

# Who Is Houdini?

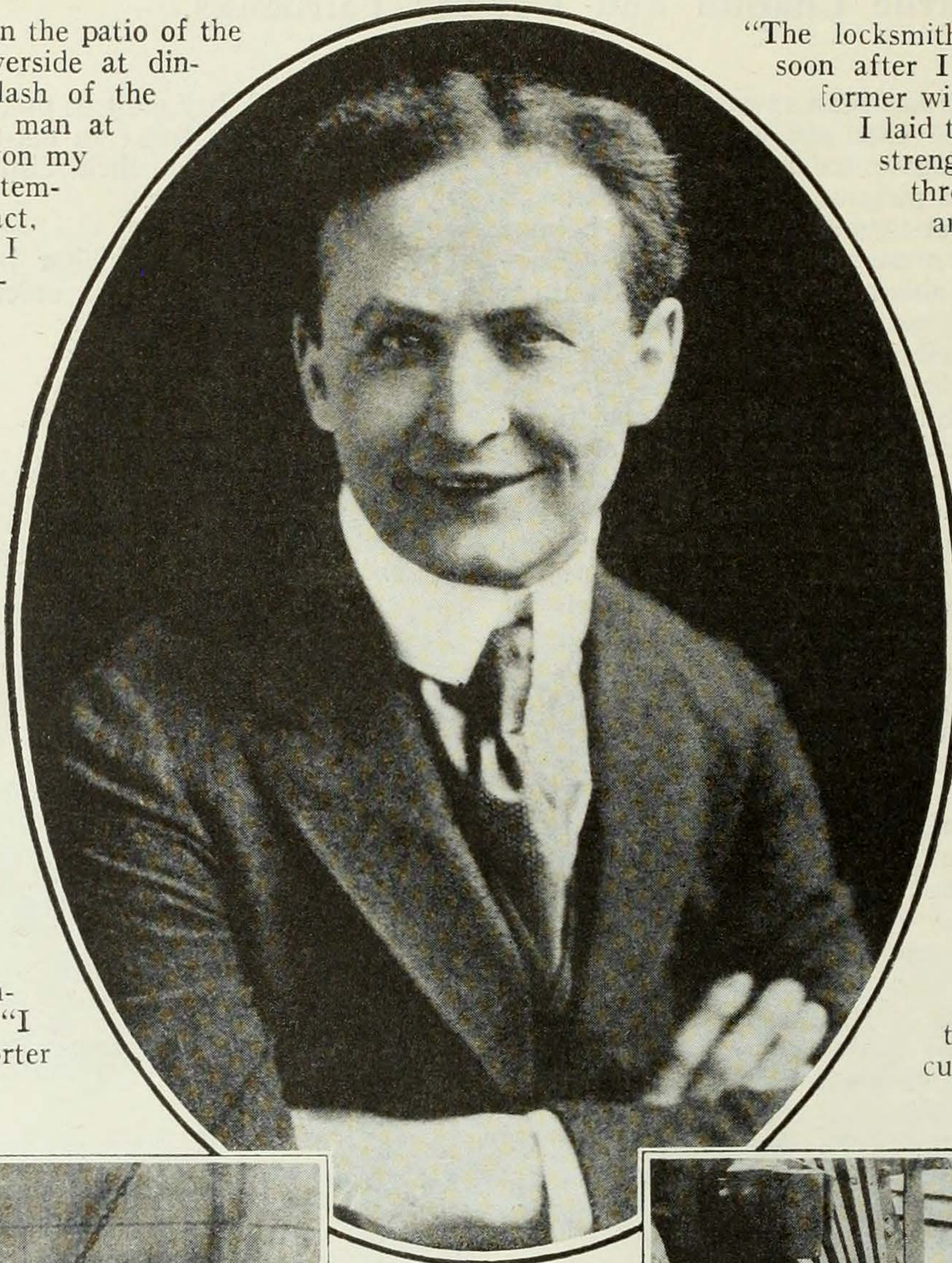
The only thing secret about him is his friendship with handcuffs.

By  
FRED LOCKLEY

A FEW days ago I sat in the patio of the Mission Inn at Riverside at dinner. Above the splash of the fountain, I heard a man at an adjoining table say: "I won my bet. He thought it was a temple bell; as a matter of fact, it's a swallowing bell. I doubt if there is another, except the one I have, outside of China. The knowledge of how to make these bells is the secret possession of a family of famous Chinese acrobats and jugglers, who pass the knowledge down from generation to generation. These are bells within bells. The jugglers swallow them, then they allow people from the audience to hit them on the stomachs, making the bells tinkle."

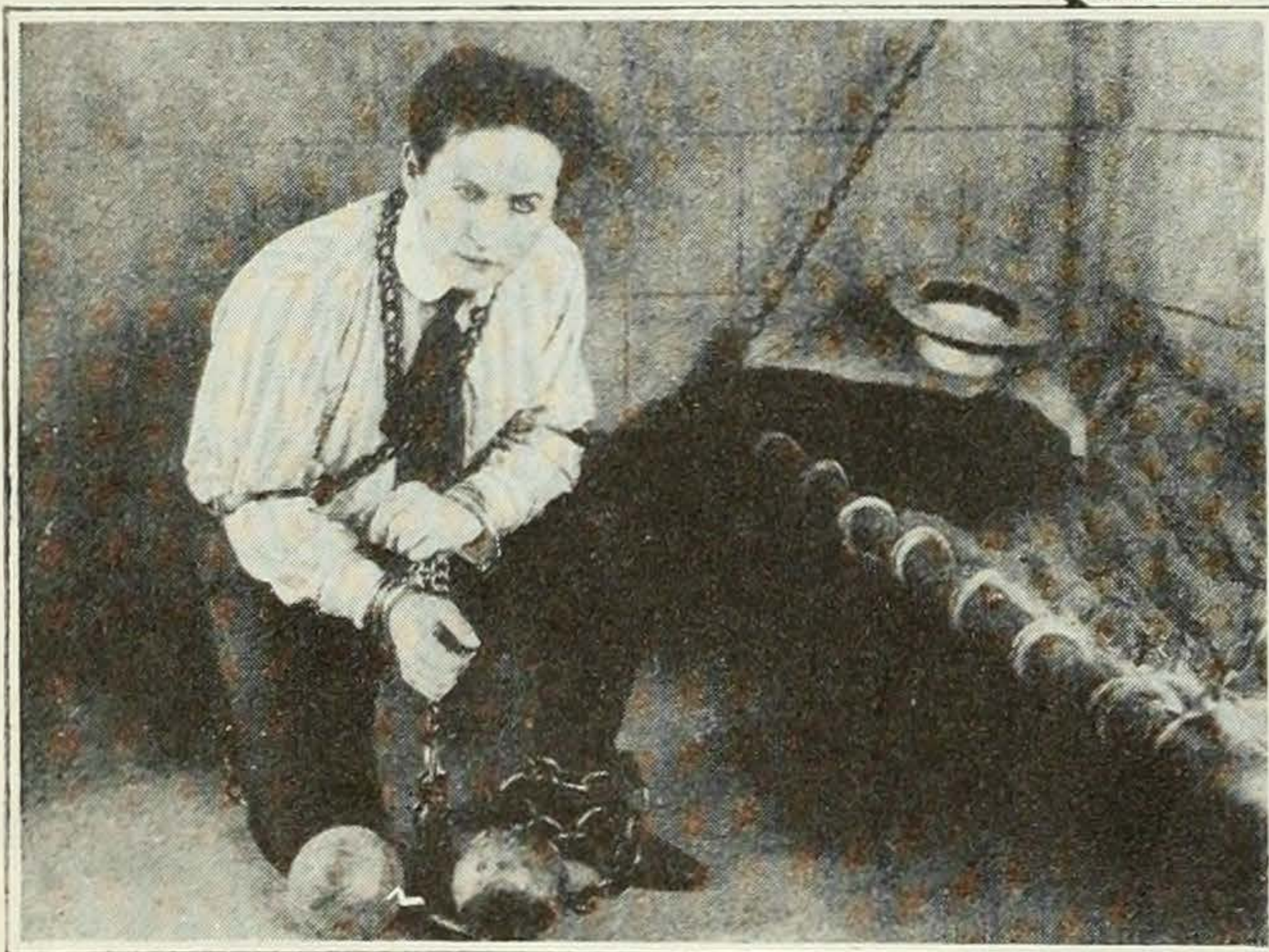
The speaker was Harry Houdini, handcuff king and film player. Through certain connections I was introduced to him.

"Sure, I'll give you an interview," said Mr. Houdini. "I used to be a newspaper reporter

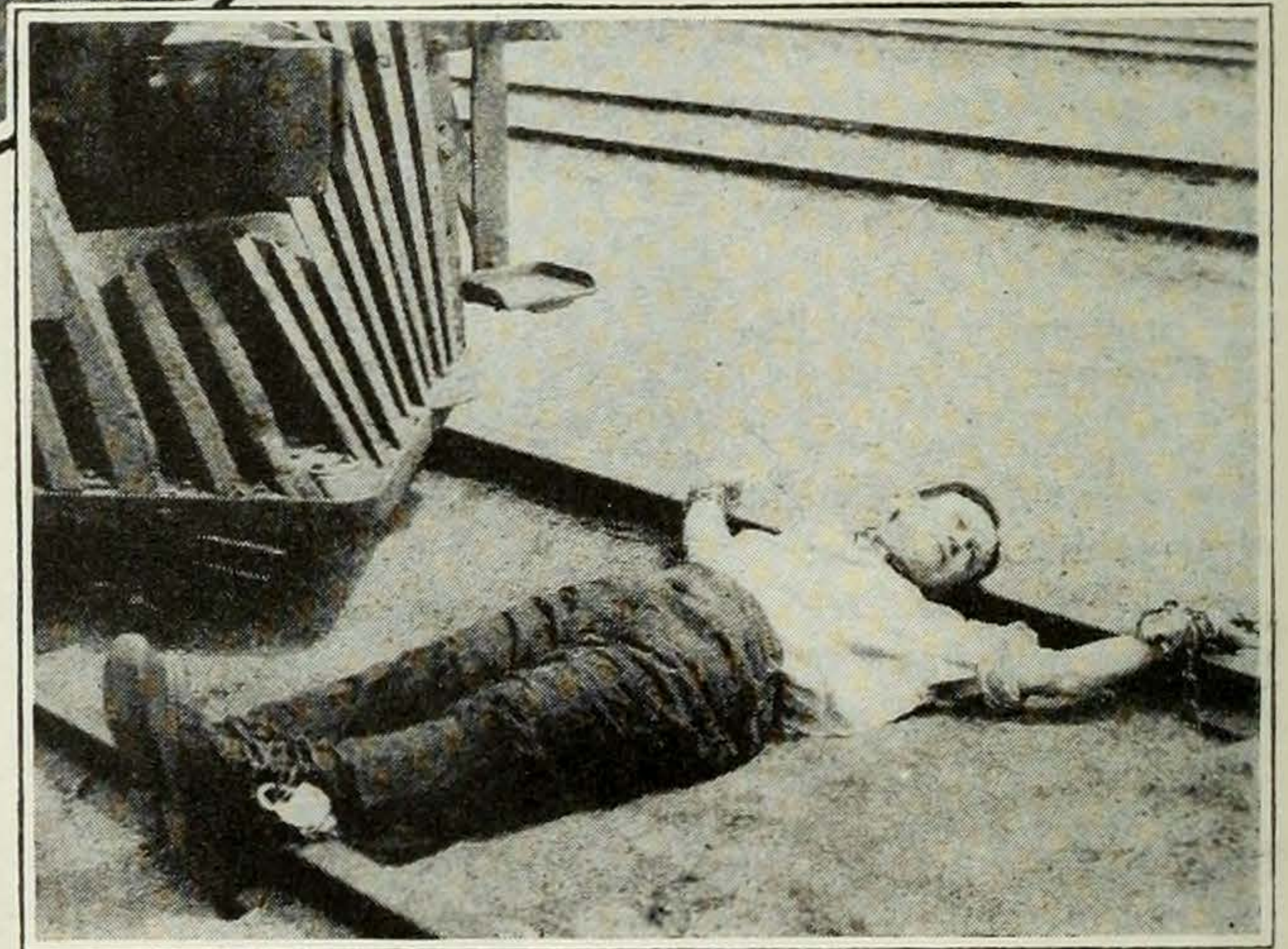


"The locksmith business tired of me, and soon after I got a job as a trapeze performer with a circus. There was where I laid the foundation for my feats of strength. After a few years I threw up my job with the circus, and took a job with a medicine show which traveled from city to city. I would let any one from the crowd tie me securely and then offer to forfeit twenty-five dollars if I couldn't release myself.

"One evening a deputy sheriff at Coffeyville, Kansas, watched me for a while, and said, 'Will you give me twenty-five dollars if I can fix you so you can't get loose?' I couldn't afford to let him get away with it, so I told him to come on up. There flashed into my memory the way in which I had unlocked the handcuffs from the banker's son, the time I was working for the locksmith. The deputy sheriff took care to see that the handcuffs were on tight. Two min-



These are the kind of stunts that make him famous among the thrill-lovers. At the left—a scene from his Paramount-Artcraft picture, "The Grim Game."



myself. I was born in Appleton, Wisconsin. I ran away to Milwaukee when I was nine years old. For a while I was a newsboy, then I carried a route; later, I broke into the game as a cub reporter. I used to run a magazine, called the 'Conjurers Magazine,' and I have written several books which have had a fair sale.

"At one time I apprenticed myself to a locksmith. One day the son of a prominent banker came in with several of his friends, to have a pair of handcuffs removed. For a joke, they had slipped the handcuffs on him, but were unable to release him, as they had no key. I found that they had broken off a bit of wire in the keyhole. By the merest accident I discovered a way in which I could unlock the handcuffs without a key. I took them off and thought nothing more about it.

utes later I handed them back to him.

"One day I was hired to give an exhibition at a children's party in Brooklyn. At the close a little girl, about sixteen, said to me, very bashfully, 'I think you are awfully clever,' and then with a blush, 'I like you.' 'How much do you like me?' I said, 'enough to marry me?' We had never seen each other before. She nodded. And so, after talking the matter over, we were married.

"Shortly after our marriage, hard times struck us good and plenty. A great many actors were out of work. Now luck is coming our way—Mr. Lasky is making motion pictures very worth while for me.

"My father is a Rabbi. I have four brothers and one sister. My sister is editor of a magazine for the blind."