingers and twined there, twined and twisted and gripped in ghastly agony of uncertainty as the two swung farther backward to the end of momentum, and knuckles turned blue and swollen—

Then Jim Slade grinned and tossed his bulky head.

"I've got you, pal!" he shouted in sudden triumph and drew Eddie closer. Then suddenly, anxiously: "Don't tremble like that, buddy! You've got to be smiling when you take your bow."

Illustrated by
Lloyd
Osborne



Druid's Eyes

By Fred MacIsaac

There is one way to capture a girl whose spirit is a leaping flame, who is as Irish as a witch or a fairy, and who doesn't want to be caught—but not every man could do it

MOLLY DORE was Irish. All her ancestors for a thousand years back had been Irish. Her grandfather, a small Galway farmer who had lost his farm, came to America in the steerage of the steamship *Circassian* in 1850 and contributed a pick and shovel to the building of the New York Central Railroad. After a year or two he married a Galway girl he found in New York, put her in a covered wagon and transported her to the Rocky Mountains, where he dug for gold and found it, millions of dollars' worth of it.

His son Michael Dore returned to New York with the family fortune, broke into Wall Street in a big way, married a society girl whose ancestors also were Irish, and pretty soon had a baby daughter who was christened Mary but whom everybody had always called Molly.

Oh, Molly was Irish and in her blood danced the sublime insanity of the pure Celt. It puffed her up with high spirits and deflated her like a punctured tire. It lifted her upon the heights and cast her down into the abyss. It endowed her with various talents and denied her the perseverance to develop them. It made her sparkle and glower. It gave her a druid's imagination, too vivid to be healthful. And it furnished her with the beauty of the devil.

Certain women pointed out that she wasn't beautiful at all because her face was round and her features too flat, and she was too plump for fashionable clothes. They said, without meaning to compliment her, that she looked Irish, and she certainly did. She resembled also a statue of alabaster with a moving flame behind it.

HER skin was clear almost to transparency and the red blood colored it exquisitely. She had a fine pair of eyes in her head, had Molly Dore; great limpid black eyes which you couldn't gaze into without getting dizzy. If her nose was a bit flat and her upper lip a trifle too long, the mouth was adorable, with full, petulant, passionate lips so highly colored that she never used a lipstick, and large, even, milky teeth. The neck of her was a column of gleaming marble and the shoulders, in an evening gown, were plump and snow white. She was a brunette with the skin of an ash blonde, a combination peculiar to the Irish and deadly to the male.

Maybe she was ugly when she was in a black mood, as jealous women declared. Suppose her profile wasn't very good because of her small nose and long upper lip and too solid a chin. Suppose anything you like. Men were crazy about her. If she hadn't had a cent she could have married about anybody she wanted.

That druid's imagination was her curse. She hoped to marry and have a lot of children and she knew she was wildly passionate and she thought that love was everything, but she would turn

"You she-devil," he growled. "I'll tame you. How do you like this?"

her mystic orbs on a man and see him as he would be at forty and fifty and sixty, which killed his chances; or else he would turn into a pig or a parrot or a wolf or a hyena, and she couldn't have that.

Heaven had given her a wonderful voice, a dramatic soprano of astonishing volume and marvelous quality, but had neglected to give her the will to train it over a period of years and make it do exactly what she wanted it to do. And she had great natural dramatic ability.

If she hadn't been a very rich girl she might have gone on the stage and become famous; that is, if she had found anybody who could make her work. Although she was a big girl and not thin,

she was an unusually gifted amateur dancer and she played the piano beautifully—by ear.

Once she was posing for a famous French portrait painter and after the third sitting she insisted upon looking at what he had accomplished.

"Good Lord, that isn't I," she ex-

claimed angrily. "You're not painting a wax doll, Monsieur Duplan."

"Perhaps mademoiselle can improve my work herself," replied the indignant artist.

"Give me a clean canvas and maybe I can," she retorted insolently.

With a snort he whisked away the unfinished portrait and set before her a white square of canvas. Molly grasped a palette knife, squeezed colors out of various tubes and plastered them, apparently without method, upon the sheet. In five minutes, out of a mess of black and red and yellow and brown paint peeped the impudent face of Molly Dore.

"Take a look at this," she challenged.

The artist gazed and was astounded. "It's a miracle," he exclaimed. "You have genius, mademoiselle. In a few seconds you have found what I sought for hours. Where have you studied?"

The light went out of her face. "Oh, here and there."

"Well, you must finish it yourself."

"Oh, I couldn't finish it," she said with a sigh. "I'm through. I'm just a flash in the pan, Monsieur Duplan."

"But you must study."

Illustrated by
Charles Lassell

