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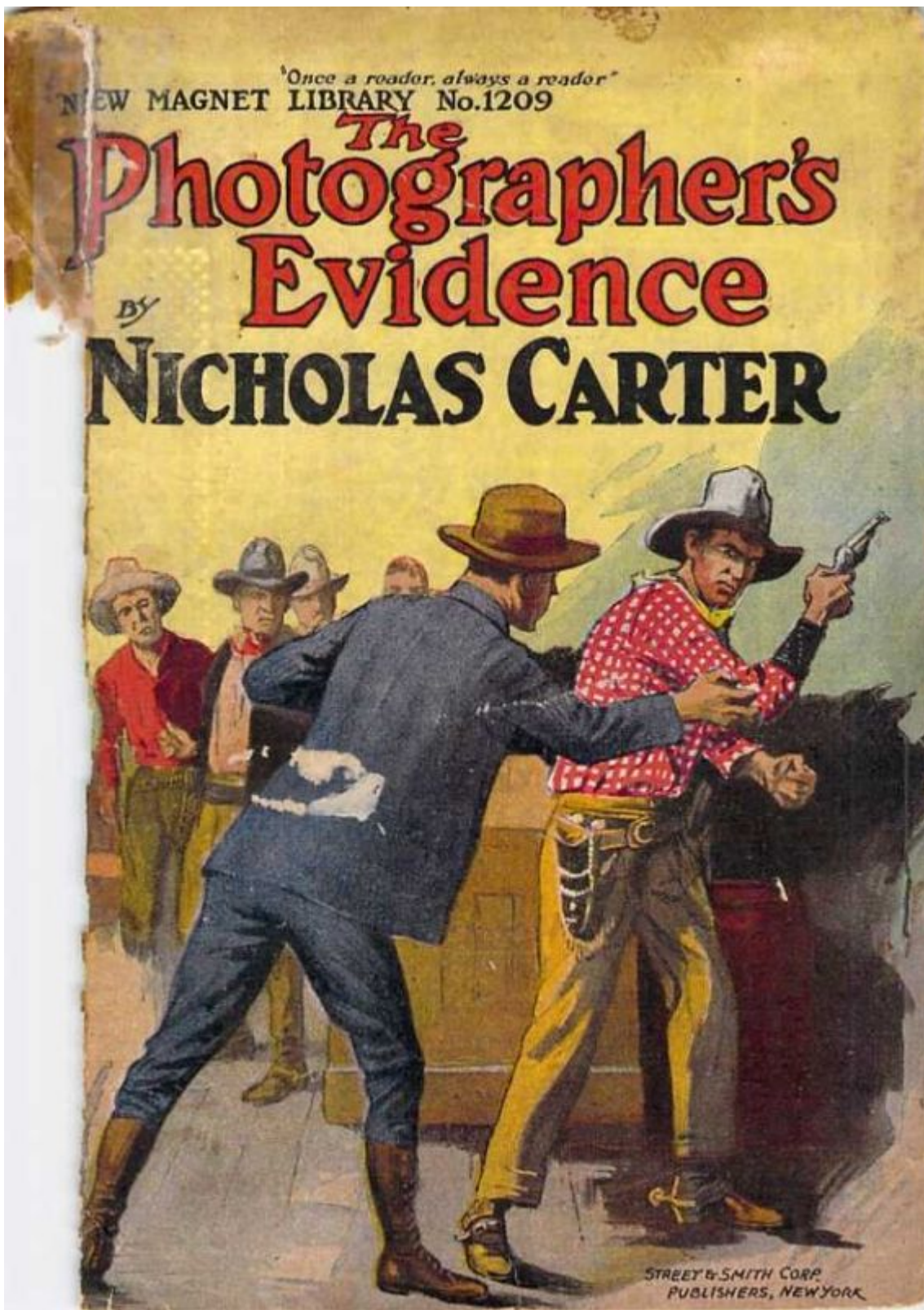
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The Photographer's Evidence

BY
NICHOLAS CARTER



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938—Nick Carter and the Green Goods Men
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944—The Great Money-order Swindle
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869—The Last Call
871—A Struggle with Destiny
873—The Crook's Blind
875—With Shackles of Fire
877—The Fixed Alibi
879—The Soul Destroyers
881—Birds of Prey
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885—The Wolf Within
887—The Trail of the Finger Prints
889—A Crime in Paradise
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903—To the Ends of the Earth
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952—Fighting Against Millions
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968—A Woman's Hand
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972—The Diamond Mine Case
974—An Accidental Password
976—Two Plus Two
978—The Clever Celestial
980—Gideon Drexel's Millions
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984—The Twelve Tin Boxes
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988—A Dead Man's Grip
990—A Deposit Vault Puzzle
992—The Stolen Pay Train
994—Wanted by Two Clients
996—Check No. 777
998—Nick Carter's Clever Protégé
1000—The Man Who Vanished
1002—A Game of Craft
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1010—A Gamblers' Syndicate
1012—Among the Counterfeiters
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1016—Found on the Beach
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1020—The Puzzle of Five Pistols
1022—A Bite of an Apple
1024—The Stolen Race Horse
1026—A *Herald* Personal
1028—The Crimson Clew
1030—The Chain of Clews
1032—Brought to Bay
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995—The Van Alstine Case
997—Partners in Peril
999—The Sign of the Crossed Knives
1001—A Battle for the Right
1003—Nick Carter's Retainer
1005—A Broken Bond
1007—The Man Who Stole Millions
1009—Hidden Foes
1011—A Chance Discovery
1013—A Threefold Disappearance
1015—A Princess of Crime
1017—A Spinner of Death
1019—A Bogus Clew
1021—The Secret of the Marble Mantle
1023—A Triple Crime
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1029—Nick Carter Down East
1031—A Victim of Circumstances
1033—The Dynamite Trap
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1038—Man Against Man
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1112—Nick Carter's Promise
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1073—The Cashier's Secret
1075—The Cloak of Guilt
1077—The Hot Air Clew
1079—The Certified Check
1081—Beyond Pursuit
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1093—The Telltale Photographs
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1115—When the Trap Was Sprung
1117—Under the Tiger's Claws
1119—Behind a Throne

1120—The Lure of Gold
1122—From a Prison Cell
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1136—The Diamond Trail
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1145—Ahead of the Game
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1160—The Bloodstone Terror
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1164—With Links of Steel
1166—The Key Ring Clew
1168—At Mystery’s Threshold
1170—The Four Fingered Glove
1172—The Broadway Cross
1174—A Master of Deviltry
1176—Doctor Quartz’s Quick Move
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1192—Nick Carter’s Masterpiece
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1200—The Elevated Railroad Mystery
1202—The Twin Mystery
1204—Under False Colors

1205—A Ring of Dust
1207—The Blood-red Badge
1209—The Photographer's Evidence
1211—The Man and his Price

1206—The Crown Diamond
1208—The Barrel Mystery
1210—Millions at Stake
1212—A Double-Handed Game

In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in July, 1927.

1213—A Strike for Freedom 1214—A Disciple of Satan

To be published in Aug., 1927.

1215—The Marked Hand 1216—A Fight with a Fiend

1217—When the Wicked Prosper

To be published in Sept., 1927.

1218—A Plunge into Crime 1219—An Artful Schemer

To be published in Oct., 1927.

1220—Reaping the Whirlwind 1221—Out of Crime's Depths

To be published in Nov., 1927.

1222—A Woman at Bay 1223—The Temple of Vice

To be published in Dec., 1927.

1224—Death at the Feast 1225—A Double Plot

Author of "The Barrel Mystery," "The Blood-red Badge," "The Crown Diamond," etc.

[5]

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EVIDENCE.

CHAPTER I. A DOUBTFUL CLIENT.

"Mr. Carter, can I trust you?"

It was in the great detective's own house that this question was asked.

"Well," was Nick's quiet answer, "if you had any doubt on that matter, why did you come to me?"

His caller looked nervously at the floor.

"There's no use in talking to me," Nick went on, "unless you do trust me. A detective can do nothing for a client who does not give him his confidence absolutely."

"Of course," the other assented; "I did not mean to offend you."

"You haven't offended me."

"I am so disturbed by it, you see. So much depends on secrecy. It is so terribly important that I found it[6] difficult to make up my mind to consult anybody on the matter; and yet I know by your reputation that you are a perfectly trustworthy man. There is nobody in the States more so."

While the man was speaking Nick was studying him.

In fact, the detective had been doing that from the moment the man entered.

He was apparently about fifty years old; a well-dressed, prosperous-looking man, who might be a merchant, or a lawyer, or a banker.

Nick did no guessing. The man might be anything else. He had given his name as George Snell, but he had not sent in his card, and he had not said where he belonged.

Word had simply been taken to Nick by a servant that a Mr. George Snell wanted to see him on "most important business."

"He isn't an American," was Nick's only conclusion from what had been said thus far. "An American would not have spoken simply of 'the States,' as he did."

There had been a pause after the caller's last remarks.

"Well," he exclaimed then, "I'm not coming more than two-thirds of the way across the continent for nothing. I set out to consult you, and I will do so."

[7]

"That's better," said the detective; and, willing to help him tell his story, he asked: "What kind of a case is it, Mr. Snell?"

"I suppose you'd call it kidnaping; but there's robbery combined with it, and—and also—also blackmail."

Mr. Snell hesitated and stammered a little at the end of this speech.

Nick merely nodded.

"To begin with," continued Mr. Snell, "I come from Wenonah. You may not be aware that the Government of England has made a large section of Western British America into a province and called it Wenonah."

"Yes," said Nick, "I am aware of that."

"You are a well-informed man. Few Americans would know the fact, for the province is so young that it isn't down on the maps yet. You know, also, I suppose, that the capital of the province is a town called Manchester?"

"Yes."

"That is where the crime was committed. It happened a month ago. The governor of the province, Bradley is his name, gave a party at his house. All the prominent families of the town and country around attended. There was dancing till a late hour.

[8]

"Then, when the guests were going away, it was discovered that the governor's daughter, Estelle, was missing. She has not been seen since."

"How old is the child?" asked Nick.

"Child?" echoed Mr. Snell, in apparent astonishment. Then he seemed to understand, and added: "It is natural that you should use that word, but the girl is twenty."

"Oh!"

"She's the governor's only daughter, and heiress, therefore, to his property, which is very great."

"Has nothing been heard from her?"

"Indirectly, yes. Her captors have offered to restore her for a ransom."

"Has there been any attempt to deal with her captors?"

"Yes, but nothing has come of it. There is doubt now whether she is really in the hands of kidnapers."

"Ah! what then?"

"I haven't told you the whole story, Mr. Carter."

"Go on, then."

"The day after she disappeared it was found that a considerable amount of jewelry had gone also."

"Did she wear it at the ball?"

"Some of it, most of it, in fact. But that was not all.[9] There were also missing certain State papers and some private documents belonging to the governor. These are extremely important. They must be recovered at any cost."

"Are they more important than the recovery of Miss Bradley, Mr. Snell?"

"No, I wouldn't say that, but they complicate the case badly. An offer has been made to restore them."

"And the girl?"

"No. That is, there was one offer to restore the girl and another to deal for the return of the papers and jewelry. There seems to be a double gang of villains at work."

"Possibly. What about the blackmail you mentioned?"

"That," answered Mr. Snell, hesitating, "has to do with the stolen papers."

"Something shady in the governor's past?"

Mr. Snell looked at the floor.

"I wouldn't like to say," he replied. "Some people might think so."

"Evidently the robbers do think so, eh?"

"Yes, for they put a big price on the papers."

[10]

"I suppose the matter has been investigated by the police of Manchester?"

"No."

"Then how did you communicate with the robbers?"

"I didn't say that I had communicated with the robbers!" exclaimed Mr. Snell, hastily.

"No, but I supposed it was you. Never mind that for a moment. Tell me more about the disappearance of Miss Bradley."

"There isn't much that I can tell. She must have left the house soon after midnight, but she wasn't missed till three hours or more later."

"Was she engaged to be married?"

Snell looked sharply at the detective.

"You're a keen one," he said. "No, she wasn't engaged, and that is another complication."

"Well, it is known that she was in love with a young fellow who wasn't liked by her father. Naturally he wasn't at the ball. It is thought possible that she eloped with him, and that the offer of the robbers to restore her was a bluff."

"Was her lover a rich man?"

"Decidedly not."

[11]

"Then you think she may have taken the jewelry to sell for her own use."

"It's possible, yes. I've thought of it."

"And that the robbery of the papers simply happened to come at the same time."

"That might be."

"Has Miss Bradley's lover been seen since she disappeared?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"Nothing."

"Indeed! I should suppose he would say a good deal."

"He goes about his business as usual, but he is under constant watch. It's plain enough that there is something on his mind."

"I should think there might be, in any case. What is his name?"

"Cecil West."

"And what is your relation to the affair, Mr. Snell?"

The visitor seemed startled.

"My relation to it?" he echoed.

"Certainly. Do you come here as the representative of Governor Bradley?"

[12]

"Oh, no! not at all! the governor didn't send me."

"Who did, then?"

Snell looked uncomfortable.

"Do you need an answer to that?" he asked.

"Of course I do. I must know whom I am dealing with."

"But I gave my name——"

"It is not enough."

The detective spoke rather sharply.

Mr. Snell hesitated and then said:

"Mr. Carter, I cannot see why I should be dragged into the matter at all——"

"But," interrupted Nick, coldly, "nobody has dragged you that I am aware of. I certainly didn't."

"You are trying to do so now, Mr. Carter."

Nick arose.

"There is no need that we should talk longer," he said.

Snell also stood up, and he looked very much troubled.

"I see that I have offended you," he said. "I didn't mean to. You see, Mr. Carter, a great scandal might come of this. It is very important that there should be none. The governor's position might be lost——"

"At this moment," said Nick, "I care nothing for the^[13] governor's position. You have given me some facts in a case that might be interesting, but I don't propose to tackle it unless I know what I am about."

"We want you to look for the girl and the stolen papers."

"Who are we?"

Snell hung his head.

"Excuse me a moment," said Nick; then: "I think I heard the telephone ring. When I return I hope you will have made up your mind to trust me. If you haven't we can't do business."

He bowed and left the room, but he did not go to the telephone.

Instead he went to a room where Patsy, one of his assistants, was reading and gave him a few rapid instructions.

Then he wrote a telegram and sent it to the nearest office by a servant.

Patsy got his hat and went downstairs.

"Now, Mr. Snell," said Nick, when he returned, "are you ready to tell me what I want to know?"

"I can only say that I want you to act in behalf of the governor."

[14]

"Does he know that you came to New York to ask this?"

Snell did not answer.

"We are wasting each other's time," said Nick.

Snell made a last appeal.

"I may be doing wrong," he said, "but I beg you to look into this matter. You can't help seeing how important it is."

"Well," replied Nick, "usually I have nothing to do with a case where any facts are concealed from me——"

"I am concealing no facts."

"Pardon me, you refuse to answer one of the first questions a detective would ask. I was going to say, Mr. Snell, give me a few hours to think it over and come again. Will you call to-morrow morning?"

"I will."

"Very well, till then."

The detective went with his visitor to the door.

Mr. Snell said "good-evening," politely, and started down the street.

A short distance behind him went Patsy.

[15]

CHAPTER II. MR. SNELL IN TROUBLE.

Nick had not taken time to tell Patsy very much about Snell.

"There's something up," he said to his assistant. "I have no idea what it is, but I want you to shadow this man and see what becomes of him."

"Do you think he's a crook?" asked the young man.

"Not yet. He may be. If so, it won't be the first time that a crook has tried to throw me off the track by calling on me. I simply feel that there's something queer in this, and I'd like to find out about it. So I shall ask this man to call again unless he makes up his mind to tell me all the facts."

Snell refused to tell all the facts, and so Patsy slipped out after him.

He had not gone far from the house when the young detective became convinced that another man also was following Snell.

This made his work very difficult, for he had to look[16] sharp against betraying himself not only to Snell, but the other man.

Snell went into a drug store and bought a cigar.

The man who seemed to be following him loafed on the opposite corner.

Patsy turned down a street, and dropped into a doorway, where he made a swift change in his appearance.

He was at Snell's heels again when the man from Wenonah went on.

The other man seemed to have disappeared.

"I was mistaken," thought Patsy, "or the second chap is a better shadow than I am."

For some blocks he kept up his chase, never losing sight of Snell, and seeing nothing more of the other.

Meantime Snell was apparently wandering around aimlessly.

He would stop at a corner and wait a full minute before he made up his mind which way to go.

Often he changed his direction.

In this way he got into a neighborhood which was very quiet in the evening.

Part way down a block he stopped suddenly, stood still for a moment and then went close to a building.

[17]

He was then in such deep shadow that Patsy could not see him.

"Somebody spoke to him," reasoned the detective.

He went cautiously closer, and before he could see anybody he heard the sounds of voices in conversation.

What they said it was impossible to make out.

The detective dared not get close enough than that for fear of attracting the attention of the men.

There seemed to be two of them.

Presently he heard one voice say:

"I won't do it."

One of the men started away.

"It will be the worse for you, then," growled the other.

The first man hastened his steps.

As he came from the shadow, Patsy saw that it was Snell.

The other man was darting after him on tiptoe.

He had one arm drawn back.

"Great Scott!" thought Patsy, "he means murder!"

He gave up trying to conceal his actions then.

Running forward as fast as possible, he shouted:

"Look out!"

Snell turned quickly.

[18]

The other man was close to him, and let his hand fall.

With a great leap Patsy was up to him just in time to catch his arm.

But it was too late to stop the blow entirely.

A slungshot in the man's hand slipped from it and struck Snell a glancing blow on the head.

"Ah!" he cried, and staggered.

Patsy dashed to assist him, and caught hold of him in time to prevent him from falling against an iron fence, which probably would have broken his head.

The would-be murderer was dashing down the street.

Patsy could not be in two places at once.

He wanted to chase the unknown criminal, but his first business was with Snell.

This was not only because Nick had sent him out to shadow Snell, but because the man seemed to be badly injured.

He was groaning and trembling so that he would have fallen if the detective had not held him up.

"Better sit down a minute," Patsy suggested, "and let me see if there's anything serious the matter."

Snell sank to a doorstep, and Patsy made a quick examination of his head.

[19]

"That was a nasty blow," he said, "but I think your skull is sound. Aren't you feeling better?"

"Yes," Snell replied, "I am. I was more frightened than hurt, perhaps. I am greatly obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. Let me help you to your house. Do you live near?"

Snell laughed a little.

"Near!" he repeated, "I should say not."

"Will you have a cab called to take you home?" asked Patsy.

Again Snell laughed.

"It would be too long a journey," he said. "I am a stranger in New York, and I am staying at the Fifth Avenue. That isn't very far away, I believe."

"No, and you can get a car at the next block, if you want to."

"I'd rather walk."

He got up, and Patsy held his arm till they came to the corner.

"I don't suppose your friend will tackle you again," said the detective, then: "but I haven't anything to do, and if you like I'll walk with you to the hotel."

[20]

"You are very kind," Snell responded; "suppose you do. I confess that I am very nervous."

"He had it in for you, I suppose," remarked Patsy.

"Yes."

"Don't you want to speak to this policeman about it?"

An officer was approaching.

"No! no!" exclaimed Snell, hastily; "I have my reasons for keeping the matter quiet. Don't for Heaven's sake, say a word."

"All right. It's no business of mine, but if any fellow had thumped me like that I should want him put where he couldn't try it again."

"I don't think he will try it again; at least, not in New York. I'd rather not talk about it."

"Just as you say, sir. Want to stop in at a drug store and get your head bathed with arnica?"

"That would be a good idea."

They entered the next drug store they came to, where it proved that Snell had suffered nothing more than a painful bruise.

After that they went on to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"I am very much obliged to you," said Snell, halting in the doorway.

[21]

"Don't mention it," Patsy responded.

"Will you come in and have something?"

He looked as if he hoped Patsy would say no, but the detective was glad of any excuse to stick to him.

"Yes," said Patsy, "don't care if I do."

Snell nodded silently, and led the way into the hotel.

As they were passing the desk the clerk spoke to him.

"Mr. Snell," he said, "there's a telegram here for you."

"Excuse me," said Snell to Patsy, going quickly to the desk.

He took the envelope handed to him, and opened it with trembling fingers.

When he had read the message he crumpled the paper in his hand and frowned.

After a moment of thought, he turned to Patsy, saying, "Excuse me" again, and went with him to the barroom.

Snell poured himself a stiff drink of whiskey.

"Once more," he said, raising his glass, "I thank you for coming to my rescue. Honestly, I believe I should be a dead man this minute if you hadn't. Here's your health."

"Thanks," responded Patsy.

"Now," continued Snell, "I don't like to leave a man[22] who has saved my life, in this abrupt way, but I've got to. This telegram calls me out of town, and I must lose no time in getting ready. Won't you leave me your name and address?"

"Why," answered Patsy, "I'll give you my name if you want it, and address, too, but it isn't likely that we shall meet again if you don't live in New York. My name is James Callahan," and he gave an address that the detectives sometimes used.

It was a place where any letters that came to strange names were promptly taken to Nick's house.

Snell made a note of the address.

"My name is Snell," he said, "and I hope we shall meet again, Mr. Callahan. I must say good-by now."

They shook hands and Snell went to the elevator.

"I wish he had dropped that telegram," thought the detective.

He looked at the clock. It was an hour and a half to midnight. If Snell meant to leave town at once he could hardly hope to do so until midnight, for that was the hour at which through trains started from most stations.

[23]

There was time to make a report to Nick and get back again if that should be necessary.

Accordingly Patsy hurried to Nick's house, and told his chief what had happened.

Nick looked very thoughtful.

"I had about decided that the man is crazy," he said. "I sent a telegram to the chief of police at Manchester, asking if he knew of any robbery of jewels, State papers, or anything else of great importance within a month. I also asked if there had been a mysterious disappearance within the same time, and if he knew who George Snell was. Here's his answer, received five minutes ago."

He handed a telegram to Patsy.

It read:

"Nothing doing in crime here. Never heard of George Snell. No man of that name lives here.

"Dinsmore."

"Dinsmore," said Nick, "is the chief at Manchester now. He used to be on the New York force, and I know him well. Now, if there has been a serious crime at Manchester, two thousand miles away, isn't it strange that I should hear of it in New York before it is known there?"

[24]

"It beats me," said Patsy.

"And it looks as if Snell was the chief crook in the matter," added Nick. "But, if he is, I can't see what he's driving at. After getting this telegram I thought he was crazy, that he imagined a crime had been committed, and I didn't mean to have anything more to do with the matter.

"Now I am interested. What you have told me shows that there's something up, something very mysterious.

"I think we'd better keep our eyes on it, Patsy."

"Well?"

"Go back to the hotel and get on Snell's track. Follow him across the continent if necessary, and keep me posted."

"All right, boss."

"Better take a cab. Leave your grip in it until you know what station Snell is going to. Then stick to him like a burr. There may be more attempts against his life."

Patsy was gone in a minute.

When his cab halted at the Fifth Avenue he did not leave it, for he saw Snell coming out.

The man got into a hotel carriage, and told the driver to take him to the Pennsylvania Railroad station.

[25]

This was done, and, of course, Patsy followed.

Snell bought a ticket for Chicago, and Patsy, who stood close behind him at the window, did the same.

They were almost side by side as they went to the ferry-boat, Patsy, of course, so disguised that Snell did not recognize him.

Snell went to the forward end of the boat and stood near the rail.

The detective sat down in the men's cabin.

Hardly had he taken his seat when a man came aboard whom he had seen before.

It was the one whom he had suspected as shadowing Snell from Nick Carter's house.

[26]

CHAPTER III. A GAME OF WATCHING.

Patsy thought that this was the same man who had come so near killing Snell.

He had not been sure of that at the time, for he had not been able to see the would-be murderer's face.

Now it took only a sharp glance to satisfy him, for the man's motions were a little peculiar.

He had a way of bending his head to one side which Patsy had noticed in the man who had shadowed Snell.

As he remembered it the same sideways hang of the head had been the case with the would-be murderer in that instant when he saw him darting after his victim.

"So," thought Patsy, "he's at his game again. Been watching Snell, probably, ever since the attack. There'll be trouble if he finds his man on board."

Nothing could have been plainer than that the man was looking for somebody.

He went part way through the cabin, giving stealthy, side glances at the men on the seats.

[27]

When he came to the doorway that led to the upper deck, he went up.

"He won't find Snell up there, I think," said Patsy to himself, as he got up and went forward.

The detective went as far as the door that opened upon the forward deck.

Looking through it, he saw Snell leaning against the rail.

Nobody else was out there.

At that moment the boat had hardly got beyond the end of the ferry slip.

Patsy sat down where he could look the length of the men's cabin and also glance through the glass in the door at the forward deck.

In less than a minute he saw the stranger coming down the stairs from the upper cabin.

He was still walking slowly, and peering sharply at the passengers.

When he had come as far as the door, he halted and looked through the glass.

The detective could see his face.

He saw the man's brow wrinkle first when he perceived that somebody was standing alone by the rail.

[28]

Then his lips were pressed hard together, and he nodded as if satisfied.

Evidently he had recognized Snell.

For a moment longer he stood there, hesitating, perhaps.

Then he gave a side glance at Patsy, who sat so close that they almost touched each other.

The detective seemed to be deeply engaged in reading a placard hung on the opposite wall.

The man softly opened the door and went out.

Patsy was on his feet instantly.

Looking through the glass, he saw the stranger slink into the darkness by the side wall of the boat, there being a space thus shut in between the cabin door and the open deck where Snell stood looking at the water.

"What a chance," thought Patsy, "to sneak up and pitch his man overboard!"

The stranger stood motionless a moment.

Then he edged forward.

At that Patsy quietly opened the door and stepped out.

The man did not hear him.

His attention was too much taken with what he was going to do.

[29]

Snell was motionless.

The boat was about in midstream.

Patsy's muscles quivered as the stranger glided swiftly up and placed his hand on Snell's shoulder.

Snell whirled around, with a gasp of surprise and alarm.

He put up his hands to push the man away, and tried to back from the rail.

The stranger kept his hand firmly on Snell's shoulder.

For a second or two the men jostled each other, but it could not be said that they were struggling.

The stranger seemed merely trying to hold Snell still.

Patsy heard him say:

"Keep quiet! I am not going to hurt you!"

Evidently Snell was somewhat relieved at this, but he was still frightened.

"I've a good mind to have you arrested," he said.

The other laughed.

"You'll think better of that as soon as you see a policeman," he retorted.

"You've tried to kill me once to-night," said Snell.

"Well, let that pass. I didn't succeed, and now that you're starting West I shan't try again."

[30]

"What do you want of me now?"

"I want to talk with you."

"On the same subject?"

"The same."

Snell gave a hasty glance at the river.

"Think of jumping in?" sneered the stranger.

"No," replied Snell, with a shudder.

Then he looked back toward the cabin, and saw Patsy.

Seeing that he was perceived, the detective walked easily forward and stood looking at the lights of Jersey City.

"This is no place," said Snell, in a low tone.

"Of course not. I'll go on the train with you."

Snell started uncomfortably.

"I presume," the other went on, with a harsh chuckle, "that you engaged a stateroom on the sleeper, and thought that you would lock yourself in and so be safe for the night. Fortunately, there's room for two in a stateroom."

At this, Snell said nothing, but went back to the cabin.

The other followed, and both went inside.

"Well!" thought Patsy, "this is a puzzler, and no mistake.[31] Are they both crooks? and have they had a falling out?"

"One is certainly a would-be murderer, and Snell is plainly in great fear of him.

"I should think he would be.

"I wonder if they will actually occupy the same room on the train?"

They did.

Snell, as the stranger had said, had engaged a stateroom, and both went into it immediately on going aboard the train.

Patsy secured a berth in the same car, and, as he turned in he wondered whether one man or two would come out of that stateroom in the morning.

It seemed to him most likely that the stranger would make an attempt to murder Snell during the night.

"If it were my business to take care of Snell," thought the detective, "I'd invent some way to do it; but it isn't, and I'll just wait and see what happens."

With that thought he went to sleep.

In the morning he touched the button beside his berth before getting up.

When the porter came he asked:

[32]

"Is there a dining car on the train, Charley?"

"Yessah," replied the porter. "Breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes, sah."

"All right; then I'll get up."

"Sumfin else yo' want, sah?"

"Yes. Put your head in here, Charley?"

The porter put his head in between the curtains.

"Have the gentlemen in the stateroom turned out yet?" asked Patsy.

"No, sah; ain't seed nuffin' of 'em."

"Were they quiet all night?"

"Yassah. Leastwise, I didn't hear nuffin."

"All right."

"Friends of yours, sah?"

"Not exactly, but I'm curious about them, that's all. You needn't say I asked any questions."

"No, sah—thank yo' berry much, sah. Won't say a word."

The porter had received handsome pay for his silence, and Patsy knew he could be trusted.

He dressed and went forward to the dining car.

As he passed Snell's stateroom, he listened for the sound of voices, but none came.

[33]

The detective wondered if there was one man in that room who couldn't speak.

Having plenty of time to kill, he spent an hour at the breakfast table.

Before he was ready to go, in came Snell and the stranger.

They sat at the same table and appeared to be in good spirits—at least, the stranger was.

Snell looked rather haggard, but he talked with his companion, and without any apparent fear of him.

"Strange!" thought Patsy; "but I'm glad my man is still alive. I want to find out what it all means."

He went to the smoker, and after he had been there half an hour or so, Snell and the stranger came in also.

They did not talk much as they smoked their cigars, but no one would have guessed that one had tried to kill the other less than twelve hours before.

So it was all the way to Chicago.

The two men were together all the time, and there was hardly a minute that the detective did not have them in view.

It was early morning when the train arrived in Chicago.

Snell and his companion got into a cab, and Patsy[34] heard them tell the driver to go to the Northwestern station.

Patsy arrived at the station at the same moment they did.

They breakfasted in the station restaurant, and after a time they went to the ticket window.

Snell bought a ticket for Helena, Montana.

The stranger did not buy any.

This also seemed somewhat strange, and the detective was a little disappointed.

He had hoped to keep them together.

But he bought a ticket for Helena, and in due time was again on the same train with Snell.

The stranger stayed at the station until the train left, and Patsy saw him on the platform as it rolled out.

Nothing of importance happened on the rest of the way to Helena.

Once the detective tried to scrape acquaintance with Snell, but the latter answered him in a surly way, and made it plain that he did not care to talk to anybody.

So Patsy gave it up for fear of making him suspicious.

Meantime, he had telegraphed Nick as to where he was going.

[35]

When they arrived in Helena, Snell did not go to a first-rate hotel, as he had done in New York, but walked about the streets, as if looking for some place that he had been sent to.

It was pretty clear that he was a stranger in the city.

At last he turned into a small building, on which there was a rough sign, with these words:

BRONCO BILL'S HOUSE.

The place was hardly larger than an ordinary saloon, and liquor selling certainly was its principal business.

Patsy went in a moment after Snell.

He found himself in a cheap barroom, where a few men were loafing.

Snell was at one end of the bar, talking in a low voice with one who seemed to be the proprietor.

The detective took his place at the other end of the bar and called for a drink.

A moment later, Snell and the proprietor went out by a door at the back, and he heard their steps going up a flight of stairs.

They were gone but a minute, and when they returned, Snell was saying:

[36]

"It may be only two or three days, you know, and I can get along all right. I'll pay for the room for a week, anyway."

With this, he took bills from his pocket, and gave money to the proprietor, who responded:

"O.K., then the place is yours."

Then the landlord invited Snell to have a drink, and Snell accepted the invitation.

"Well," thought Patsy, "I shall have to find another place to stay. Bronco Bill evidently isn't used to having guests in real hotel fashion, and two at a time would make him and everybody else suspicious.

"I couldn't put up any sort of a yarn that would satisfy them. So I'll get a room somewhere else, and then drop in here when I feel like it.

"That will be safe enough, for it looks sure that Snell is bound to stay for a while."

As the detective left the saloon, he saw a sign in the window of a house opposite:

ROOMS TO LET.

"That will do," he decided, "but not just yet."

He was fearful that Snell might be watching him, for^[37] he could not tell how suspicious that strange man might be.

So he walked around town a little while, made a complete change in his disguise, and finally returned to the lodging house opposite Bronco Bill's.

There he hired a room that had a window opening on the street, at which he sat for some time, with his face hidden behind the curtain.

He saw enough to know that Snell was still at the "hotel," and he was satisfied.

Late in the afternoon, Snell went out.

The detective followed, of course.

At first Snell did not seem to have any errand. He seemed to be walking for exercise.

But at last he stopped and looked in at a store window.

Rifles, revolvers, and all sorts of things that hunters need were displayed there.

Snell went in, and Patsy, looking in at the window, saw him buy a revolver.

With this in his pocket, the strange man returned to Bronco Bill's and disappeared within.

That evening the detective loafed away most of the time in Bronco Bill's barroom, but he did not see Snell.

[38]

There was the ordinary crowd of idle workingmen, and a few roughs who evidently came in from ranches at a distance, but there was no disorder; none of the men seemed to be crooks, and nothing happened to throw any light on Snell's business in Helena.

It was much the same the next day and evening.

Snell took a long walk, but spoke to no one on the way, and when he returned he apparently shut himself in the room he had hired.

He came into the barroom late during the evening, but it was only to have a drink, and go upstairs again at once.

"Who's the stranger, Bill?" asked one of the loafers.

"How should I know?" was the surly response. "A gent comes to my house an' takes a room an' pays for it like a gent. Why should I ask him if his father went to church reg'lar, or if he intends to start a faro bank?"

"Do you think he does mean to start a faro bank, Bill?"

"Aw, come off!" returned Bill, scornfully. "Can't you take a hint? I don't know the gent's business, and, if I did, I shouldn't shoot off my mouth about it."

Next day, Snell took several walks, but they were short ones. He always returned quickly to Bill's, and once[39] Patsy heard him ask the landlord if anybody had inquired for him.

Nobody had, but it was clear that Snell's business, whatever it was, was coming to a head.

In the evening quite a number of men galloped through the streets on horseback.

They shouted and sang songs and made a good deal of a racket at every place they visited.

By the time they arrived at Bronco Bill's they were well loaded and noisier than ever.

"Paint the place red," yelled half a dozen of them, as they came stamping in.

Patsy was standing at the farther end of the bar talking with Bill, with whom he had picked up acquaintance.

Snell was seated at a table in the corner nearest the door.

"Everybody have a drink!" shouted the leader of the party, looking around the room.

All except Snell got up and went to the bar.

"Come on, stranger," yelled the leader.

Snell, seeing that he was spoken to, got up slowly and started toward the bar.

[40]

His face was pale, and it was evident to Patsy that he wished he were not there.

When he was halfway to the bar he turned suddenly and made for the stairway door.

He passed through quickly, closed the door behind him, and all in the room heard the click of the lock as he turned the key.

"Well, I'll be durned!" exclaimed the leader.

As he spoke he drew a revolver from his belt, and, with the quick motions of a Westerner, pointed it toward the door.

But he was not so quick as Patsy, who darted forward and knocked his arm up.

The revolver went off, but the bullet, instead of crashing through the door and thus endangering Snell's life, flew into the ceiling.

"Now then, gents," began Bronco Bill, who didn't want a disturbance in his place.

The leader was too mad to be stopped by talk.

Turning fiercely upon Patsy, he demanded:

"What in thunder do you mean, tenderfoot?"

"I was afraid you might hurt somebody," responded the detective, quietly; "then you'd be sorry."

[41]

"Sorry! me sorry!" roared the ruffian; "reckon you don't know who you're talking to. I'm Serpent Sam, of the Dead Hills, I am, and no man tells me what I shall or shan't do. I'll make you dance for your impudence, you measly tenderfoot!"

[42]

CHAPTER IV. PATSY'S DANCING LESSON.

Serpent Sam, as he called himself, backed into the middle of the room as he spoke.

The other men in the crowd yelled with joy, and got together at the other end of the bar from Patsy, most of them.

A few stood almost behind their leader.

They were grinning at the fun they thought they were going to have with the tenderfoot.

Patsy thrust his hands in the side pockets of his coat, and watched, as if with curiosity.

He knew exactly what would happen, for he had met wild men from the Western hills before.

So, when Serpent Sam blazed at his feet, he did not stir.

The first bullet tore a hole in the floor, just in front of his right toe.

"Dance, you onery cuss! dance!" yelled Serpent Sam.

"I don't know how," replied Patsy.

“Jump then, you idiot! jump into the air, durn ye! I’ll teach ye!”

[43]

As he spoke, Serpent Sam fired again.

This time the bullet struck so close to the detective’s foot that it jarred it.

But no harm was done, and Patsy never stirred.

He knew that the first shots would be aimed so as to scare him—not to hit.

After that, Serpent Sam might be angered into firing to kill.

“For Heaven’s sake, stranger,” called Bronco Bill, “don’t be a fool. Dance for the gentleman. It won’t last long, and nobody will be hurt. Jump and let him have his fun.”

Patsy himself saw by the savage glare in Serpent Sam’s eyes that it would be jump or get hit at the next shot.

Quick as a flash, therefore, without moving from his place, and before Serpent Sam could cock his revolver again, Patsy drew one of his own barkers and fired.

Nobody in the room knew what he was about till they heard the bang! and saw the puff of smoke that rolled away from in front of the detective.

“I don’t dance for anybody,” said Patsy, quietly.

“Wow! ouch! damn!” howled Serpent Sam, as his revolver flew from his hand.

[44]

Patsy’s bullet had struck it on the butt.

It not only caused Serpent Sam to drop the weapon, but it numbed his fingers.

And the bullet did another thing.

Glancing from the place where it struck Sam’s revolver, it flew across the room and hit another man on the cartridge belt, doing no harm, but startling that man fearfully.

For that matter, all the men were startled.

Some of them ran behind the bar and crouched down.

Half a dozen of those who had been in the place when the horsemen came ran for the outside door.

Serpent Sam, cursing with rage and pain, reached for his other revolver.

He could bend his numbed fingers just enough to draw it from his belt, but he could not cock it.

While he was trying to do so, it dropped to the floor.

The fingers of his right hand would not hold it.

Patsy, knowing that he was disabled, was paying no attention to him.

He was sweeping his revolver carelessly around the room.

[45]

"It might go off," he remarked. "It's got a hair trigger. Look out!"

At that his weapon did go off.

One of the men was just getting the drop on him.

Patsy's shot did for him just what had been done for Serpent Sam.

It knocked the gun out of his hand and caused him to leap back, cursing with rage.

"If you gents enjoy dancing," said Patsy, coolly, "just recollect that I'm floor manager here. I'll tell you when it's your turn—yours, for instance."

With this he let drive at the feet of a man near the edge of the crowd.

The bullets splintered the floor at the man's toe.

He jumped for fear, and the detective laughed.

"It's more fun than I thought," he cried; "we'll try it again."

He made as if he would empty all his cartridges at the men's feet, but he had done enough.

All except Serpent Sam were making a wild scramble to get behind the bar, out of doors, underneath tables—any place, so as to be out of range.

Sam had cooled down very suddenly.

[46]

"Hold on, stranger," he called; "we uns know when we're licked. You've done us brown, an' ef thar's anything in the house you want, call for it."

Patsy understood the man.

His tone and manner showed that he meant what he said.

He was rubbing his sore hand and kicking his revolvers so that they would lie where he could pick them up.

Of all the men there Sam was the only one who hadn't shown fear.

The detective immediately pocketed his weapon.

"All right, pard," he said, good-naturedly; "there is one thing in the house I want."

"Name it."

"I want every man jack of you to wet up. The drinks are on me, gents. Step lively."

For an instant nobody stirred.

They looked at him as if they could not believe their ears.

Those who had crouched behind the bar gradually began to poke their heads above it.

Naturally, Serpent Sam was the first to move.

[47]

Leaving his revolvers where they were on the floor, he strode to Patsy with his hand outstretched.

"Put it there, pard," he cried; "you're a white man an' no mistake. I see I don't need to 'pologize fer trying to hev some fun with yer."

"Not at all," replied Patsy, shaking the man's hand.

Sam winced, for the detective's grip hurt his sore fingers.

"Excuse me," said Patsy, letting go; "I didn't think."

Then both laughed, and at that sound the other men came crowding up.

"Whar'd you learn to shoot?" asked one.

"Say, are you a walking Gatling gun?" inquired another.

Patsy smiled at them.

"I never learned to shoot," he said. "I was born with a gun in my hand, and I used to practice at the flies on the wall before I could walk."

Everybody laughed at this.

Bronco Bill drew a long breath.

The shooting scrap had turned out pleasantly, with nobody the worse for it, and everybody thirsty.

Glasses rattled on the bar, and bottles passed.

[48]

"Here's how, pard," said Sam.

He drained his glass at one gulp, and set it down.

"But say," he added, "you'd oughter hev let us make the other cuss dance. Friend of yourn?"

"No. I saw that he was scared half to death, and I was afraid he might have a fit."

"Rot! he'd 'a' got over it. Jine us now, won't ye, pard, and rout him out?"

"We'll let you do the shootin'," said another, eagerly.

"Now, gents," began Bronco Bill, fearful that the rough crowd would break loose again.

He didn't know Patsy.

"Rout him out?" echoed the detective; "why! he's a mile from here by this time."

"Go on!"

"That's what he's doing. Bet your life on it."

"We might break down the door and see," somebody suggested.

Several of them began to move toward the door.

"Wait a minute," called Patsy.

He was smiling, and they stopped to hear what he had to say.

"I'd rather you wouldn't bother the fellow," he went[49] on; "I tell you that straight, but if you're dead anxious to have some fun with him and want me to join, I'll take the chance of a toss-up. What do you say?"

"It's a go!" cried Sam, taking a coin from his pocket. "Heads or tails, pard?"

"Is it a cent?" asked the detective.

"No—a dime."

"Just as good. Throw it up to the ceiling, and if it comes down what you call yourself, I'll join you."

Serpent Sam tossed up the coin.

"Tails!" he called.

It struck the ceiling with a ting, and began to fall.

The detective's revolver flashed, to the great surprise of all, for they were watching the coin.

Crack! bang! went the trusty barker twice in rapid order.

There was another ting at the further side of the room.

Sam went over there, and, after hunting a bit, picked up the dime.

He came back to the bar with it, his face fairly blue with wonder.

"Durned ef the stranger hain't won," he said; "the dime hain't got either a head or a tail."

[50]

He laid the coin on the bar, and everybody crowded around to look at it.

Patsy's first bullet had struck it on one side and his second on the other, for the coin was spinning in the air and luck was with him to the extent that both bullets did not hit the same side.

"Wal! ef that ain't the durnedest shootin' ever I seen!" said one of the men.

All agreed with him.

"It means," said Sam, gravely, "that we let the white-livered cuss upstairs alone. But you must come with us to the next joint, pardner."

"All right," replied Patsy, "lead on."

"An' you'll hev to make some galoot dance soon as we find one of the right kind."

"Go ahead. I'm agreed."

The whole mob charged for the door.

On the sidewalk they paused to decide which way to go.

The street was not well lighted, and, while they were talking, Patsy slipped a beard to his face.

"We'll go to Danny Dineen's next," said Serpent Sam. "Come on, pard——"

He looked around.

[51]

"Where's the sharpshooter?" he asked.

Patsy pointed down the street.

"He's just scooted that way," he said, in a disguised tone.

"Durned ef I don't believe he's tryin' to shake us!" cried Serpent Sam; "come on, boys, let's catch up with him."

Off they went, yelling like mad, some jumping to their horses, others on foot.

When they had all disappeared around a corner, Patsy took off his beard and went back into Bronco Bill's.

Bill and his bartender were alone in the place.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bill, "where'd you come from?"

"I thought I'd say good-night," responded Patsy, laughing.

"Didn't you go with that crowd?"

"You see."

"Wal, I don't see how you done it, but you done me and my house a good turn, pardner. Gee! I thought they'd shoot the whole outfit to pieces. Have something?"

"No, thank you. When they find that I've given them the shake, they may come back here, and if they find me,[52] it won't be so easy to get rid of them again. Tell 'em you don't know where I went."

"All right, no more I do. Call again?"

"To-morrow."

The detective then went out and crossed the street to his lodging.

He sat at his window for more than an hour.

He saw the horsemen return after a time, heard them singing and shouting in Bronco Bill's, but he heard no more shooting, and he saw no more of Snell that night.

[53]

CHAPTER V. CAUGHT IN THE HILLS.

Next morning, in a fresh disguise, Patsy went over to Bronco Bill's and saw Snell eating breakfast.

The detective felt relieved.

He had feared that the man might have been so frightened by the drunken horseman as to light out.

Patsy had now been studying the man for several days.

"I can't make him out," he said to himself, "but I don't believe he's a regular crook."

The detective was inclined to think that Snell had been up to crooked work, but that he was new to it.

He went back to his lodging almost at once, and watched.

Snell came to the door of Bronco Bill's and stood there a moment, looking up and down the street.

"He wants to walk for exercise," thought the waiting detective, "but he doesn't dare to get far away, for he's expecting somebody. I won't bother to follow him."

So Snell that morning took his walks alone.

They were not long ones.

[54]

He was always back at Bronco Bill's within ten minutes from the time he started.

At length he went in and stayed there.

Patsy went across and looked in long enough to see that Snell had found an old book somewhere, and was reading it in the barroom.

It was almost noon when the man Snell had been expecting came.

The detective knew it before Snell did.

Watching from his window, he saw a man come rapidly up from the direction of the railroad.

He walked as if he knew where he was going, and he turned in at Bronco Bill's.

It was the stranger who had come so near to murdering Snell a short time before in New York City.

"Now we're getting down to business!" thought Patsy, with great satisfaction.

It had been a long wait, and he was a little tired of it.

Every day he had sent a telegram to Nick, saying, simply: "No change," or "Nothing doing."

Meantime, he had received no word from his chief.

So he knew that there was nothing for him to do but stay there and watch.

[55]

Of course, he crossed over to the saloon soon after the stranger went in.

He was disguised so that neither knew him, and Bronco Bill did not suspect that the man who asked for a cigar was the one who had done the wonderful shooting the night before.

Snell and the stranger were eating dinner at a table in the corner.

They did no talking.

Patsy returned to his watching place.

After dinner, the stranger went away alone.

The detective would have liked to follow, but it was his business to spot Snell.

So he stayed where he was.

Some three hours passed, and then the stranger returned.

He went into the saloon, and almost immediately came out again with Snell.

They walked away rapidly.

Patsy was after them.

Thinking that there might be some such excursion as this, the detective had bought a horse.

The animal was stabled a few doors from his lodging[56] house, where he could be got quickly, and he was kept saddled all the time.

But there was no use for him on this trip.

The men walked through the city, and they acted as if they were in a hurry, but they walked, and Patsy thought it better to follow them in the same way.

As long as they were in busy streets he had no difficulty in keeping close to them.

When they came to a long street, where the houses were scattered, he fell a little further behind.

And at last they were in the open country, with no house at all in sight ahead.

Then the detective had to be very cautious.

He decided to get into a field alongside the road, where he could dodge behind bushes.

It was well he took this precaution when he did.

He had hardly left the road when both men wheeled about suddenly.

They stood for a full minute, looking back toward the city.

There could be no doubt that some sudden fear of pursuit had made them turn.

Patsy stooped behind a low bush and waited.

[57]

At last they went on, but Snell turned frequently, and Patsy was kept on the dodge all the time.

This continued for two miles or more.

By then the road had brought them to hilly land, and the detective was thinking that his pursuit would be easier, when the two turned aside and began to climb a steep hill.

It was covered with trees, and there was no path.

Dead wood was on the ground everywhere.

A man's footsteps could be heard a long way, no matter how carefully he proceeded.

Therefore, it was not possible any longer to keep the men in sight.

Patsy took the chance of cutting across ahead of where the men seemed to be aiming for.

In this way he thought he might come to the top of the hill before they did.

Perhaps he succeeded. He could not tell, for, when he got to the hilltop, they were not to be seen.

He waited a bit, and listened for a sound of their voices, or footsteps, but heard nothing.

The hill dipped steeply on the other side, and there were many hills beyond.

[58]

It was a very wild place, only partly wooded, and there seemed to be deep gullies in every direction.

"They didn't come out here for their health," thought Patsy. "It was to meet somebody.

"Probably that somebody is waiting in one of these gullies.

"Which one?

"It's almost as good a place for hiding as a big city is."

After some little thought he went part way down the hill, then along the side until he came near the edge of a ravine.

While he was cautiously approaching the edge, he heard a laugh somewhere below him.

In the ravine, undoubtedly.

Then that was where the men had gone.

Patsy saw a rock a short distance away, from behind which he thought he might be able to look down into the ravine without being seen.

A few cautious steps and he was beside it.

Leaning far over it, he found that he had chosen the spot luckily; for a little way below him he saw a group of men, most of them roughly dressed.

Among them were Snell and his strange companion.

[59]

They were talking earnestly.

At that moment, Snell's companion was speaking, and the others were listening.

His words came faintly to Patsy's ears.

"I tell you," he said, "we're ready to pay the price, but you've got to deliver the goods. There's nothing unfair in that. We've come out here to tell you so, but you can't deliver the goods here, can you?"

"That'll be all right," said one of the rough men.

"Oh! will it? How do we know?" demanded Snell's companion. "We don't propose to put our feet into a trap."

At this some of the men laughed hoarsely.

"Supposin'," suggested one of them, "we don't let you get out of this gulch alive?"

Snell could be seen to start uncomfortably.

His companion was unmoved.

"In that case," he retorted, "you'd leave a couple of worthless stiffes here for the crows to pick. That's all."

"Do you mean that you haven't brought the stuff with you?"

"That's it, exactly."

"Then what the dev——"

[60]

"Why!" interrupted Snell's companion, "we're here to let you know that we're acting on the square. Prove that you're on the square, too, and we can do business."

The men looked at each other.

"Don't like it," grumbled one.

"Well," said another, the youngest in the party, "I think they've got the best of the argument. Here they are, just as they agreed to be. They haven't gone to any detectives, and it's our business now to hand over the goods——"

Patsy was greatly interested, wondering whether this young man would persuade the gang to his way of thinking, when, without the least warning, strong hands were laid upon him.

He turned like a flash at the first touch.

His hand raised the revolver that he had been clutching from the moment when he lay down behind the rock.

But there was no use in firing it.

The bullet wouldn't have hit anybody.

His assailants had every advantage of him.

He had been caught by both feet and yanked backward.

Others had grabbed him by the arms.

[61]

Still another dropped a noose over his head and pulled it tight.

A little more strain on that rope, and the detective would have been choked to death.

In much less time than it takes to tell it, they had him with his hands securely bound behind his back.

The detective was helpless.

And up to this moment, nobody had said a word, and no sound of the capture had reached the ears of the men in the ravine.

[62]

CHAPTER VI. PATSY IS FORCED TO SLEEP.

When they had him bound to their satisfaction, Patsy's captors laid him on his back and looked him over.

He saw, too late, how it had happened.

Close to the rock was a thick bunch of bushes.

His judgment had been perfect, for it had taken him to the exact spot where there was an easy way down to the gulch.

It was the way these men always took to get there.

But, unluckily for the detective, they had posted sentinels at that spot.

His captors had been within reach of him from the moment he arrived.

Why they had not attacked him at once could only be guessed.

Probably they were so surprised that they didn't know what to do at first.

And maybe they thought he might be a prospector, or anybody but a detective, who would go away as soon as he had taken a look.

[63]

"Wal, by gosh!" muttered one who seemed to be the leader of the sentinels, "I reckon this'll make some difference with what they're jawin' about down thar."

Patsy tried a bluff.

"I'd like to know what you mean," he began, indignantly. "I haven't done anything to you —"

"And we won't do a thing to you," interrupted the leader, harshly—"oh, no! we won't tech ye! Pick him up, boys."

Two of the men took Patsy on their shoulders, and they went stumbling down the side of the gulch.

Snell and the others looked up in the greatest surprise when they heard the sentinels coming.

All the men got to their feet, for some had been sitting, and guns were shown freely.

"What ye got thar?" demanded the chief of the gang.

"A spy," replied the leader of the sentinels.

"Find him up thar?"

"Yes—behind that rock. He crep' up jest as ef he knowed thar was suthin' to see below."

"The skunk!"

"Prob'ly," went on the sentinel, "he was put onto the[64] thing by them galoots," and he pointed to Snell and his companion.

"That's it!" roared more than one, angrily.

"So this is what ye call bein' on the square, is it?" exclaimed the chief, turning to Snell's companion, fiercely. "Ye make a deal to meet us here alone to talk business, and give the tip to a pryin' detective, do ye? An' do ye think ye'll git outen it with hull skins? Wal, I don't think!"

The ruffians were growling angrily and watching their leader.

It needed only his word to make every one of them empty their revolvers into Snell and his companion.

Snell was horribly frightened.

"I don't know anything about this," he stammered; "I give you my word of honor——"

"Rats!" interrupted the leader, scornfully, "what's your word of honor worth?"

"Plug 'em full of holes!" cried another.

The men raised their weapons, and it did look as if there would be a double murder on the spot.

"He's right!" said Patsy, quietly.

The leader turned swiftly toward him.

[65]

"What's that ye say?" he demanded; "who's right?"

"The man who just spoke."

"Him?" pointing to Snell.

"Yes. I don't know who he is."

"And I s'pose ye don't know him, nuther," pointing to Snell's companion.

"I certainly don't."

It was plain enough that nobody believed the detective, but he breathed easier.

His interruption had gained time.

The men were not so likely now to shoot in a hurry and ask questions afterward.

Patsy had been set on the ground with his back to a rock.

Snell's companion was looking at him sharply.

It was to him the leader spoke next.

"I s'pose, Jim Leonard," he said, "thet you've got a word of honor to stack up thet ye never seen this man afore, eh?"

"He's a stranger to me," replied Leonard. "I never saw him before, and we took all the pains we could to keep from being followed. Snell's been in town three days[66] without seeing anybody who was on his track. Why should anybody be on his track, anyway?"

"Why!" roared the leader, "to get us behind the bars, you fool! Ain't that reason enough?"

He turned again to the detective.

"P'r'haps you'll tell us how ye come here?" he said.

"Certainly," replied Patsy. "I saw these two men in town. It was plain enough that they had good business of some kind on. I took 'em for prospectors and thought they'd struck a good thing somewhere. It wasn't a straight thing to do, but I followed 'em to see what they'd got."

This was a story that it was very easy for the rough Westerners to believe.

Evidently they were struck by it, for they looked at each other doubtfully.

All except the leader.

He turned his eyes from Snell to his companion, and then to Patsy, and remarked, calmly:

"You lie—every one of ye."

Then he addressed his men.

"We won't go off at half-cock," said he; "these geezers[67] hev done us dirt, but mebber we'd better talk it over afore we do anything."

He spoke then to the sentinels.

"Stay here and use yer guns, ef any of 'em tries to scoot. We'll go further down the gulch and chin about it."

The sentinels nodded and the leader and the rest of his men went down the ravine until they were out of sight.

Now and then their voices could be heard as they argued, but what they said could not be told.

Once they sent a couple of men up to take Snell's companion, Jim Leonard, down to talk with him.

They sent him back after half an hour, and continued their discussion until the sun was setting.

Then they all came slowly back to the spot where Patsy lay.

The young man who had been speaking when Patsy was captured, was talking with the leader.

"I'm sure it's the best way," he was saying.

"Wal, Harry," returned the leader, "you've got a sound nut on yer shoulders, an' you can talk better'n most of us, but I dunno. Howsomever, we'll try it. As you say, the main thing is to get the stuff."

[68]

"We certainly can't get the ransom, if we don't give 'em a chance to pay it," said Harry.

The leader nodded.

"After dark," he said, shortly.

It grew dark early in that deep ravine, but it was not till fully two hours had passed that the gang began to move.

In the meantime, they smoked and talked in low voices, or lay on the ground and snoozed.

At last the leader stood up and said:

"Bring 'em along."

Patsy had tried at first to see if he could free his hands. In the darkness he tried again, but it was of no use.

These fellows had known how to tie a knot, and they kept the noose around his neck, with a warning that they wouldn't mind leaving him there for crows to pick.

That was only too plain. They cared little for the detective. It was Snell and Leonard that they were interested in.

The gang returned to Helena in pairs mostly.

Two went beside Patsy, and one each with Snell and Leonard.

The rest trailed along—some in advance, some behind.

[69]

When they came to the edge of the town they scattered over different streets.

No one meeting any of them would have suspected that a score of men were coming into the city together.

Patsy's guides took the noose from around his neck then, and cautioned him that if he tried to break away they would shoot.

The caution wasn't necessary, for the detective had no idea of doing anything except stick to the gang until he had found out all about the business that had brought them together.

They came at length to a house in a quiet street.

Patsy's guides took him in there, opening the front door with a key, and led him to the kitchen.

The house was dark when they arrived, but it had gas, and this was lit.

Curtains were pulled down at the windows, and they waited in silence.

Others came in from time to time.

The last to arrive were Snell and Leonard, and the men who had been walking with them.

It was understood that they had been to Bronco Bill's, where Snell had hidden the "stuff."

[70]

When all were there, the leader said:

"Now, ef ye're ready fer business at last, let's git at it without any palaver."

"We're ready," responded Leonard.

"Prove it."

Leonard glanced at Snell, who slowly drew a wallet from his pocket, and took from it a number of one-thousand-dollar bills.

The eyes of the men in the gang flashed greedily.

"I'd ruther 'twas gold," muttered the leader, "but it looks straight enough."

"It's perfectly straight," said Snell, closing the wallet.

"Wal, but what are ye doin' now? You brought that stuff to hand over, didn't ye?"

"Certainly; when you deliver the goods."

It was Snell who responded, and his voice was calm now.

He seemed to feel that his victory was won.

Leonard, on the other hand, looked worried.

"Guess that's right enough, then," remarked the leader. "We've got the goods, an' we'll show that we can meet ye. Harry—"

He interrupted himself suddenly, with a glance at Patsy.

[71]

"Twon't do," he added, in a decided tone; "not jest yet. We don't want no witnesses to this perceedin'. I don't perless to say that this geezer's a detective, but dead men tell no tales. I wisht we'd bored holes in him out thar in the hills."

"Better not do any shootin' here," suggested one of the men.

"Right; but thar's a good way, jest as quiet an' peaceable as a graveyard. Take him into the basement."

"What!" exclaimed Harry, "you wouldn't do that?"

"Wouldn't I? In course I would," replied the leader, harshly. "You go an' git the goods, Harry, an' mind yer own business. Two or three of ye gag that geezer and tie his feet. Then take him to the basement. Hear?"

They heard.

Patsy saw young Harry's face pale as he went slowly from the room.

Others proceeded promptly to obey the leader.

"I wonder if my time has really come at last?" thought the detective.

He could make no resistance, and tried none.

It was useless, too, to bluff the men or try to plead with them.

[72]

They stuffed his own handkerchief in his mouth and tied a cord tightly around his ankles.

Then they lifted him, while the rest of the gang and Snell and Leonard looked silently on, and took him from the room by a door that opened upon a stairway.

Down the stairs and along a short passage they carried the helpless detective, and at last laid him upon a cemented floor.

Not a ray of light was there.

The men stumbled in the darkness as if they were not familiar with the place.

"Say yer pra'rs, tenderfoot," remarked one of them, with a harsh chuckle, as he started away.

"He's got nerve," said another, noticing that no sound came from their victim's throat.

"More likely he's scared silly," returned the first.

One of them was feeling along the wall.

"Hurry up," said the other.

"It's all right, I've found it," was the reply from a corner.

"Full on," said the first.

"So 'tis."

"Come on, then."

[73]

They went out.

Patsy heard the door close behind them.

Then their steps stumbling along the passage and upstairs.

At last he heard the opening and shutting of a door at the top.

The sound of the leader's rough voice came to him, evidently asking a question.

"Is the trick done?" or something of that sort.

He could imagine the men's short answer.

Then probably the gang got down to business again with Snell and Leonard.

It would do no good to try to tell what Patsy's thoughts and feelings were.

He had been unlucky enough before to get captured by men who meant to kill him.

On other occasions he had worked himself free, or Nick or Chick had come just in time to rescue him.

Nick was thousands of miles away.

Chick wasn't on this strange case at all.

The cords upon his hands and legs were very firm.

And yet the young man felt no despair.

[74]

"Somehow!" he thought, and he went to rubbing his back as well as he could against the hard cellar floor.

He thought he might wear the cords through in time.

In time—good Heaven! would there be time?

What was that he smelled?

An enemy more fearful than the bullets of assassins.

He understood now what he had been doing when the man had been feeling along the way.

The villain had been hunting for the gas jet.

He had found it and turned the cock "full on!"

The close cellar was filling rapidly with the poisonous stuff.

Patsy's throat tickled.

He coughed and partly dislodged his gag, but it was only to take more gas into his lungs.

With all his might he wriggled so that the cord might be cut or worn enough to break.

He could make no effect on it, so far as he could tell.

Every strain simply made the cord cut deeper into his flesh, and he was as helpless as before.

The poisoned atmosphere choked him.

He felt his head whirling.

The whole house seemed to be going around and around.

[75]

In the confusion of his mind he seemed to hear voices in a loud discussion.

They ceased—there was no sound—except a fearful roaring as if he lay at the bottom of Niagara Falls.

And then, a dreadful feeling that he might as well give it all up.

A man had to die some time.

One time was probably as good as another.

He had done what Nick told him to as well as he knew how.

He hoped that Nick and Chick would somehow get at this gang.

Patsy was very tired and sleepy.

The whirling and the noises ceased. His brain was at rest.

[76]

CHAPTER VII. THE MYSTERY OF GEORGE SNELL.

Nick Carter had said good-by to his bright young assistant at about half-past ten of an evening.

He gave little further thought to the case that night, for he knew that it was in good hands.

"I shall probably hear from the boy in the morning," he thought, as he went to bed.

No message came from Patsy in the morning, because the young man had been too much occupied in watching Snell and Leonard in the Jersey City station to send one.

But a message came from Dinsmore that gave Nick a bit of a surprise.

It was as follows:

"Important robbery just reported. Don't know if it is the one you referred to last night, but it is very important and mysterious. Wish you would come on."

Nick took the next train for the West.

Dinsmore's telegram was sent from Manchester, the capital of Wenonah, and there, of course, the detective went.

[77]

The journey was without incident, and was made as rapidly as possible, considering that there are no through trains between New York and the distant Canadian town.

Dinsmore met him at the station.

"I've got a telegram for you," he said, as soon as they had shaken hands. "It was forwarded from New York, after you left."

Nick opened and read it. It was the one Patsy had sent from Chicago to say that he was going with Snell to Helena.

"All right," said Nick. "Now, what's the case?"

"It was reported by the lieutenant governor," replied Dinsmore, "Gov. Bradley being away. His absence makes the thing very peculiar, and I don't understand it at all. How you should know in New York that a robbery had taken place in Manchester before anybody here suspected such a thing, is quite a mystery."

"I believe," responded Nick, "that I begin to see how that happened. But go on. Some State papers have disappeared."

"That's it, and that's what makes me suppose it the same affair that you seemed to have in mind when you telegraphed from New York."

[78]

"Anything else?"

"Do you mean anything else stolen? Not that I am aware of, but the papers are very important. I thought you ought to come on, as you seemed to know something of the matter."

"I am afraid I don't, but I'm interested. You say there's been no abduction, or kidnaping?"

"I didn't say so, but I know of no such case."

"Well, tell me all you know about the loss of the papers."

"That's very little. The lieutenant governor called me up late on the night you telegraphed me. In fact, I think it was about two hours after I had sent my answer.

"'Dinsmore,' said he, 'there's been a very strange robbery, or something that looks very much like it. Some papers that cannot be of value to ordinary thieves, but for which the government would pay a handsome reward, have disappeared.'"

"I asked him when they were taken.

"'I've no idea,' he answered. 'I only discovered the loss this afternoon.'

"Then I asked him why he had not called on me sooner.

"'Because,' he replied, 'we've been hunting high and[79] low for the papers. We supposed they must be somewhere in the government building. But we've looked everywhere. They're gone, and that's all there is to it.'"

"I thought of your telegram, Nick, but said nothing. After I had asked the usual questions about where the papers were kept, and so forth, I inquired if he had any suspicions.

"The questions seemed to make him uneasy.

"'I cannot suspect anybody,' he replied.

"I remembered you, Nick, and I said:

"'That means that you suspect everybody.'"

"What did he say to that?" asked Nick.

"Huh! he smiled in a queer way, and simply said: 'Well?' Of course, I pressed him to be frank with me, but didn't succeed at first.

"Finally, though, he let the cat out of the bag in a kind of roundabout way.

"I saw that he actually suspected Gov. Bradley himself."

"Well!" exclaimed Nick, "that's rather interesting."

"Yes—and mysterious. I'll tell you a fact or two without stopping to say how I squeezed them from the lieutenant governor.

[80]

"Some six or seven weeks ago a man unknown here called on Gov. Bradley. We know his name was Leonard and that he and the governor had been in some sort of business deal together years before.

"That much is known, because a part of their conversation was accidentally overheard.

"Nobody thought anything of it at the time, of course, for it all seemed natural and straight enough.

"The lieutenant governor heard Leonard asking about some papers of some kind.

"'They're safe,' Gov. Bradley told him.

"'That's all well enough for you to say,' Leonard responded, 'but I'd rather keep them myself. Then I'd know.'"

Dinsmore paused.

"Does anybody know what the governor said to that?" asked Nick.

"He was heard to say something to the effect that that would give Leonard the whip hand.

"The men were evidently on bad terms, and that is all that is known of that matter.

"Now, some time later—it is rather more than three[81] weeks ago—Gov. Bradley left town. He hasn't been back since."

"Is there anything strange in that?"

"Not exactly. He went away openly enough. Told everybody that he was tired and needed rest. That was natural. He also told the lieutenant governor secretly that he was going to travel without letting anybody know where he was.

"'I don't want to be bothered with letters,' he said."

"That was natural enough, too, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so; but just now the lieutenant governor is putting two and two together, and I can see that he is suspicious. He hasn't said so in so many words, you understand, but that's what he feels, just the same."

"You haven't told me all, Dinsmore."

"Not quite. Governor Bradley told the lieutenant governor that he would manage to be within reach at all times, but that his movements and address must be kept private.

"I will take the name of George Snell," said he, "and keep you informed where you may telegraph to me, if anything of real importance comes up."

"So, for some days, the lieutenant governor received a[82] telegram every day, saying: 'Snell, Auditorium, Chicago,' or 'Snell, Planter's, St. Louis,' and so forth.

"Then there was a break of a few days, after which came word that 'Snell' was at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York.

"Meantime, nothing had happened that the lieutenant governor couldn't attend to alone.

"Then came the discovery that papers were missing.

"As soon as it was certain that the papers had disappeared, the lieutenant governor telegraphed the fact to 'Snell,' and told him in the same message that the matter would be placed in my hands.

"If the lieutenant governor had thought twice, he would have called me up before wiring to Bradley, alias Snell, but he didn't think quick enough, and since that time not a word has been heard from 'Snell.' And there you are."

"I see," said Nick; "it's very interesting. When does the next train go to Helena, Mont.?"

"To Helena! There's no direct train to that point, in any case; but what the mischief do you want to go there for?"

"Because that's where Gov. Bradley is, or where he went. I think, Dinsmore, that I shall have to hunt for[83] your governor, as well as for the thieves who stole the papers. I hope I may find the governor alive."

"Good gracious! what—"

"Look up the trains, please. I want to catch the first that goes."

With a wondering face, Dinsmore studied a railway guide for a few minutes.

Presently, he looked at his watch.

"There's a train in half an hour," he said, "that will get you pretty well started, and you can probably make connections that will take you through so as to reach Helena in about thirty hours. Will that do?"

"How can I tell? I must take that train, and I think, Dinsmore, it would be as well if you should come along, too."

"I'll do it, gladly."

"Anything to do to get ready?"

"No."

"Let's start for the station, then."

They went out, and on the way Nick asked:

"Dinsmore, do you know anybody in Manchester whose name is Cecil West?"

"Slightly," replied Dinsmore. "Friend of yours?"

[84]

"No, I never saw him. What sort of a man is he?"

"Tiptop, from all I hear. Not rich, you know, but honest and industrious. First-rate fellow, every way. By the way, he's in love with the governor's daughter, Estelle."

"So?"

"Yes, and the old man won't have him. He's sent the girl away, so as to keep them from meeting."

"The governor sent his daughter away, did he?"

"That's what I hear. She dropped out of sight after a big party at the governor's house some five weeks ago, and it is understood that she was packed off to visit a distant aunt, or something, in the hope that she would forget young West."

"I wonder if West hears from her?" mused Nick.

"If he does, he doesn't say so."

"Of course not."

Nothing more was said on this subject, and Dinsmore did not suspect what was in the detective's mind.

Nick asked one other question about the case:

"I understand that nothing has been reported, except a theft of government papers. Is that right?"

[85]

"Yes, and I have wondered a little, for in your telegram to me you mentioned jewelry."

"I did. I heard some was taken."

"Nick," said Dinsmore, "who gave you the tip about all this?"

The detective looked his old friend in the eyes for a moment, and answered, quietly:

"Gov. Bradley."

"The deuce you say! Why didn't you jump on the case?"

"Because I didn't know till I arrived in Manchester that it was the governor who called on me. He said his name was Snell. I doubted it, but I had no suspicion as to who he really was. I could see that he was holding some facts back, and that made me turn him down. That was where Bradley made a bad mistake."

The detective and Dinsmore made good connections, and arrived in Helena at six o'clock in the evening of the following day.

They began at once to trace the men they wanted to find.

Dinsmore made inquiries for a man answering the description of Gov. Bradley.

[86]

Nick, knowing that Patsy must have come to Helena, hunted for some trace of him.

He had the more difficult task, for Patsy, of course, had been disguised when he arrived in the town, and, as Nick presumed, he changed his disguise almost daily.

Calculating from the telegram, Nick reckoned that Patsy must have reached Helena on a certain day and by a certain train.

He asked men employed at the station about the passengers who arrived on that day.

From one he got a tip as to a man who might be Patsy who left his grip at the station and walked away.

The grip was sent for later, the man said, and was taken to a street that he named.

Nick went to that street.

He walked the length of it twice.

There was no good hotel on it, but several boarding houses, and any number of saloons.

Among others was Bronco Bill's.

Nick looked at it each time he passed.

It was not the first one he entered, but, after dropping in at two or three other places, he entered Bronco Bill's[87] place just as the proprietor was telling a customer about a shooting scrap that had taken place there recently.

"They wanted to make the tenderfoot dance," said Bill, grinning, "but durn me ef he didn't make them dance and holler afore he got through with them. Such shootin' I never did see! I thought 'twould be the last of Bronco Bill's house, but the young stranger just brought them crazy galoots to their senses in no time. Say! he hit a dime——"

And Bill went on to tell the whole story.

"Patsy!" said Nick to himself, as he slowly put down a glass of beer at the other end of the bar. "I wonder how long it will take Dinsmore to follow his trail to this joint?"

Nick sat down to wait, and had supper meantime.

Shortly after nine o'clock, Dinsmore came in, looking sour and hopeless.

"Ah! there you are," said he. "I've been looking for you."

"Why didn't you come here, then?" asked Nick.

"Because I didn't expect to find you here. I seemed to trace a man who looked like the governor to this hole several times. Plenty said they'd seen such a man hanging[88] around, but the governor wouldn't put up in such a place, not he!"

"It's where he put up, just the same," said Nick.

"Who told you?"

"I guessed it. My assistant has been here, and he wouldn't stay in such a place, either, unless there was business in it. The business that brought Patsy here was——"

Nick did not finish.

Instead, he caught up a newspaper and held it in front of Dinsmore.

"Read it!" he whispered, "and don't show your face!"

Four men were coming in from the street.

One of them was the man whom Nick had known as George Snell.

As the detective was now disguised, he did not hesitate to show his face.

It looked, however, as if his disguise would have been unnecessary, for Snell walked quickly across the room and out by a door at the back.

One of the four went with him.

The other two stepped up to the bar and called for drinks.

[89]

Snell came back in a short time with the man who had gone out with him.

"Have something?" asked a man at the bar.

"No," replied Snell; "let's be going."

The four then went out at once.

"Great Scott!" whispered Dinsmore, "that was Gov. Bradley's voice!"

"Of course it was," replied Nick. "Come on."

They kept on the track of the four men, and followed them to a house in a quiet street.

There was a light in the kitchen windows.

"Crooked work here," whispered Dinsmore.

"Sure!" replied Nick. "We must get a line on it, if possible."

They had not gone very near the house, presuming that there might be men on guard who would give warning to the others.

It seemed best to try to get at the kitchen windows from behind, and, accordingly, they went around to another street, through a yard, and over a fence.

This took some time, but the lights were still there, and all was quiet within.

[90]

Although the curtains were down, they managed to get a glimpse inside through a small hole.

It was just enough to show a good many tough-looking men around a table, with Snell in the middle.

He was counting out a big roll of bills.

"Buying back the papers," whispered Nick, "and paying the ransom for his daughter."

"What! you don't mean——"

"Miss Bradley was kidnaped. That's what I mean. Ah! if the governor had had the sense to tell me the whole truth!"

Nick was thinking.

"There are a good many of them," whispered Dinsmore; "shall we go to headquarters for a squad of police?"

"No. They'll be through in a minute. We must make a bluff, and they'll think they're surrounded. You go to the front door, and I'll tackle them here."

[91]

CHAPTER VIII. THE RANSOM.

Harry had brought down what the leader of the gang called "the goods."

This was a parcel of papers done up in red tape.

It was laid on the kitchen table, and Snell began to count out the money that he had shown a few minutes before.

"I have forty thousand dollars here," he remarked.

"Ought to be twice that!" growled the leader.

"That was the price agreed on with Leonard, wasn't it?"

"Go ahead."

"You haven't produced the goods."

Snell, or, rather, Gov. Bradley, stopped counting out the money, and looked straight at the leader.

“Plank down the money!” ordered the leader, harshly.

Just then there was a furious knocking at both the back and front doors.

Loud voices—there seemed to be a dozen of them—were crying:

“Surrender, in the name of the law!”

[92]

“We’re done!” gasped the leader, starting up, and lifting his revolver, “and by thunder! I know who done it! You, Harry, you sneak, with your argument—”

“I haven’t given you away, Hamilton,” cried Harry, “I swear—”

He got no further, for Hamilton, the leader, fired.

Harry groaned and staggered to the cellar door.

He grasped the handle to keep from falling.

It turned, the door opened, and he plunged headlong down the stairs.

All the other men were starting up in great confusion.

“Kill the governor!” they cried.

“No!” shouted Hamilton; “there’ll be more in him than in anything else. Take him with us.”

Then he added, in a lower tone:

“Side door, boys. Nobody seems to be there. They’ve forgotten the side door!”

He seized the governor as he spoke, and pushed him from the room.

Others helped, and both the governor and Leonard were hustled out.

All the things on the table—money and papers—were swept off by somebody.

[93]

A door crashed in, and next instant Nick Carter leaped into the room.

He was greeted by a pistol shot from one of the ruffians.

It missed him.

Many voices were heard, calling, ordering, cursing.

Dinsmore rushed in from the front.

"Heaven!" he gasped, "the governor's voice. He's calling for help. After him, Nick, and rescue him."

Together they made for the side door.

They overtook some of the gang there and Nick laid them flat with giant blows from his fists.

Then they went on.

Over a fence at a little distance a number of men were seen climbing.

A pistol shot from Nick dropped one.

The rest ran on.

Nick and Dinsmore dashed off in pursuit, their one hope being to rescue the governor, who had foolishly tried to do his own detective work.

* * * * *

Patsy felt as if a fearfully heavy blanket lay upon him.

[94]

Slowly, for he was less than half-awake, he put up his hands to brush the blanket away.

It was too heavy, and he wondered.

Then he opened his eyes.

It was rather a dark place, and rough, unfinished ceiling overhead.

He saw that first, naturally, for he was lying on his back.

"By Jumbo!" he muttered, beginning to remember, "I thought I was dead."

He looked down, raising his head a little, and saw with horror that what he thought was a heavy blanket was the body of a young man.

There was an open knife in the young man's hand.

"It's the fellow they called Harry!" said Patsy to himself, sitting up now and carefully lifting the body away. "What the mischief does it all mean?"

His memory was returning fast.

He recalled now how he had been carried down to this cellar to be suffocated with gas.

That was early last night.

It was now day, as he could tell from the light at one dusty window.

[95]

Besides, the cellar door was open, the one opening into the passage through which he had been taken.

His hands had been bound so hard that he could not loose them, and now they were free!

“How did that hap—”

He looked at the cord that had been around his wrists.

It was cut through.

Nothing could be clearer than that smooth mark of a sharp knife.

The detective looked at the knife in Harry’s dead hand.

“That’s it!” he said, softly. “The poor fellow tried to save me, and he came pretty near doing it.”

He tried to take the knife from Harry’s hand, but the stiffened fingers held it tight.

His own knife was in his pocket, and with that he cut the cord around his ankles.

Then he got up.

His head still swam, and he was weak, but his strength came back rapidly.

Going to the wall, he found the gas jet.

The cock had been turned square off.

“Harry did it,” he whispered. “Poor fellow! I remember how he couldn’t stand the idea of my being murdered.[96] His coming in and leaving the door open, ventilated the place, and so I didn’t die of suffocation. Poor chap! he meant well. I wonder how he came to be shot?”

Shot he was, as the detective could see from the wound in the young man’s breast.

Patsy stood still for a full minute.

“Hang me!” he exclaimed, “if it doesn’t seem as wonderful as if I was dead!”

He felt for his revolver.

One had been taken away from him, but he had the other, and, with this in his hand, he went upstairs.

The house was very still.

In the kitchen he found overturned chairs and other signs of disorder.

“There was a ruction of some kind,” he concluded.

He wasn’t sure just what he ought to do, and decided that before he tried to form a plan he would explore the house.

Nothing attracted his attention in the rooms of the ground floor, and it was the same on the next floor.

They were ordinary rooms, furnished cheaply.

The detective looked into bureau drawers, not because^[97] he was expecting to find anything, but to see if there was any evidence that the house was regularly occupied.

There was none. All the drawers were empty.

Opening a door, he found himself at the foot of the stairs to the attic.

"Might as well take it all in," he thought, and he started up.

The third step was loose, and came up when he put his foot on it.

At once he pulled the board away.

He saw something that made his eyes bulge.

A box had been made beneath the step, and, lying in it, were two packets of papers done up in red ribbon, and a great quantity of money in big bills.

He took out and counted twenty one-thousand-dollar bills, and twenty thousand more dollars in bills of five and one hundred.

"Whew!" he whistled, sitting down and looking at his find.

A sound startled him.

It came from above.

A faint, weak voice—a woman's, apparently.

It seemed to be calling for help.

[98]

Patsy stuffed the money in his pockets, and bounded up the attic stairs.

Under the unfinished loft on a couch of blankets he saw a young woman lying.

She was tied to the place so that she could turn over only with difficulty.

"Good gracious!" he cried, "who are you? What does this mean? Have you been hurt?"

"No," she answered, weakly, "but I am so weak and hungry. They haven't given me anything to eat or drink for more than a day. I suppose they have forgotten me. I am Estelle Bradley, sir. If you would only get word to my father! He is the Governor of Wenonah, and I know he would reward you!"

"Don't try to talk, Miss Bradley," interrupted Patsy.

He was stooping to cut the cords that bound her to the floor.

When this was done, he helped her to her feet and then downstairs. On the way, he took the papers he had seen in the box, and put them in his pockets.

She told him, when he explained that he was a detective, how she had been deceived by a message that was supposed to be sent by her lover, Cecil West.

[99]

"It was handed to me during a party at my father's house," she said, "and it told me that Cecil was lying dangerously wounded not far away. I went at once to see him, and was seized by rough men, who brought me here and have kept me ever since."

Patsy took her to a hotel, where they had breakfast.

Then, knowing nothing of Nick's journey to the West, he arranged for taking her home.

They started on a train that left Helena just as Nick and Dinsmore returned after a successful chase of the ruffians.

It had taken them most of the night, but they had rescued the governor and caught three of the gang, though Hamilton, the leader, had escaped.

Leonard had been shot through the heart by the leader when it came to the last fight out in the hills miles beyond Helena.

The governor confessed bitterly that he and Leonard had been engaged in a business that could not be called quite square years before.

"For my reputation," said the governor, "I had to keep certain papers, and Leonard wanted them, fearing that I[100] would give them up some time, and so ruin him. We feared each other.

"So he hired a band of ruffians to steal the papers. They not only stole mine, but, without knowing it, a number of government documents, also. Then, to make a complete job of it, they kidnaped my daughter.

"I dared not trust my secrets to the police, or to you, Mr. Carter. When Leonard found that the ruffians would not give up the papers without an immense ransom, that he was unable to pay, he told me what he had done. It was for the interest of both of us to keep the matter dark, and he thought he could drive a bargain with the thieves.

"So I got together all the cash I could and we tried it.

"We went from city to city, but whether Leonard saw the leader anywhere, I do not know. At last, I told him I should give the matter to Nick Carter.

"Leonard threatened to kill me if I did so. He nearly succeeded, as, perhaps, you know. At last, he said we should find that gang in Helena, and that by this time they would be willing to come to my terms—forty thousand dollars—their first bid having been for a hundred thousand.

[101]

"We came to Helena, Leonard taking a different route from Chicago, in order to give the word to the gang, who, he said, were mostly at the North.

"I came here and went, as he told me, to a low saloon, where I stayed till he came, and the rest you know."

"Not quite all," said Nick; "wasn't there a man on your track all this time?"

"Not that I know of, though yesterday a stranger was found spying on us. The gang killed him."

"How? When? Where?" demanded Nick, anxiously.

Gov. Bradley told him about the way the stranger was put down the cellar.

"And I was there," thought Nick, with deep sorrow, "perhaps in time to save him! I wish I had let the governor go."

They went to the house, and found it deserted by all, save the dead Harry.

What Nick saw, though, the open knife, the cut cords, convinced him that Patsy had made his escape.

But the case did not seem to be finished, for the valuable papers and the governor's daughter were still missing, to say nothing of the great ransom that had been paid down.

[102]

So Nick went with the governor to Manchester, and there found Patsy, Miss Estelle, and all that the governor had been looking for.

It is supposed that one of the gang hid the papers and the money in the box under the stairs during the confusion of the attempt to escape.

"It was a clever move," said Nick, discussing it; "for the rascal must have known that some, if not all the gang, would be captured, and it would be foolish to have the stuff captured with them. So he took the chance of hiding it, meaning to go back some time, next day, probably, and get it."

Gov. Bradley offered to pay Nick and Patsy for their services.

"I don't think we want any pay," replied Nick. "We've had a good time out of it, and we weren't engaged on the matter at all. But I'd like to ask two favors."

"They shall be granted," said the governor.

"First, then, when you have detective work to do in the future, don't try to do it yourself."

"That's easy," laughed the governor; "you may be sure I shan't try that sort of thing again."

[103]

"The second," said Nick, "is that you consent to the marriage of your daughter and Cecil West. He's a fine young man——"

"I yield," interrupted Gov. Bradley. "I will send for West at once."

[104]

CHAPTER IX. A CALL TO COLORADO.

"Patsy, here's a letter from a friend of mine in Colorado who asks me to go around that way and look at some mining property he's got."

"Just the thing," said Patsy. "I'm pretty sick of British America, and I guess Colorado is about as good a way as any other to get back to old New York. I don't suppose we'll ever strike that gang of villains again."

"You think not?" queried Nick. "I'm not usually disposed to plume myself on any prophetic gifts, but something tells me that before we sight the Brooklyn Bridge again we'll have some of the members of that gang to deal with once more. In the meantime, however, we'll accept this invitation to Colorado."

It is not necessary to dwell on the trip; suffice it to say that Nick finished the examination of the mines and prepared to resume his return journey.

While on the train he received a telegram that disarranged his plans and gave him the first inkling that his prophetic vision was to materialize.

[105]

The telegram was from a man named Folsom, whom Nick had met while examining his friend's mining property. It intimated that a tragic occurrence was disturbing the people of Mason Creek, and that the services of Nick Carter would be appreciated in clearing up the mystery.

Nick decided to reply in person to the telegram, and started immediately for Denver.

It is necessary to go back a little to understand why Folsom had telegraphed for Nick.

A day or two before, two men had met on a rocky plateau, some three miles from the village of Mason Creek, in Colorado, and a little farther from Denver, near which city the overland express was bearing Nick Carter and his assistant eastward.

One of the men was a farmer, the other a clergyman.

The farmer was vociferating wildly, while the clergyman strove to pacify him.

"It ain't right! it's swindling, and you can't make it anything else!" declared the farmer.

The clergyman raised his hand, and there was a look of pain on his pale face.

[106]

"I wish you wouldn't swear," he said, gently. "Be calm, and tell me just what you mean."

The farmer looked ashamed of himself, and probably would have answered in a quiet way if another man who was standing near had not put in:

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Judson. Let him rave. If he's such a fool that he can't make money, it's not your fault, and he has no business to complain to you."

"But," said Mr. Judson, "he makes a serious charge——"

The farmer did not hear this, for he was angry almost beyond his control, "mad clean through," as the saying is in that part of Colorado.

He did not hear, because he broke in violently:

"I've been swindled, robbed, do you hear? and you're just as much to blame as if you'd been the only one in the scheme. You wear the clothes of a preacher, but, by thunder! you're a wolf in sheep's clothing, and you deserve to be shot on the spot. If you want to keep that pious skin of yours whole, you'd better not come around Hank Low's way."

"But, Mr. Low, listen to me," the clergyman begged.

"Not a word, you black-coated villain! When I think[107] of the way my wife and children have been cheated by a sneak-thief of a minister, it puts murder in my heart, it does! I won't talk to you, for fear I'll forgit and take the law into my own hands. Geddap, Jenny."

The farmer's old mare responded to the command and a lash of the whip and jogged away, dragging the rickety old wagon in which sat the angry Hank Low alone.

The clergyman turned, with a sigh, to his companion.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Claymore," he said, "that all is not as it should be in this matter."

"Pooh!" returned Claymore, easily; "you mustn't mind the howling of such a wild man. He doesn't know what he's talking about. He won't hurt you."

"Oh! that isn't what I fear. I don't like to hear a man talk like that, because it shows that he believes he has been wronged. There might be some truth in it. If so, I should be the first to make it right."

"But there isn't anything wrong. It was all a plain matter of business. Hank Low had a lot of land that he couldn't do anything with. We asked him his price for it, we had a dicker with him, and he sold. What could be simpler, or fairer, than that?"

[108]

Instead of answering, the clergyman looked over the ground where they were standing.

It was a level, but rocky, spot between high hills.

No house was in sight, but half a mile farther up the valley was Hank Low's cabin.

This spot where they stood had been part of Hank Low's farm.

He had had a hard struggle trying to make a living out of his land, and had not succeeded very well.

There was a heavy mortgage to be lifted, besides.

One day a couple of men came to Mason Creek and spent a good deal of time tramping about the country.

One of them was William Claymore.

After a few days of tramping about, Claymore offered to buy the most useless part of Hank Low's farm.

He mentioned the name of Rev. Elijah Judson as a man who was interested with him in some kind of a plan.

Nothing very definite was said about it, but Low understood that the clergyman meant to put up a private school for young ladies, and wanted the land for that purpose.

A deal was made by which Low was able to pay off his mortgage, but nothing more.

He would have been content with that if he had not[109] discovered, when it was too late, that the parties who bought his land had no idea of putting up a school or anything of that sort.

It was at the time when the fact was just becoming known that oil could be found in great quantities in the far Western lands.

Claymore and his companion, by making secret tests of the soil, had come to the conclusion that this worthless end of Hank Low's farm was the best place in the State for oil wells.

So they bought several acres for next to nothing.

It might be supposed that their next step would be to sink wells and build a refinery, or a pipe line.

But such things cost money, and neither Claymore nor his partner had any left to speak of.

They had to raise it, and in this task they had the assistance of the Rev. Elijah Judson.

The clergyman had not been in Colorado when Hank Low's land was bought.

In fact, he did not half understand the scheme.

He had not been a success as a preacher, but he had a little money, some two or three thousand dollars, and Claymore[110] had persuaded him that with it he could make his fortune in oil.

There was nothing dishonest in discovering oil and digging for it.

If there had been, the clergyman would not have touched the scheme.

Supposing that it was all right, he had put in his money, and had been made the president of the company.

His name was printed in large type on the letters sent out by Claymore.

These letters were sent to people in the far East, who had been members of the Rev. Mr. Judson's church.

They were sent to other places where his name was known, and they told all about the wonderful discovery of oil.

Friends of the clergyman were to be allowed to invest in the company, if they wanted a sure thing.

The letters did not state that money was needed for digging the wells or building a refinery.

Oh, no! Persons who received the letters were given to understand that this was their chance to get rich quickly.

And the Rev. Elijah Judson's name as president of the[111] oil company was enough to make everybody sure that it was all right.

For, of course, the clergyman would not go into any business that was not perfectly straight and sure.

That was quite the case—at least, the clergyman thought it was. He meant well, and he really believed that the company was square, and that there would be great profits in the business.

There were many answers to the letters, and money came in rapidly. Not many persons invested large amounts, but the sum total was considerable.

All this operation of raising money for the work took several months.

At last the clergyman went to Colorado to look over the plant and do his share of the work.

He was surprised to find that there wasn't any plant.

There was the land that had been bought; on it were a few small mounds of loose dirt to show where borings had been made; and in Denver there was an office of the company.

Nothing more.

Claymore explained that it took time to get the machinery[112] for sinking the wells, and Mr. Judson was satisfied.

They went out to the land, and there happened to meet Hank Low, as he was driving to the city with a small load of farm stuff for the market.

By that time, of course, Low had learned just why his land had been bought.

The farmer honestly believed that he had been swindled, because nobody had told him that the land he was selling was very valuable.

"They might have let me in on the deal," he grumbled. "The land was mine. S'pose it had been gold they found. Wouldn't it be swindling to make me sell it dirt cheap just because I didn't know what 'twas worth?"

His neighbors told him he mustn't expect any better treatment in a business deal.

"But," he argued, "they sprung the preacher on me, made me believe there was to be a school there. Ain't that false pretenses? You bet, 'tis!—an' ef ever I git my hands on that preacher, I'll make him suffer!"

He hadn't had his hands on the Rev. Elijah Judson, but he had made him suffer, just the same.

[113]

"I hate to be called a swindler," sighed the clergyman, as he stood there with Claymore.

"Mr. Judson," responded Claymore, "business is business, and the man who gets left in a trade is always sore. That's all there is to it, and you mustn't think anything more about it."

"Well," said Mr. Judson, "I'll try to think it's all right, but if I should find that any wrong has been done, I shall insist on making things right with Low."

There was a sneering expression on Claymore's face, but he said nothing, and they returned to the city.

Mr. Judson found new trouble there. He met one of his old church members on the street and shook hands with him.

"I didn't know you were in this part of the country, Mr. Folsom," said the clergyman.

"I suppose not," snapped Mr. Folsom, in reply, "and I presume you'd have liked it better if I had stayed away."

"Why! what do you mean?"

"I came out here to look into the oil company I put my money in. That's what I mean."

"Well——"

[114]

"There isn't any well. There ought to be several, but there isn't one, and, what's more, there won't be any, and what's more yet, you know it."

"Why! Brother Folsom——"

"Don't brother me! You've lent your name to a swindle, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I can stand my loss, and it will teach me not to trust a minister again, but there

are others, widows and orphans, who have put their all into your infernal scheme, and they can't stand it. You've made them beggars just to fatten yourself."

The clergyman grew ghastly pale as he listened, and even Claymore, who was still with him, looked troubled.

"This is dreadful!" gasped Mr. Judson. "I'd die if I believed it to be half true!"

"Then you'd better die," retorted Folsom. "That's all I've got to say. I've looked at that wonderful land the company bought, and there isn't enough oil in it to fill a lamp. Not a dollar that's been put into it will ever be got out again. But you'll be fairly well off with the money you've got from the widows and orphans—if you don't get into jail for swindling."

With this Mr. Folsom strode away.

"What does it mean?" asked Mr. Judson.

[115]

"Sore head, that's all," responded Claymore. "He doesn't know what he's talking about —"

"But he seems to. Mr. Claymore, if I find that there has been any dishonest work in this business I shall expose it all, understand that. I shall die of the shame of it, but I will not commit suicide until I have seen that the really guilty parties are punished."

"Come, Mr. Judson, don't talk of suicide. That's foolish. You're not used to business, that's all."

"It is not all—ah! there's Mr. Low's wagon in front of that store. I am going to speak to him."

Claymore objected, but the minister was stubborn, and they went into the store.

Low was there, and the clergyman asked him to call at the hotel to talk over matters.

"I want to know all the facts," said Mr. Judson.

"Wal," answered Low, slowly, "I've got some business to attend to, but ef ye're in at half-past three I'll be thar."

"I shall look for you at that hour."

It was then about noon, and while they were at dinner Claymore tried to make the clergyman think that the business was all straight, but evidently he did not succeed.

"I shall go to my room and think quietly till Low[116] comes," said Mr. Judson when they got up from the table, "and I repeat that if all does not seem to be honest and aboveboard I shall take measures to right the wrongs that have been done."

"Go ahead, then," grumbled Claymore. "I shall be at the office if you want any information."

They parted, and did not meet again.

Half-past three came, and, prompt to the minute, Hank Low drove to the hotel entrance and went in.

Mr. Judson's room was on the fourth floor, the clerk told him, and called a boy to show the visitor up.

"Never mind," said Low, "I've been here before, and I know the way."

He therefore went up alone.

Within five minutes he came down the stairs again, an angry look upon his face.

He said nothing to anybody, but hastened to his wagon, got in, said, "Geddap, Jenny," and drove away as rapidly as the old nag could take him.

As nearly as anybody could make out, it was just previous to Low's departure that two or three persons on a street that ran along one side of the hotel were fearfully[117] startled by the sight of a man falling from an upper story window.

He struck head first on the sidewalk, and was instantly killed.

Men were at his side before his heart stopped beating, but no word came from the unfortunate man's lips.

He was unknown to those who saw his end, but they knew from the cut of his clothes that he was a clergyman.

Information was taken to the hotel office at once, and the clerk went out.

He immediately identified the body as that of a guest of the house, the Rev. Elijah Judson.

[118]

CHAPTER X. WAITING FOR NICK CARTER.

In the first horror of this discovery nobody thought of murder.

It was taken for granted that the unfortunate clergyman had been leaning from his window, and lost his balance.

It was not long, however, before men began to look at the thing in another way.

The minister's body was left on the walk under guard of policemen until an undertaker came to take it away.

Up to that time no friend of the dead man had appeared.

The clerk had been so shocked that he could not remember whom he had seen with Mr. Judson.

So the hotel manager had engaged the undertaker.

At last the clerk recalled that Judson had been with Claymore early in the morning, and that the two had dined together in the hotel restaurant at noon.

Accordingly, a messenger was sent to the oil company's office to inform Claymore of what had happened.

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It was while the messenger was gone on this errand that a man went into the hotel, and laid his card on the clerk's desk.

"Send it up to Mr. Judson, please," he said.

"Mr. Judson!" gasped the clerk, looking first at the man and then at his card.

"Yes," replied the caller, "Rev. Elijah Judson. He's stopping here, isn't he?"

"Yes—that is, he was, Mr.——" The clerk looked at the card. "Mr. Folsom," he added, "but he's—he's gone."

"Gone! when?"

"A short time ago—ah! you see, Mr. Folsom, he's dead!"

"Dead!" cried Folsom, "dead! Mr. Judson dead?"

"Instantly killed, sir."

Mr. Folsom echoed these words as if he were in a dream.

"What do you mean?" he whispered then; "how did it happen?"

"Nobody knows, sir," replied the clerk, "except that he pitched headforemost out of his window. He struck the sidewalk; was just outside there——"

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The clerk's explanation was not heard by Mr. Folsom.

"Great Heavens!" he gasped, pressing his hand to his brow; "he took me in earnest and committed suicide."

"Suicide!"

It was the clerk who repeated the word, but he had not time to say more when Claymore rushed breathlessly up.

He had caught the last of Folsom's remark.

"What's that you say of suicide?" he demanded, excitedly.

Folsom looked at him, blankly.

"I said," he answered, slowly, "that my old friend had committed suicide, and I fear it was some hasty, angry words of mine that drove him to it."

Claymore looked sharply at the speaker.

He remembered him.

That conversation on the street was not easy to forget, though Claymore had taken no part in it.

Evidently, Folsom did not remember that he had ever seen Claymore before.

He had spoken to the clergyman without noticing that a stranger stood near.

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"I think you're wrong," said Claymore, still looking straight at Folsom.

"I wish I could think so," responded Folsom, sadly; "but I spoke to Judson very harshly. I thought I had reason to be angry, and I guess I had, but I should not have spoken in that way. I came here just now to beg his pardon. He said at the time he should die, and I told him he'd better. Great Heaven! to think that I should have hounded him to his death!"

Mr. Folsom was terribly distressed.

The crowd that had gathered at the clerk's desk listened breathlessly.

"You may be entirely right," said Claymore, quietly, "but I think not. I heard the conversation you refer to."

"You heard it?"

"Yes; I was with Mr. Judson at the time."

"Ah! I didn't see you. Then you heard his words?"

"I did, and, as I say, you may be right, but I think differently."

"How can you?" asked Mr. Folsom, eagerly; "if there's a ray of hope for a different explanation, in the name of Heaven speak up, man!"

"Mr. Judson had a bitter enemy," said Claymore.

[122]

"An enemy? Do you know this?"

"I heard a man threaten to kill him this morning."

For an instant Mr. Folsom was too astonished to speak.

He stood with his mouth open, staring at Claymore.

Then he brought his fist down on the clerk's desk with a bang, and exclaimed:

"Then, I'll be responsible for tracking that enemy to the ends of the earth, if necessary. I'll telegraph for Nick Carter to come. He's in this part of the country, and I can get him here by evening, if not sooner."

There was a murmur from the crowd.

Everybody, unless it was Claymore, seemed to think that this would be the best possible plan.

After a moment, he asked:

"Is Nick Carter a friend of yours?"

"I met him not long ago," replied Folsom. "He'll come; I know he'll come if he's not too far away. I can't rest as long as there's any shadow of doubt that I worried poor Judson to his death."

"The local police on such a plain case," began Claymore, but Folsom interrupted:

"I said I'd take the responsibility, and I will. Let the[123] local police do all they can. It won't do any harm to have Nick Carter also on the spot. I'll wire him at once."

He reached for a pad of telegraph blanks, and wrote a dispatch, which he gave to the clerk with a request that it be sent to the office in a hurry.

A bell boy went off with it on the run.

Then Folsom turned again to Claymore.

"Who is this enemy of Judson's you speak of?" he asked.

A man who had been quietly listening to the conversation touched Claymore on the shoulder.

"Don't answer that question just yet," he said.

At the same time he pulled aside the lapel of his coat.

Claymore and Folsom both saw a badge pinned to his vest.

"Come into the office a minute, both of you," added the stranger.

The two men followed him into the hotel manager's private room, and the door was closed.

"My name is Kerr," the stranger said then. "I am a detective, and belong to the regular force here. I shall be very proud to work with Nick Carter on this case if[124] he comes, but it is my duty to get ahead on it, and clear it up before he arrives, if possible."

"Of course," responded Claymore.

Folsom nodded.

"Now," said Detective Kerr, "you may answer this gentleman's question. Who is the enemy you refer to?"

"You mean the man I heard threaten Mr. Judson's life?" asked Claymore, cautiously.

"Yes."

"It was a farmer named Hank Low. He lives out beyond Mason Creek a few miles."

Kerr made a note of the name.

"What led to the threat?" he asked.

"The men had high words about a business transaction, in which Low thought he'd been badly used. As a matter of fact, Low was treated with perfect fairness."

"But he was hot about it, eh?"

"I should say so!"

"Out there."

"Near Mason Creek?"

"Yes; on the oil company's land."

"Well, do you mean to say that this Hank Low followed^[125] Mr. Judson to the city for the purpose of murdering him?"

"No, I don't mean to say anything of the kind."

"Then I don't see how we can suspect Low. Mason Creek is some miles away—"

"Yes, but Low was on his way to the city when we saw him."

"Oh! that's different. Now perhaps we are getting down to business. The first question is, did anybody see him in town?"

"I saw his wagon in front of the store," said Claymore, hesitatingly.

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded the detective sharply.

"Well, just begin to feel that it's a pretty serious thing to bring a charge of murder against a man. You see, Low was hot and his tongue was uncontrollable. I presume he didn't mean what he said."

"It isn't our business to think what he meant," declared Kerr. "And we're not bringing any charge against him. If he's innocent he can stand a little inquiry. So you'd better tell all you know frankly, and not wait till you are examined in court."

[126]

"Oh, I'll be frank enough," said Claymore, "I know that Mr. Judson asked him to call here at half-past three."

"You ought to have said that before."

Folsom, who had been listening quietly to the conversation, here suggested that an investigation should be made to find whether this Hank Low had been seen in the hotel.

"I was just going to," said Kerr.

He opened the door, and asked the clerk to step in.

"Do you know anybody named Low?" asked Kerr, when the clerk was with them.

"Yes," replied the clerk; "there's a farmer named Hank Low, from Mason Creek—"

"That's the man."

The clerk said nothing further, and Kerr asked:

"When did you see him last?"

"This afternoon," was the reply.

"Here?"

"Yes—great Heaven!"

The clerk looked suddenly startled.

"What's the matter?"

[127]

"Why! Hank Low called on Mr. Judson just before he died—or was it afterward?"

"That's a mighty important point," said Kerr, gravely. "Isn't there any way by which you can fix the time?"

The clerk thought a moment.

"Yes," he said, "I can fix it to the minute, but I can't do it offhand."

"Why? How can you fix it, then?"

"Just as Low came to the desk a telegraph boy came with a message for a guest. I had to sign the boy's book."

"Yes. Well?"

"I had to enter the time, you know, and I looked up at the clock as I did so."

"Did you enter the exact minute?"

"I did."

"What was it?"

"That I can't remember."

"The boy's book will show?"

"Sure."

"Then," said Kerr, rising, "we'll look up that boy, and also try to find the exact minute at which Mr. Judson fell or was thrown from the window."

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The detective cautioned the others to say nothing about their conversation, and went out to talk with the men who had seen Judson fall.

They agreed pretty nearly as to the time of the event.

One said twenty-five minutes of four.

The other thought it was two minutes later.

When their watches were compared it was found that one was two minutes ahead of the other's.

The testimony of several other persons was taken on this matter, and it was agreed that twenty-five or twenty-six minutes of four was the time when Mr. Judson met his death.

A bell boy was quietly questioned also.

He remembered seeing Hank Low leave the hotel office.

"Twas just after he had gone up alone," the boy said. "I remember, 'cause the clerk was going to send me up with him, and he saved me a trip upstairs by going alone."

This was important, and Kerr asked a number of other questions as to how it happened that Low went up alone, and so forth.

Next he found a man who remembered seeing Low drive rapidly away.

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This man did not know when he was being questioned that Low was suspected of murder.

"I says, 'Hello, Hank,' says I," he told the detective, "and he said, 'Hello,' and got into his wagon.

"'How's things up at the farm?' says I.

"'Can't stop to chin,' says he, kind of mad, and he whipped up his critter, and went away. Never seen Hank in such a hurry."

All this was important, and Kerr made a note of the names of all witnesses.

"I'll try to show Nick Carter," he thought, "that I can work up a case."

He was just about to leave the hotel, when Folsom approached him with a telegram in his hand.

He gave it to Kerr, who read the one word it contained:

“Coming.”

It was signed “N.C.”

“All right,” said Kerr; “when he gets here I shall probably have the guilty man in the lockup. He doesn’t say when he will arrive.”

“No,” responded Folsom, “but as this was sent from [130] Pueblo, it shows that he is on the way. I’ve looked up the trains, and should say that he’d be here early in the evening.”

“Well, I’m going down to the telegraph office to look up that messenger’s book. If it gives the time I think it does, I shall start for Mason Creek without waiting for Carter.”

“I suppose that’s right,” said Folsom.

Kerr was sure it was.

He went to the telegraph office, but was disappointed to learn that the boy who had the book he needed to see had been sent to a distant part of the city, and could not be back before six o’clock at the earliest.

Then Kerr was in doubt as to what he ought to do.

“It would make me look like thirty cents,” he reflected, “if I should arrest Hank Low, and bring him to the city, only to find that the boy’s book showed that he couldn’t have done the thing.”

“Suppose, for example, the book shows that the clerk signed it at twenty minutes to four.

“By that time Judson had been dead at least five minutes, and, of course, Low couldn’t be guilty.

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“I think I’ll wait for the boy to get back. Carter may be here by that time, and I’d rather take his judgment.”

And Kerr left it that way. He went down to the railroad station at a quarter to six with Folsom, hoping to meet the great detective on the train due to arrive from Pueblo at that hour.

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CHAPTER XI. A SUSPECT AND AN ALIBI.

They were not disappointed.

Nick was on the train, and Patsy was with him.

Nick greeted Folsom warmly when they met on the platform, and then he was introduced to Detective Kerr.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Kerr," said Nick. "I suppose there's no mystery about this case?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Kerr, doubtfully. "I think not."

"I thought it was all settled."

"Settled, Mr. Carter? What do you mean?"

Nick smiled, and glanced at Folsom.

"Usually," he said, "my friends do not have a brass band to meet me when I begin to work."

Folsom started, and looked uncomfortable.

He had heard it said that Nick Carter had a great objection to working on a case when it was known that he was at work.

"I beg your pardon," said Folsom, hastily; "I've been excited this afternoon, or I would have sent for you secretly,[133] but there's no brass band about it. Mr. Kerr is the only one who knows that you are here."

"It's all right, Folsom; don't worry," responded Nick, "but I'll bet the cigars that more than Mr. Kerr know."

"You'd win," said Kerr. "Mr. Folsom spoke of sending for you in the presence of fifty men."

"That's so!" exclaimed Folsom, looking very awkward.

Nick laughed.

"Let it go," he said, good-humoredly. "I don't need to bother with the case if I don't want to. I presume Mr. Kerr has the hang of it, anyway. So, unless there is real trouble, Patsy and I can take the night train for the East."

"I hope you won't, Mr. Carter," said Kerr, earnestly. "I do think that I can put my hand on the murderer, but I'd like very much to get your opinion if not your assistance."

"All right. There'll be time enough for that while we get dinner somewhere. Can you take us to a quiet place?"

"We were going to the hotel where the crime was committed. The Western Union manager is going to send[134] a boy there with a piece of evidence we need just as soon as the boy gets back from a long errand."

"Very well," said Nick; "we'll go to the hotel, but we won't go together, if you please. You and Folsom go back together, and if anybody asks you about Nick Carter, give them any kind of an evasive answer you choose, as long as you make them understand that I'm not in town. Then engage a private room for dinner——"

"We have done that already, Mr. Carter."

"Good! What's the number?"

"Fourteen, second floor."

"Patsy and I will join you there in half an hour unless there's some hurry."

"No," said Kerr, a little doubtfully, "I don't believe there's any hurry, for we can't act till we get the messenger boy's evidence."

"So long, then."

Kerr and Folsom left Nick and Patsy inside the station, where they had met.

"You don't really hope to conceal the fact that you're in Denver, do you, Nick?" asked Patsy.

The great detective smiled.

[135]

"When fifty men heard that I was sent for?" he returned, quietly; "not quite."

"Then, why do you make such a fuss about it? Why not go along to the hotel openly?"

"Patsy," said Nick, as he pretended to consult a pocket time-table, "if the guilty man was one of that fifty, don't you think it likely that he would shadow Folsom and Kerr, and follow them to the station to see if I came?"

"Yes! I hadn't thought of that."

"And if he did so, of course, he's seen me."

"Sure."

"And he wouldn't follow the others out, but would wait to see what became of me."

"That's it."

"Well, then——"

"You needn't say any more, Nick. I see now. I've spotted every man who had been in sight since we stepped off the train."

"About a dozen of them, eh?"

"Fully that."

All through this talk each had been carefully looking around the station, though no one there could have suspected[136] that they were paying attention to anything but themselves.

In fact, Nick had been taking in the situation from the moment he met Kerr and Folsom.

"Let's go into the waiting-room," he said, as he put away his time-table, "and buy a cigar and a newspaper."

As they crossed the large room they watched very carefully to see if any man was observing their movements.

The crime had happened too late in the afternoon for the regular editions of the evening papers, but extras were now out, and a big pile of them had just been brought to the newsstand.

Several men were at the counter buying the papers.

Patsy went to the cigar case, and Nick asked for a paper.

The boy behind the counter was very busy just then.

Nick had to wait his turn, which didn't trouble him any.

"Mr. Claymore!" the boy called, suddenly; "you forgot your change."

"Oh! did I?" said a man, who had bought several papers, and was hurrying away.

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He came back and reached his hand across the counter.

"Keep a nickel of it for your honesty," he said.

"Thankee, Mr. Claymore."

Nick bought his paper next, and Patsy joined him.

They went slowly to a corner of the waiting-room, and sat down.

"Well?" said Nick, as he unfolded the paper, and began to read about the death of the Rev. Mr. Judson.

"Well," repeated Patsy, "there's nobody around now who was here when we came."

"I thought not."

Nick read for a moment, and then remarked:

"That's an honest newsboy."

"Yes," returned Patsy, who had heard the talk about the forgotten change.

"The man he spoke to was on the platform when we arrived."

"He was."

That was all they said about it.

As a matter of fact, neither of them had the slightest suspicion of Claymore, any more than they had of any of the dozen others who had stayed in sight while Kerr and [138] Folsom were there; but they remembered his face and name.

That was a matter of habit with them.

"Look it over," said Nick, passing the paper to Patsy.

While the young man read, Nick thought.

At last he said:

"I think we'll call at the undertaker's."

The name of the undertaker who had taken charge of Judson's body was printed in the paper, and Nick inquired the way to his place from the first policeman they met.

There was a crowd of curious idlers at the door, and a man stood there, who at first was not going to let the detectives in.

"We want to see the body of the clergyman who——" Nick began.

"I know you do!" interrupted the man, crossly, "and so does everybody else, but you can't see!"

"Can't see when I have eyes," retorted Nick, with a queer smile, and he pushed by the man into the building.

The man was astonished.

He had not expected this stranger to defy him, and there was something so commanding in Nick's quiet way [139] of doing things that he had let both detectives pass before he knew it.

Then he followed them into the office, blustering:

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It's my business to be here," said Nick, coldly. "I am a detective, and my name is Nicholas Carter."

"Oh!" exclaimed the undertaker, and his eyes grew large. He did not seem to be able to take them off the famous man, of whom he had heard so much. "Oh!" he added, after a pause.

"If that makes a difference," said Nick, "you may show us the body."

"Certainly, anything you want, Mr. Carter. Only too proud."

He led the way to a back room, and for a minute or two Nick and Patsy stood there studying the still, cold form.

"Can I do anything more for you?" asked the undertaker, as they turned away.

"No, thank you."

"I suppose you'll see the clergyman's friend, won't you?"

"Do you mean Mr. Folsom?"

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"Yes, sir. The hotel people, you see, Mr. Carter, told me to take charge of the body, and I supposed it would be a kind of charity case, as, of course, the hotel people had no interest in the unfortunate man. But if Mr. Folsom was his friend, perhaps he'd like to order a better casket, don't you see. If——"

"I'll speak to Mr. Folsom about it."

"Thank you, sir. Perhaps you'd like to look at some of my caskets, and advise Mr. Folsom ——"

"I'll leave that to him."

"Oh! very well, sir; but if you don't mind speaking to him about the matter. It would be too bad to bury a clergyman in an ordinary——"

By this time Nick and Patsy were out of hearing.

When they were about halfway to the hotel, Nick remarked:

"It wasn't suicide."

"No," responded Patsy. "I could see that. The thing that killed him was the breaking of the back of his skull on the sidewalk; but he had a black and blue mark over the right eye. That wasn't made by his fall."

"Certainly not. It was made by the blow that sent him reeling through the window."

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"That information will make your friend Folsom feel better, won't it?"

"I judge so, as his telegram told me that he feared suicide, and hoped that it was murder.

"But," added Nick, "I don't think I shall be in a hurry to ease Folsom's mind. We'll wait till we have heard the whole story before letting him know what we think. It may be handy to give out the report that we believe it a case of suicide."

"I'm on," said Patsy.

They found Kerr and Folsom waiting for them in room fourteen, and they sat down at once to dinner.

While they were eating, Kerr told the whole story as far as he knew it.

Naturally, he mentioned Claymore's name as the witness to Hank Low's threats.

"Who is this Claymore?" asked Nick, as he lighted a cigar at the end of the meal.

"He's a Denver business man," replied Kerr. "I have no acquaintance with him. I believe he hasn't been here more than a year or so."

"Less than a year, I guess," said Folsom.

"Why, do you know him?" asked Nick.

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"No," replied Folsom, "except as I have talked with him this afternoon, but I remember now that his name is on the letters sent out by the oil company of which Judson was president. Claymore is the secretary of the concern, I believe."

"But you hadn't met him before?"

"No; and I didn't hear his name till late in the day, and even then I didn't connect him with the company, though I remember wondering a little how he knew so much about poor Judson. You see, I was terribly excited."

"No wonder."

"It worries me a great deal," continued Folsom, "to think that my angry words might have led Judson to suicide. He meant well, I am sure of that, and he was deceived by the rascals as much as the rest of us."

"Hum!" murmured Nick; "seems to me that's setting Claymore out in rather a black light."

"Yes, it is. I hadn't given it much thought, for my attention was taken up with the death of Judson, but I have no doubt that Claymore is crooked. A dishonest promoter, you know. One of these fellows who knows[143] how to swindle and keep on the right side of the law. Don't you think so?"

"Maybe."

Folsom looked as if he wished that Nick would say more, but the detective was silent.

Shortly after this, a waiter came to the room to say that a telegraph messenger wished to see Mr. Kerr.

"Send him up at once!" exclaimed Kerr.

The boy came in with his book.

"Boss said you wanted to see it," said he, laying it on the table, and going out again at once.

Kerr opened the book with great eagerness.

After looking down the columns of names and time marks until he came to the one he wanted, his eyes glowed with delight, and he passed the book to Nick, with his finger on a certain line where the hotel clerk's name was written.

"There!" he cried, triumphantly; "see that?"

Nick looked.

He saw the clerk's name in one column, and against it in another column the figures, "3-31."

"You see!" added Kerr, too excited to wait for Nick's opinion, "Hank Low did it."

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"I see," responded Nick, slowly, "that Hank Low could have done it."

The reply disappointed Kerr.

He began to argue, but Nick interrupted.

"Excuse me a moment, gentlemen," he said.

He arose and looked at Patsy.

They withdrew to a corner of the room, and whispered together a moment.

Then Patsy went out.

Nick returned to the table.

"Excuse me," said Nick, again. "I don't mean to interfere with your handling of the case, Mr. Kerr——"

"Oh! bless you!" exclaimed Kerr, "that's what we all want. You do just what you think best, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you. I was going to say that I had forgotten something and sent my assistant out to look after it. Now, as to this time mark, it is very important. I can see that."

"Of course," said Kerr, encouraged by the great detective's tone. "The testimony of the clerk cannot be doubted. Here is the sure testimony that Hank Low started for Judson's room four minutes before the man fell from his window. It is known that Low left the[145] hotel and drove away just before word was brought in that the man had fallen out. See?"

"Yes."

"Then do you think we ought to lose any time before arresting Low?"

"Do you say that he lives some eight miles from here?"

"Yes—about eight."

"If he's running away, he's got a pretty good start."

"All the more reason why we should get after him at once. I declare, I wish I had run out there and hauled him in before you came."

"That might have been a good idea, but I don't believe there's any use in hurrying now."

Neither Kerr nor Folsom could understand Nick's delay.

The fact was he was waiting for Patsy.

He kept them talking for several minutes, and then Patsy returned.

"Speak out," said Nick. "I want these gentlemen to hear what you have to report."

"Well," said Patsy, "Claymore was in his office all the time from one o'clock to ten minutes of four, when a messenger came to tell him of Judson's death."

[146]

CHAPTER XII. THE JOURNEY TO HANK LOW'S.

Kerr and Folsom stared at each other and at Nick.

They were no fools.

It was clear enough what Patsy's errand meant.

"Then," said Folsom, in a low voice, "you suspected Claymore?"

"Oh, no, not exactly," Nick replied, "but I thought it would be just as well to make it impossible to suspect him. That was all."

This remark did not convince either of the men.

"You wouldn't have gone to this trouble," said Folsom, "if you hadn't believed that he had a motive for the crime."

"As to motive," replied Nick, "I can only guess, but if Claymore is crooked and Judson was straight, isn't it possible that Judson threatened an exposure, and that Claymore would try to prevent it?"

Kerr nodded.

"That's all right," he said, "but in the face of this evidence," and he tapped the messenger's book.

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"It looks very bad for Hank Low," admitted Nick.

"You think that Claymore set Low up to it?" remarked Folsom.

"Do I?" inquired Nick, mildly.

"Well," responded Folsom, "what are we to think?"

"Anything you please. I am willing to take hold of this case, but, as I start under unusual difficulties, I want you to let me go at it in my own way."

"Certainly, Mr. Carter," said Kerr; "but I don't see the difficulties with all this evidence —"

Nick raised his hand.

"You've done first-rate work, Mr. Kerr," he said. "The evidence is sound as far as it goes. But it don't go quite far enough. The difficulties I refer to are the fact that so many men know that I am here, and that the only man who can say that Judson was murdered is dead."

"I see."

It was Kerr who spoke.

Folsom turned pale.

"You think, then," he said, hoarsely, "that it was not a case of murder at all?"

"I didn't say so," responded Nick; "but this I will say, for, as I am in it now pretty deep, there's no use in concealing[148] my thoughts from you two—but you mustn't let it go any further."

"Certainly not, Mr. Carter."

"Well, then, I don't believe that Hank Low did it."

Both Kerr and Folsom stared open-mouthed.

"By thunder!" said Kerr, slowly, "if any man but Nick Carter said that——"

He hesitated.

"You'd say he was a fool," remarked Nick.

Kerr laughed uneasily.

"I am afraid I should," he admitted.

"That's all right," said Nick; "you can think that of me just as well as not, if you want to. Meantime, I'll go out and get acquainted with Hank Low."

"To-night?"

"Now."

"Won't you want help?"

"Oh, no. If I don't come back with him as a voluntary prisoner, Mr. Kerr, I'll help you arrest him in the morning and give you all the credit."

"Credit be hanged, Mr. Carter! I'm not a jealous idiot."

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"Glad to hear you say so. You will lie low, then, till you hear from me again?"

"Yes, but if it was any other man——"

"You'd lock him up as a dangerous lunatic. I know. If I'm mistaken, I'll own up frankly. Now, tell me the way to Mason Creek."

Kerr told him and advised him where to get a horse.

"It seems to me," said Nick, "you've described a roundabout way."

"Yes, the road runs along a crooked valley, and around the base of a big hill. If it was daylight, I might tell you of a short cut over the hill, but you wouldn't be able to keep to the trail in the dark, to say nothing of the fact that the woods on the hill are not safe just now."

"Not safe?"

"No. There's a scare about panthers out that way."

"Ah! I shall have to keep my revolver handy."

"It will be as well, but, of course, you'll stick to the road?"

"Yes, though you might tell me where the trail strikes off."

"It's about four miles from here. You pass a perfectly bare ledge a hundred yards long at your right, and then[150] come to a stream. Instead of crossing the bridge, you can follow up the stream. In the daytime, it's plain enough, and not a bad ride for a good horse."

"All right."

Nick then gave some private instructions to Patsy, and left them.

He went to the stable that Kerr had spoken of and hired a horse.

It was about eight in the evening when he galloped away, and at that hour it was quite dark.

The road took him quickly out of the city, and he was soon in a wild country, where it would have been easy to imagine that there wasn't a town within a hundred miles.

The sky was clear, but the moon had not yet risen.

Nick did not ride hard, for he felt in no hurry.

It was somewhat less than half an hour after he started when he noticed a long, high ledge at his right.

"Probably the place Kerr spoke of," he thought.

He was glancing up at it, when his horse suddenly leaped violently.

At the same instant there was a flash and a report from the bushes at the other side of the road.

Nick's hat flew from his head.

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It had been singed by a rifle bullet.

His hand caught his revolver, but before it was drawn, another shot came, and the horse staggered.

Nick slipped off quickly.

He ran a few paces and fell.

Then he lay still and watched.

The horse fell in earnest.

He was some two rods from the detective, and, as he did not struggle after he went down, Nick knew that he had been instantly killed.

Not another sound came from the bushes across the road.

"Confound them!" thought Nick, who was not scratched, except for the slight mark on his forehead. "Why don't they come out to make sure of their business?"

It was clearly a case of murder intended, for, if the unseen villains had been robbers they would have crept forward to go through the supposed dead man.

And, of course, it was plain that they knew whom they were firing at.

Nobody would have shot at a stranger like that.

[152]

"This," muttered Nick, "is what comes of starting on a case with a brass band at the head of the procession."

He meant by this that he believed the attempt to kill him was connected with the death of Judson.

"It's only too easy to see how it happened," he thought. "Everybody knew I was sent for, and there isn't a doubt that my arrival was spotted."

"Then it was easy to guess that I would go out to look up Hank Low, and, as this is the only way to his place, they were sure of having a shot at me."

Nick listened as he lay there, but could hear no sound of steps on the other side of the road.

The rushing of the stream a little beyond would have drowned ordinary noises, so that the would-be murderers could have got away without being noticed.

Apparently, that was what they did, for the detective neither heard nor saw them.

He could only guess whether they believed that their shots had done their work.

While he was waiting the moon rose.

As the sky was perfectly clear the land became almost as light as day.

Nick at last got up cautiously and went to his horse.

[153]

The animal had fallen at the side of the road, and so was out of the way of anyone passing.

Nick took off the saddle and bridle and hid them in the bushes near.

"I'll pay for the horse," he thought, "but there's no sense in giving the saddle to the first thief who comes along."

He went back to the spot from which the shots had been fired, and lit up the place with his pocket lantern.

If the scoundrels had accidentally dropped anything that could serve as a clew, the detective would have found it.

Nothing was there that could be of any use to him.

He saw traces of footprints on the grass and leaves, but they were too faint to be measured.

Having satisfied himself on this matter, Nick started on foot to finish his journey.

When he came to the stream, he did not cross the bridge, but turned into the trail that Kerr had told him about.

The moon made the path perfectly plain at the start, and Nick took it, not only to save the long walk around the base of the hill, but to save time.

[154]

For some reasons, he would have liked to go straight back to Denver.

There was no doubt in his mind that his would-be murderers had gone to the city.

If he was there, he might run across them.

But he believed it to be his first business to have a talk with Hank Low, and so he went on.

The trail followed along the bank of the stream for some distance, and then crossed it on a bridge of fallen trees.

After that, it was very steep until it reached the summit of the hill.

Although the trees were rather thick, the moonlight came in on the eastern slope sufficiently to make the way clear.

It was different when Nick began to descend upon the other side.

That slope was in shadow, for the moon was not high enough to light it, and more than once he found it difficult to keep on the path.

Once he thought he had lost it, and he was thinking that it would make him feel rather foolish to get lost at night in these woods.

[155]

"Better have kept to the road," he muttered, standing still.

There was a very steep descent just before him.

He could see hardly anything, but he felt that the ground was dipping sharply.

At the left there was a ridge of bare rock, and it seemed that the trail led along the underside of it.

"This must be right," he argued to himself. "By daylight a horse would get down here easily enough. It's the right general direction, anyway, and I'll chance it."

Putting his hands on the bare rock at his left to steady himself, he went slowly down.

It was not a high ledge, and he had come, as he thought, about to the bottom, when there was a slight noise behind and almost overhead that startled him.

His revolver was in his hand instantly.

There was a blinding flash not ten feet in front of him and a deafening report.

Swish! went a bullet past his face.

Then there was a blood-curdling scream in the air above, and the detective fell flat under a heavy body.

[156]

CHAPTER XIII. AN ARREST.

Nick's breath was knocked out of him, but he was not stunned.

He knew partly what had happened.

It was a wild beast that had borne him to the ground.

Kerr's remarks about the "panther scare" flashed upon his memory.

Evidently, this beast had sprung upon him from the top of the ledge.

He could feel the great limbs quivering, and one of the claws scratched his hand.

All this was in a quarter of a second.

In the next second, Nick had exerted all his giant strength, and rolled the beast over.

He got upon his knees and fired his revolver three times in rapid succession at the huge carcass that he could feel but not see in front of him.

Then a rough, surprised voice interrupted him.

"Geewhilikins! how many of 'em be ye, anyway?"

"Only one, stranger," replied Nick, getting to his feet.

[157]

"Gosh! I thought it mought be a regiment by the way ye fired. Got a double-quick action repeater, ain't ye?"

Nick did not reply at once.

The beast was still clawing the ground frantically, and he was not sure that another dose of lead was not necessary.

Then a little flame glowed in the darkness near by.

The man who had spoken to him had struck a match.

He held it first over the dying panther, for such it was, and then remarked, in a satisfied tone:

"Done for. Four times dead, I reckon."

Then he took a step forward and held the match close to Nick's face.

The men looked at each other in silence for a moment.

Nick saw a surprised, honest-looking face—that of a hardy backwoodsman—and he caught a glimpse of the rifle that the man held loosely in the hollow of his arm.

The backwoodsman saw a well-dressed tenderfoot, whose coat was torn by the panther's claw, whose face was grimed with dirt and smeared with blood.

"By golly, stranger," said the backwoodsman, "you're not jest fit to enter a beauty show—not but what ye may be a slick-lookin' chap when yer face is washed."

[158]

The detective laughed heartily.

"I reckon, pard," he said, "that you saved my life."

"Reckon I did," returned the other, quietly, "but I come close to killin' you to do it."

"I felt your bullet hiss past my face."

"So? Should ha' thought that mought have scared ye to death."

"Oh, no, I'm used to that."

"You don't say!"

"But I'm not used to enemies that spring on a man in the dark without making any noise of warning. That's what the panther did."

"Yes, he'd ha' had ye, sure, ef I hadn't been here to fire."

"It was good luck."

"Wal, I dunno about the luck of it. I was here on purpose. Been a-lookin' fer that critter."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; the pesky varmint has been worryin' the life out of us, and to-night I jest made up my mind that I'd get him. I was pretty durn certain he'd be on the trail somewhere, fer there's enough as comes over it, you know, to give the scent. I thought he'd be watchin' fer prey, but[159] I didn't have no idee that he'd git a chance at any. That's whar I'm s'prised. How come ye here, stranger?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," Nick answered; "just explain to me first how you managed to take that shot in time. I heard the beast springing just as you fired."

"Why!" said the backwoodsman, "I was waitin' here, hopin' the scent of me would bring the varmint along, and, of course, I wasn't makin' no noise about it."

"Then I heard steps—your'n, you know—and I was wondering about it as you come down the steep part of the trail."

"Ef you look up at the top of the ledge thar you'll see that the risin' moon makes the top line quite clear."

"Wal, I had my gun up, fer I didn't know but what you might be an enemy, when, all of a suddent, I saw a black mass on the clear edge of the rock up thar."

"I knowed what it was, and the thing jumped."

"Thar wasn't no time to think about it."

"I knowed the critter had spied you, and was springin' fer ye, and I had to fire then, or not at all.

"So I blazed while the beast was in the air.

"It was too late to save you from a knock down, but the critter was dead when he hit you. Them shots of [160] yours was mighty slick ones, comin' as fast as they did, just as ef you was out practicin' at a target, but they was good powder and lead throwed away."

"I can spare the powder and lead," Nick responded, "and at the time I couldn't believe that the panther had been hit in the heart. He was making a furious struggle."

"Yes," drawled the backwoodsman, "it takes them critters some time to die. But how'd you come here?"

"I was going along the road on horseback when the animal died suddenly."

"Died!"

"Shot."

"Gosh!"

"It was meant for me."

"Huh! Robbers?"

"Perhaps, but they let me alone."

"Mebbe they knowed you was handy with a gun?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Anyhow, I had business out this way, so I came along. I took the trail to save time."

"So! Business out here, you say."

"Yes. I'm looking for Hank Low's place. I presume it's not much further, is it?"

[161]

"Hank Low's! No, it ain't much further—'bout two gunshots."

There was surprise and suspicion in the man's tone.

"This trail will bring me there, I suppose," said Nick.

"Twill if ye follow it far enough."

"Then I shall have to go on. I'm much obliged——"

"Hold on, stranger! What's yer business with Hank Low?"

"I'll tell that to Low."

"Then you can tell it to me."

"Why, are you——"

"Yes, I am. My name's Hank Low."

Nick had guessed as much.

He held out his hand in the darkness and grasped that of the man who had saved his life.

Low returned the grasp rather feebly.

"Mr. Low," said Nick, "I am more obliged to you than ever."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Low, in a surly tone.

"I want to talk to you about the land you sold some months ago."

"Do you belong to the company that bought it?"

[162]

The question came quickly, and Low's voice was harsh.

There was no longer the good-natured tone in which he had spoken while talking about the panther.

"No," replied Nick, "I haven't anything to do with the company. I heard you were swindled."

"That was it, stranger!" cried Low; "nothing short of it. People say I was beat in a business deal, but I'm tellin' ye it wasn't a squar' deal."

"I'd like to know all about it."

"What's yer name?"

"Nicholas."

"Be you a lawyer?"

"Not exactly, but I may be able to set you right in some ways that you may not have thought of."

"Wal, Mr. Nicholas, come down to the house. I've got nothin' to hold back, and ef you're interested, you can hear the whole story."

Low talked as they walked along through the woods.

His voice continued to be harsh, as he told of the trick that had been played upon him, but Nick saw that Claymore had kept well within the law.

"It wasn't fair," thought the detective, "but it was what[163] would be called a business deal, and Low was beaten. No wonder he feels sore, but he can't do anything about it."

Of course, Low mentioned the Rev. Elijah Judson in the course of his story.

His voice was more angry at this point.

"I can't understand an out-an'-out villain," said he, "but it seems a durned sight worse when a preacher takes to swindling, now don't it, Mr. Nicholas?"

"I should say so," replied Nick, "if I was sure that the preacher had known that the scheme was unfair."

"Know! How could he help it? Ain't he president of the company?"

"He was."

"Was? Ef he ain't now, then thar's been a mighty sudden change. Will ye come into the house, Mr. Nicholas?"

They had come to cleared land at the bottom of the hill, and Low's house was plainly seen in the moonlight a few rods away.

None of the windows were lighted.

"No," said Nick; "your wife and children are asleep by this time, and we might wake them up. We can talk out here just as well, can't we?"

[164]

"Sure."

They sat down on a log near a shallow brook that crossed the farm.

The moon rays reflected from the water straight into Nick's eyes, and his attention was curiously attracted.

"Must be handy having running water on your place," he remarked.

"Huh!" returned Low, "that's whar you reckon wrong. I thought so when I took this land, and I found out my mistake too late."

"What's the matter?"

"Durned ef I know. The cattle won't drink it, and I don't like the taste myself. I've had to dig a well up on the hill thar and run the water to my house and barn through pipes. That cost a good bit, but it was the only way I could get water that would do."

They were silent for a moment. Then Low said:

"I seen that cuss, Judson, to-day."

"So?"

"Yes. He was up here with Claymore in the early morning. I met 'em and we had a jawin' match. I spoke pretty hot, I reckon, but I can't help it when I think how I've been used. Thar's my wife and children, you see.[165] I never have been able to give them the nice things I'd like to. Ef they had let me in on the deal I mought ha' got money enough to dress my children right smart and send them to school in the city."

"What should you say," suggested Nick, "if you heard that the company had got left in buying your land."

"Eh? Got left? What do you mean?"

"Suppose that, after all, the land proves to be as worthless as you thought?"

"B'gosh! 'twould serve 'em right."

"I guess that's the case."

"Wal, I'm durn glad to hear it, but it don't make me feel any better toward those swindlers. I kind o' thought the preacher chap wanted to squar' things, but I found I was mistaken."

"So? How was that?"

"He met me again in the city, and asked me to call on him at the hotel. Reckon he had some new, slick scheme up his sleeve."

"Did you call on him?"

"Yep."

"Well?"

"He wouldn't see me."

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"That's odd."

"I thought so at the time. I told him I'd be there at half-past three, and he said he'd wait for me. I was there on time, and I went right up to his room."

"What did he say?"

"Say? He didn't say nothin'. I didn't see him. He wouldn't let me in."

"Did he know you were there?"

"Sure! I knocked, and heard somebody stirrin' in the room. I'm sure of that. So, when he didn't say 'Come in,' I knocked again. 'It's Hank Low,' says I, loud and sharp. 'Ef you want to see me, speak up quick, fer I ain't got any time to waste on ye.'

"Thar wa'n't no answer to that, so I sung out that he was off, and I waltzed downstairs fast.

"I was kind o' 'fraid he might call me back, and I didn't want to hear him, for I was as mad as a hornet, and I was afraid that ef him and me got together thar'd be trouble."

"Did you leave the hotel at once?"

"Yep. Drove straight home and didn't see him then, nor since."

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"Did you notice any excitement around the hotel as you drove away?"

"Excitement? Reckon not. A feller I know spoke to me, but I was too durn mad to answer him decent."

"But didn't you notice anything else?"

Low thought a moment.

"Now I think of it," he said, "I do remember seein' two or three men runnin' down the street at the side of the hotel, but I was so durn mad that I didn't turn my head. The hull town mought ha' been on fire fer all I cared. I was thinkin' of how I'd been cheated."

"I understand."

If Nick had had any doubt of this man's innocence it was all gone now.

Low was no actor; just a plain, honest farmer—bullheaded, quick-tempered and unreasonable, perhaps, but no murderer.

He couldn't have told his story of the afternoon in that straightforward way, if he had been guilty.

"Mr. Low," said Nick, after a pause, "Judson is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the farmer, in a tone that showed the greatest surprise. "How long since, Mr. Nicholas?"

"He died while you were at the door to his room."

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"You don't mean it!"

"He was murdered."

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"Thrown from his window to the sidewalk."

"Good Lord! Then that was what those men were runnin' for."

"Yes—they went to pick him up."

The farmer sat with his elbows on his knees, staring open-mouthed at Nick.

"That's awful, ain't it?" he whispered.

"It is," said Nick, "and there's something else that is still more awful."

He paused, but Low said nothing.

"It is perfectly well known," Nick added, "that you started up to Judson's room just before the deed."

Low became very attentive, but it was plain that the truth was not dawning on him yet.

"And that you came down again in a hurry," added the detective, "immediately afterward. It is also well known that you threatened Mr. Judson——"

This was enough.

The light burst upon the honest farmer suddenly.

[169]

In the moonlight, his face was ghastly white, and his voice almost choked, as he said:

"Mr. Nicholas, you don't mean to set thar an' tell me thar's folks as say I done it?"

"That is what they say," returned Nick, quietly.

Low groaned, and buried his face in his hands.

"My wife has often told me," he sobbed, "that that sharp tongue of mine would git me into trouble. I see! It all fits in like the handle into an ax."

"Listen," said Nick. "There isn't going to be as much trouble as you think for. I told you that I was not a lawyer, but that I might be able to help you. I am a detective, Mr. Low."

The farmer uncovered his face and looked frightened now.

"I said my name was Nicholas," the detective went on, "and that was the truth, but only a part of it. My last name is Carter."

Low started.

"From New York?" he gasped.

"Yes."

The farmer shook from head to toes. He laid his trembling hands on Nick's arm, and began:

[170]

"Mr. Carter, I've hearn tell of you, that you're keen and hard when it comes to criminals, but you're straight with innocent men. I swear——"

"You don't need to," interrupted Nick; "you are as innocent as I am, and I know it. I believed it when I started out to see you, but I am going to arrest you for murder, nevertheless."

"Mr. Carter! I don't understand! What will my poor wife say?"

"You needn't let her know. I want you to understand, though. Suspicion has been put on you by an enemy of yours. Now, if I lock you up over night, it will make this enemy

believe that I have finished my work. See?"

"You want to blind him?"

"Yes. Then I can hunt for the real murderer in my own way."

"All right, Mr. Carter."

Low was perfectly quiet. He did not talk or act like the hot-tempered man who had threatened Mr. Judson.

"You can tell your wife," said Nick, "that a man wants you to go to the city on business about the land deal. Let her think that some good luck has come your way. I[171] don't think you'll have to disappoint her afterward. Then hitch up your horse, and we'll go back together."

Low agreed to this without argument. He went into the house and was gone several minutes. Then he went into the barn and hitched up. A little later, he and the detective were jogging over the road toward Denver.

[172]

CHAPTER XIV. SNAPPED.

Kerr was at police headquarters when Nick arrived with his prisoner.

His eyes glowed triumphantly when he saw them come in.

"You got him?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Nick, "he surrendered when I told him how strong the evidence was against him."

"I wonder he hadn't run away."

"Well, you see, he didn't know that a messenger had come in with a telegram just ahead of him."

Kerr chuckled.

"This will be a great story for the newspaper fellows," he said. "They've been here all the evening till about half an hour ago. I told them to come back later."

Nick looked thoughtful.

He wondered if it would be necessary to give the honest farmer the shame of having it printed that he had been arrested for murder.

[173]

"I suppose the newspaper boys know that I am on the case," said Nick.

"Oh, yes—everybody knows it."

"But they don't know that I went to Mason Creek?"

"Well, I reckon they've guessed it. Newspaper reporters are good at that, you know."

"Do they know that Low was under suspicion?"

"Sure! They got that from the hotel clerk."

"Humph!"

Nick was a little disgusted.

When he handled a case in his own way, hotel clerks and others were not allowed to tell what they knew, and he took pains that nobody should know too much, anyway, until he got ready to tell them.

"See here, Kerr," he said, earnestly, "I'd hold the reporters off for a time, if I were in your place."

Kerr glanced at the clock.

It was not far from midnight.

"They'll be hungry for news pretty soon," said he.

"And perhaps I can give them a little more, and a better story, if they wait a bit."

"Why—"

"Low isn't the only one."

[174]

"Ah!"

"I want to consult with my assistant before telling about this arrest."

"You have a clew that you haven't spoken of, then?"

"Maybe. Just lock Low up without putting anything on the blotter for a little while. Give me an hour to see what I can do."

"All right, Mr. Carter, if you say so. But what shall I tell the reporters?"

"Nothing. I'll be back inside an hour."

Nick whispered a few words to Low, telling him to keep his courage up and his mouth shut, and went away.

He had asked Kerr to wait an hour, without any idea as to what he should or could do.

Nick felt that he had only got to the beginning of the case.

He was certain of Low's innocence, though he might not be able to convince a jury of it.

It was necessary, then, to find the proof of Low's innocence, as well as proof that somebody else was guilty.

Who that somebody else was, he could not guess.

He still thought of Claymore, in spite of the alibi that Patsy had found to be sound.

[175]

Claymore evidently had not committed the murder, but that he knew more than he had told, Nick was certain.

Could any evidence be got in an hour that would save Low from being published in the papers as a suspected murderer?

Low's horse and wagon were at the door of the station.

Nick got in and drove to the stable where he had hired a horse.

There he explained what had happened to the horse, paid the damage, and returned the saddle and bridle that he had picked up on the way back with his prisoner.

Then he went to the hotel in the hope of finding Patsy.

He made the round of the rooms on the ground floor without finding him.

As he was passing the desk, the clerk spoke to him.

"Excuse me," said he, "but aren't you Mr. Carter?"

"I am," said Nick.

"There's a young man waiting here to see you. Your assistant told me to point him out to you as soon as you came in."

[176]

"Where is he?"

"That man sitting near the door with a parcel in his hands."

Nick went up to the young man.

"Are you waiting for Mr. Carter?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the young man, rising.

"I am he."

"Oh! well, sir, I understand you are working on the Judson matter. The man who is supposed to have committed suicide."

"I have been looking into it a little."

"Well, sir, I've got something here to show you. I showed it to your assistant, and he said it would interest you."

The young man went to undoing his parcel, and three or four idlers drew near.

"Wait," said Nick.

He led the young man to the desk and asked for a room.

Shortly afterward, they were in a room alone, and Nick took the parcel.

Unfolding the paper with which it was wrapped, he found a photograph.

[177]

It was a clean-cut picture of the Rev. Mr. Judson's fall from the hotel window.

Nick looked earnestly at the picture.

"How did you happen to get this?" he asked.

"I am an amateur photographer," was the reply. "I work in the office at the top of the building just across the Street from the hotel. Yesterday I got hold of some new plates that a friend had advised me to use, but I had no time to try them till this afternoon."

"And you tried them on this scene?" asked Nick, quickly.

"Without meaning to, yes. You see, I knew it would be Sunday before I would have time to take any pictures that I cared about, but I wanted to be sure that the plates were all right.

"So, when there was a dull time in the office work, I got out my camera, which I had with me, and went to the window.

"There isn't much of a view from here, but I thought I'd take a couple of shots at the roofs, just to test the plates.

"I had the camera all ready, when I accidentally touched the button.

[178]

"That made me hot, for I had spoiled a plate.

"I pointed it carefully from the best view I could get from there, and tried again.

"Just as I pushed the button, I heard cries on the street, and, looking down, saw a man lying on the sidewalk, and several others running toward him.

"Of course, I went down to see what was the matter.

"It was Mr. Judson.

"Later I went back, and as soon as possible after supper, while there was yet sunlight, I developed my second plate.

"I didn't bring that with me, for it wouldn't interest you. But it came out so good that I thought I might as well see what I had caught on the first plate, when the thing went off before I knew.

"That picture in your hand was what I caught."

He paused, but Nick said nothing, and the young man added:

"I had heard your name mentioned in connection with the matter, and, as people said it was a case of suicide, I thought I ought to show you what I had caught."

Nick drew a long breath.

"Well!" he said, "for once the brass band has been[179] useful. I wanted to work unknown, but the fact that I am known to be on the case has brought me a piece of evidence that otherwise I might never have discovered."

Again he looked at the picture.

"This lets Low out of it," he murmured.

Kerr's theory was that Low had made a mad rush for the clergyman as soon as he entered the room, pushed him from the window, and then hurried out and down the stairs.

The amateur photograph showed not only the unfortunate clergyman falling headforemost toward the sidewalk, but above him the forms of two men at the window.

They were not looking out, but rather in the act of dodging back.

These two were outlined very dimly, but the picture was clear enough to show that there were two of them, and that their arms were half-raised, as would be natural if they had just thrown a body away from them.

Unluckily, the faces were not at all distinct.

Try as he would, and Nick used his magnifying glass, he could not make them out to his satisfaction.

While he was still studying it, there came a knock at the door, and Patsy hurried in.

[180]

"The clerk told me you were here?" he said. "Well?"

"It's a good piece of evidence," responded Nick; "if only this young man had had a little more luck! We could get along without the picture of Judson if we only had a clean-cut picture of the two murderers."

"That's all right," said Patsy, confidently, "I know who they are."

Nick looked quickly at his assistant.

Then he turned to the photographer.

"Will you leave this with us?" he asked. "I shall see that you are well paid for it."

"Oh! I don't care for any pay," replied the young man. "I shall be glad if it helps you. Good-night."

He left them, and Patsy made his report.

"I laid for Claymore, as you told me," he said, "and after chasing him around town for a while, I found at last that he had gone to the office of the oil company. He spent the whole evening there."

"Well?"

"There was nothing for me to do but stay around. I was pretty sure that any attempt to find out what Claymore was doing would make him suspicious. So I didn't[181] go into the building even, but stayed outside on the other side of the street.

"It was a dull wait till a while ago.

"Then something happened.

"A man came hurrying up the street and another man after him. I thought I had seen them both before somewhere, from their motions, but I couldn't see their faces in the dark. I suppose I wouldn't have bothered to get a closer look, if they hadn't stopped right in the entrance to the building where Claymore has his office.

"That interested me, and I crossed over.

"One man was holding the other back.

"'Tain't safe to wait any longer,' said the one who got there first.

"'And it ain't half so safe to try to see him here,' the other answered. 'Don't be a fool! You see, his windows are still lighted, and he's busy. When he gets through, he'll come, as he said he would. Let him alone now and come back.'

"They talked a little more back and forth, and finally the second man got the first one to go away.

"I didn't know then what they were talking about, and[182] I don't know now, but I dropped Claymore for a time and followed those two men."

"Why?" asked Nick.

"Because I knew them. One was Nat Hamilton, the leader of the gang we had a tussle with in Helena, and the other was his right-hand man, Jack Thompson."

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CHAPTER XV. DADDY DREW'S DIVE.

"What! those two scoundrels!" cried Nick.

"Yes, you were right when you prophesied that we would come upon them again."

Nick looked suddenly at the picture.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I believe I know them now."

"I haven't a doubt of it," said Patsy, "but you couldn't swear to it to the satisfaction of a jury."

"True, and the jurymen could look at the picture for themselves, and see that the likenesses are not there. We've got to get more evidence than this, Patsy. Nobody saw them do the deed. This picture almost tells the story, but not quite. But go on. You must have more to tell."

"A little. I shadowed Hamilton and Thompson to a dive where you and I have been before—Daddy Drew's."

"Whew!" whistled Nick. "It means a fight with all the crooks in Denver, if we go there."

"Well, that's where they are, and they're waiting for Claymore."

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"All right. We'll go there and get them, then, if we decide we'd better arrest them. Is that all?"

"Not quite. Knowing they were there to stay, I ran back to Claymore's office. He had just put out his lights and was leaving the building.

"He went to police headquarters."

"Did you go in, too?"

"With a disguise, yes. I saw that Claymore had a private talk with Kerr. Then he went out again."

"How did he look?"

"Rocky, but he was saying, 'Very good,' and 'Quite right' to Kerr."

"That means that Kerr told him," said Nick.

"Told him what?" asked Patsy.

"What I have done. He shouldn't have said a word, but I can understand how he should make such a slip, for Claymore was the first to direct suspicion at Hank Low. What became of Claymore?"

"He went home. He lives in a boarding house——"

"We must have him! Come on!"

They left the hotel together hurriedly.

* * * * *

In a corner of Daddy Drew's dive—the worst place in [185] Denver—sat the two men who had escaped from Nick Carter in Helena a short time before.

They had liquor in front of them, but they drank little.

Every time the door opened to admit a newcomer, they looked that way eagerly.

The place was pretty well filled.

All the scum of the city seemed to drift in there, for it was known that once inside the doors a man need not leave until morning.

Daddy let his customers sleep on the floor, if they had nowhere else to go.

At last it was closing hour.

The doors were locked, and the curtains pulled tightly across the windows.

Jack Thompson muttered an oath.

"He's going to bilk us," he muttered.

"Not him," responded Hamilton. "Wait, I tell you. The night's young yet. He can't afford to bilk us, don't you see?"

"No, I don't. He might skip——"

"But he's not suspected! He's got every reason to stay, for here is where the money is. He'll get around before the night is over."

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"I hope he brings his wad with him."

"He will."

They were silent for a moment, and then Jack muttered:

"I'd have liked it better if he'd paid us for the other job and not asked us to tackle the detective."

"Pooh! what scares you so?"

"Nick Carter. Ain't that enough?"

"Nick Carter is dead."

"Do you believe it, Nat?"

"I'm going to tell Claymore so."

Jack shuddered.

"I see you don't believe it," he said; "But I hope Claymore comes along and believes it. Then he'll pay us, and we can skip before the cuss comes to life."

Nat Hamilton smiled.

"He won't come to life if he's dead," he remarked, coolly, "any more than the preacher chap will."

"Ugh!" grunted Jack, and they were silent again.

Not less than thirty men were in the place.

They were fairly quiet, for they knew that loud noise might bring the police down on the dive, and then their night's shelter would be closed up.

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But they were a tough lot, and every man of them would have joined in to help anybody there if a policeman, or a dozen of them, had come in to make an arrest.

This was so well known that the police usually waited for their men to come out before trying to arrest them.

There hadn't been a murder in Daddy Drew's for a long time, and a tough present on this night remarked to another that one was about due.

A few minutes after twelve, there was a light knock at the door.

The bartender, who went to it and looked through a slide, came back to Nat.

"Feller out there askin' fer youse," he said.

Both men got up, but Nat pushed Jack back into his chair.

"I'll see who 'tis," he said.

He went to the door and looked through the slide.

Claymore's face appeared there as if it were a picture in a frame.

"He's all right," said Nat to the bartender; "friend o' mine. Let him in."

The door was opened, and Nat's friend came in.

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As he went to the back of the room silently with Nat, many curious glances were cast at him.

"Who is he?" asked one of another.

And those who answered came pretty near to guessing the truth.

"Some fellow," said they, "who gets others to do his work for him."

Two or three knew Claymore by sight, and they were not surprised.

"Well?" said the newcomer, when he sat down at the table in the corner, and three heads were put close together.

"We done it," said Nat.

"Sure?"

"He's dead as a nail."

There was a short pause. Then, in a low voice:

"You lie, Nat."

Both the criminals started angrily, but they gritted their teeth and looked at the man, who added:

"He's just as alive as I am. Less than an hour ago he brought Hank Low in on a charge of murder."

"Then," exclaimed Jack; "it's all right, ain't it?"

"No! it isn't all right. Carter believes that Low is innocent,[189] and he has arrested him for a bluff. He knows that you did it."

Jack turned ghastly pale.

Nat looked as if he didn't believe it.

"He can't have any evidence against us," said he.

"He'll get it. You know Nick Carter."

"But how can he get it? Nobody saw us."

"Somebody must have seen you enter the hotel."

"No," said Nat, positively; "I swear, Claymore, we got in without being seen."

"You haven't told me how you managed that."

"No, for you sent us down the road on the chance of a pot shot at the detective. I'll tell you. There's an office building next to the hotel, you know, with an alley between."

"Yes."

"We went in there and found an empty room. It was easy enough to pick the lock and get in. Then we found that a short board would reach from the window to an open window in the hotel. Jack went out and swiped a board from the place where they're putting up a new building. At twenty-five minutes past three we put the[190] board out, crawled across and got to the preacher's room without meeting anybody."

"And left the board there?"

"Not on your life!" replied Nat. "We took the board in and hid it in a closet until we had tumbled the preacher out of the window. Then we slipped back, returned to the office building by the same way, and so went down to the street."

"And left the board——"

"Of course! We weren't going to lug it around in daylight. What harm could it do in an empty room?"

"Oh, no harm, of course," very sarcastically. "Nobody would find it, and wonder about it; oh, no!"

"What do you mean, Claymore?"

"I mean this: Nick Carter has that infernally sharp Patsy along with him. I believe you know Patsy."

"Yes, confound him!"

"So I say! but while Nick went out to get Low, Patsy was nosing around town. He probably found that board; he probably saw you two fellows, and knew you; then he put two and two together, and the long and short of it is that Carter is after you."

"We'll be hanged, sure!" groaned Jack.

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"There's only one way out of it, boys."

"Well?"

"Carter will come here to a dead certainty. He knows the town, and knows that this is the place where you would most likely hang out. He'll come here."

"Then he'll get a warm time of it," said Nat.

"If you think so, stay. But you know the Carters. If you want a chance to escape, take it now. There's a train for San Francisco runs through here in half an hour. You can catch it."

"Come on," said Jack, rising.

"Hold on a bit," said Nat. "Who pays the freight? We haven't had our money yet."

"I've got it, but I'll be hanged myself if I pay you in here. Get out on the street. I'll go with you part way to the station, and settle with you."

"Don't wait," urged Jack.

"That's good advice. Carter may break in here any minute, or he may sneak in in disguise. That's his most likely way, and then you'll be nabbed before you know it."

Nat was rather pale now.

"I'll give him a fight for it, if he comes," he muttered, but he got up, and the three went out.

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When they were on the street Nat turned.

"Will you settle now?" he asked.

"Don't be in such a hurry," was the sharp reply. "Your only safety is to get away from this place. Walk along toward the railroad. I'll be close at your heels until I think it's safe to stop and settle."

Nat hesitated.

"Don't you dare to try to skip without paying!" he hissed, savagely.

"I'll settle with you both before you get to the station. Get a move on! Carter may be here the next second."

The crooks started away, looking back frequently to see that Claymore was following.

He kept about half a block behind them.

Nobody but themselves seemed to be on the streets.

There was a drunken man staggering along some distance ahead, but he didn't count.

He, too, disappeared around a corner before the crooks came to it.

When they were about to pass that corner a quiet voice behind them said:

"This will do. We'll settle here."

"All right," responded Nat.

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Both men halted and turned about.

They looked into the muzzles of two revolvers.

The face back of the hands that held the weapons was not that of their employer, Claymore, but that of their deadly enemy, Nick Carter.

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CHAPTER XVI. HANK LOW'S LUCK.

Claymore was not in his boarding house when Nick and Patsy arrived there.

He had come in and gone out shortly afterward.

Where he had gone, or in what direction, nobody could say.

Possibly to Daddy Drew's to meet the desperadoes he had hired to commit murder; but Nick didn't believe it.

"That long work in his office this evening means something else," said Nick. "He's got another plot up his sleeve. I'll go to Daddy Drew's and get those men."

Accordingly, he had turned his face into a copy of Claymore's and had been admitted easily.

Nat had said he would put up a stiff fight if he should meet Carter, and he kept his word.

Probably he reckoned that the detective would wish to take him alive, for he did not surrender when he saw the revolver pointed at his heart.

Instead, he made a quick rush at Nick, trying to knock up both his arms.

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The detective was quite ready for that.

It was true that he wished to take the men alive, and he did not fire.

He had hoped they would be scared into quiet surrender.

When the attack came, he dropped both weapons to the sidewalk.

Letting drive with his fists, he caught Nat on the chest, and knocked the wind out of him.

But the crook did not fall.

He staggered against Jack, who at first was going to give up.

Seeing that the weapons had been dropped, Jack joined in and made a desperate effort for freedom.

He caught his partner and kept him from falling.

Then both together sailed into the detective.

"Why!" said Nick, with a laugh, "come on, if that's what you want."

His arms shot out like lightning flashes, and every blow landed, but the crooks kept too close for him to give them settlers.

And, after a moment, Jack retreated and drew his revolver.

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That was a moment of peril for Nick, as he was busy just then with Nat.

And Nat, seeing the chance, pretended to be knocked down.

This was to give Jack a chance to shoot.

Up came the ruffian's revolver, but before he could aim, around the corner rushed the drunken man whom they had seen.

This man threw his arms about Jack's neck, and bore him silently to the ground.

"Put the bracelets on him, Patsy," called Nick.

"They're on," replied the "drunken man," calmly.

Nick had leaped upon Nat, and in a second had him ironed.

"This is the way I settle," he said, as he stood up.

The prisoners cursed furiously, but if that did them any good nobody knew it.

Nick picked up his revolvers, and then he and Patsy marched the prisoners to headquarters.

Kerr was still there, and he was surrounded by eager reporters.

"Here are the murderers," said Nick. "Low is innocent."

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He produced the amateur's photograph, and told the story as briefly as possible.

"The chief villain is yet to be caught," he concluded. "I think we shall find the clew to him in his office."

There was a great deal of excitement at headquarters, and many questions were asked.

Nick told the reporters to make it plain that Low's arrest had been a fake.

"When it's all settled," he said, "I'll give you the details, or you can get them from Kerr, who deserves a great deal of credit for the way he picked up evidence. I've got work ahead between now and morning."

Low was released, of course, and he went with Nick, Patsy and Kerr to Claymore's office.

Everything seemed to be in order there, but Nick picked the lock of Claymore's desk, and found a lot of papers there on which the man had been at work during the long evening.

There were maps of the country around Mason Creek, some printed, some roughly drawn with a pencil.

There was also the deed which Low had given to the oil company when he sold a piece of his land.

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Using his magnifying glass, Nick saw that some changes had been made in the deed.

Words and figures had been carefully scratched out and others inked in.

"I had an idea this was what he was up to," said Nick. "We shall find Claymore out at Low's farm."

The four men set out for Mason Creek soon after.

Nick went in Low's wagon, and Patsy and Kerr in one they hired.

When they came to the beginning of the trail, Nick got down and told the others to drive slowly on.

"I'll take the short cut," said he. "You keep on by the road, and if he escapes me he'll run into your hands."

As it was late in the spring, light came early.

The day was beginning to break when Nick passed the dead body of the panther.

As he approached nearer Low's house he moved cautiously.

Coming to the edge of the cleared land, he saw a man busy with a shovel at a little distance.

It was Claymore.

He was digging a hole for the purpose of setting a boundary post in it.

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The post had been taken up from a spot some distance farther down the stream that crossed the farm.

Claymore's scheme was to change the boundaries of the land bought by the oil company so that they should include twice as much as had been bought.

That was why the deed had been changed, and it explained the maps in Claymore's desk.

Nick watched the rascal for a few minutes, and then walked toward him.

"Why don't you put the post up where it will take in Hank Low's house and barn?" he asked.

Claymore turned at the sound, and caught up a revolver that was lying on the ground beside him.

He fired hastily, and the bullet went wild.

Nick had him covered.

"Try again," said the detective, "if you think you can do your own murdering."

As he spoke, he was advancing upon the man.

Claymore gave one desperate look around.

He saw two wagons coming up the road.

Then he dropped his weapon, sat down on the ground, and put his hands to his face.

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"You haven't as much nerve as I thought you had," remarked Nick.

He put handcuffs on the prisoner, and waited for the others to come up.

"I can tell you all about it," said Nick, then. "This man Claymore found that he had bought land where the oil was scarce. He was so anxious to get the land cheap that he didn't dare to prospect thoroughly. If he had done his work well, he would have seen that the place for oil wells is further up the stream and nearer Low's house.

"He found that out after a while, and then schemed to get possession of the rest of the farm without paying for it.

"Seeing that Judson would expose the crooked work of the company, he had him murdered by a couple of desperadoes who drifted into Denver just in time for the job.

"Then he did some forgery work on the deed to make it show that he had bought a good many acres more than he really had, and to back up the deed he had to come out here and change the boundary posts.

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"His best chance for doing that was while Low was locked up.

"That was why he didn't go to meet his confederates early at Daddy Drew's.

"His confederates have told me all about the murder of Judson, so that they are sure to be hanged, and one of them, Jack Thompson, is ready to confess and tell just how Claymore hired them to do the deed.

"Between Jack's confession and what I heard them say, we have got a complete case.

"If I was in Hank Low's place I'd give up farming on land where the water is covered with oil, and dig wells.

"I noticed the appearance of the water in the stream when I was talking with Low earlier in the night, and I knew that the place to dig for oil is near his house."

It was soon proved that Nick was entirely right.

The upper part of Low's farm was rich in oil.

The farmer acted more than honestly about it.

With the help of Folsom, who was greatly pleased to learn that the clergyman had not committed suicide, Low got the names and addresses of all who had put money into the scheme of which Judson had been president. And in[202] the end nobody who had invested with the clergyman lost anything.

No attempt was made to get back the part of the farm that was sold, for the land wasn't worth the trouble.

Jack Thompson confessed, but that did not save him from severe punishment. He was put in prison for life, and Claymore and Hamilton were hanged.

Nick Carter and his faithful assistant, Patsy, were content at last.

THE END.

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905—A Woman Without Mercy	By May Agnes Fleming
912—One Night's Mystery	By May Agnes Fleming
913—The Cost of a Lie	By May Agnes Fleming
920—Silent and True	By May Agnes Fleming
921—A Treasure Lost	By May Agnes Fleming
925—Forrest House	By Mary J. Holmes
926—He Loved Her Once	By Mary J. Holmes
930—Kate Danton	By May Agnes Fleming
931—Proud as a Queen	By May Agnes Fleming
935—Queenie Hetheron	By Mary J. Holmes
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945—Gretchen	By Mary J. Holmes
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954—Marguerite	By Mary J. Holmes
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1041—The Crime of Love	By Barbara Howard
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1051—If It Were True	By Wenona Gilman
1052—Vivian's Love Story	By Mrs. E. Burke Collins
1053—From Tears to Smiles	By Ida Reade Allen
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1056—The Strength of Love	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
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1058—The Stronger Passion	By Lillian R. Drayton
1059—What Love Can Cost	By Evelyn Malcolm
1060—At Another's Bidding	By Ida Reade Allen
1061—Above All Things	By Adelaide Stirling
1062—The Curse of Beauty	By Geraldine Fleming
1063—Her Sister's Secret	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1064—Married in Haste	By Wenona Gilman
1065—Fair Maid Marian	By Emma Garrison Jones
1066—No Man's Wife	By Ida Reade Allen
1067—A Sacrifice to Love	By Adelaide Stirling
1068—Her Fatal Gift	By Geraldine Fleming
1069—Her Life's Burden	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1070—Evelyn, the Actress	By Wenona Gilman
1071—Married for Money	By Lucy Randall Comfort
1072—A Lost Sweetheart	By Ida Reade Allen
1073—A Golden Sorrow	By Charlotte M. Stanley
1074—Her Heart's Challenge	By Barbara Howard
1075—His Willing Slave	By Lillian R. Drayton
1076—A Freak of Fate	By Emma Garrison Jones
1077—Her Punishment	By Laura Joan Libbey
1078—The Shadow Between Them	By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller
1079—No Time for Penitence	By Wenona Gilman
1080—Norma's Black Fortune	By Ida Reade Allen
1081—A Wilful Girl	By Lucy Randall Comfort

1082—Love's First Kiss	By Emma Garrison Jones
1083—Lola Dunbar's Crime	By Barbara Howard
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1085—Lynette's Wedding	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1086—A Fair Enchantress	By Ida Reade Allen
1087—The Tide of Fate	By Wenona Gilman
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1089—Hearts of Stone	By Geraldine Fleming
1090—In Love's Springtime	By Laura Jean Libbey
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1092—What Was She to Him?	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1093—For Another's Fault	By Charlotte M. Stanley
1094—Hearts and Dollars	By Ida Reade Allen
1095—A Wife's Triumph	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1096—A Bachelor Girl	By Lucy May Russell
1097—Love and Spite	By Adelaide Stirling
1098—Leola's Heart	By Charlotte M. Stanley
1099—The Power of Love	By Geraldine Fleming
1100—An Angel of Evil	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1101—True to His Bride	By Emma Garrison Jones
1102—The Lady of Beaufort Park	By Wenona Gilman
1103—A Daughter of Darkness	By Ida Reade Allen
1104—My Pretty Maid	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1105—Master of Her Fate	By Geraldine Fleming
1106—A Shadowed Happiness	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1107—John Elliott's Flirtation	By Lucy May Russell
1108—A Forgotten Love	By Adelaide Stirling
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1112—Mischievous Maid Faynie	By Laura Jean Libbey
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1114—Love's Clouded Dawn	By Wenona Gilman
1115—A Blue Grass Heroine	By Ida Reade Allen
1116—Only a Kiss	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1117—Virgie Talcott's Mission	By Lucy May Russell
1118—Her Evil Genius	By Adelaide Stirling
1119—In Love's Paradise	By Charlotte M. Stanley
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1121—Andrew Leicester's Love	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1122—Taken by Storm	By Emma Garrison Jones
1123—The Mills of the Gods	By Wenona Gilman

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1125—Loyal Unto Death	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
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1135—The Thorns of Love	By Evelyn Malcolm
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1137—Her Priceless Love	By Geraldine Fleming
1138—My Own Sweetheart	By Wenona Gilman
1139—Love's Harvest	By Adelaide Fox Robinson
1140—His Two Loves	By Ida Reade Allen
1141—The Love He Sought	By Lillian R. Drayton
1142—A Fateful Promise	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1143—Love Surely Triumphs	By Charlotte May Kingsley
1144—The Haunting Past	By Evelyn Malcolm
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1153—The Pride of My Heart	By Laura Jean Libbey
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1155—That Terrible Tomboy	By Geraldine Fleming
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1157—Her Fateful Choice	By Charlotte M. Stanley
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1164—Love Conquers Pride	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1165—His Unbounded Faith	By Charlotte M. Stanley

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1167—Stronger than Fate	By Emma Garrison Jones
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1169—Love's Young Dream	By Laura Jean Libbey
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1173—Could He Have Known	By Charlotte May Stanley
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1175—They Met By Chance	By Ida Reade Allen
1176—The Lovely Constance	By Laura Jean Libbey
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1183—Brave Barbara	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1184—Lady Gay's Martyrdom	By Charlotte May Kingsley
1185—Barriers of Stone	By Wenona Gilman
1186—A Useless Sacrifice	By Emma Garrison Jones
1187—When We Two Parted	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1188—Far Above Price	By Evelyn Malcolm
1189—In Love's Shadows	By Ida Reade Allen
1190—The Veiled Bride	By Laura Jean Libbey
1191—The Love Knot	By Charlotte May Kingsley
1192—She Scoffed at Love	By Mrs. E. Burke Collins
1193—Life's Richest Jewel	By Adelaide Fox Robinson
1194—A Barrier Between Them	By Evelyn Malcolm
1195—Too Quickly Judged	By Ida Reade Allen
1196—Lotta, the Cloak Model	By Laura Jean Libbey
1197—Loved at Last	By Geraldine Fleming
1198—They Looked and Loved	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1199—The Wiles of a Siren	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
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1201—Her Twentieth Guest	By Emma Garrison Jones
1202—From Dreams to Waking	By Charlotte M. Kingsley
1203—Sweet Kitty Clover	By Laura Jean Libbey
1204—Selina's Love Story	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1205—The Cost of Pride	By Lillian R. Drayton
1206—Love Is a Mystery	By Adelaide Fox Robinson
1207—When Love Speaks	By Evelyn Malcolm

1208—A Siren's Heart	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1209—Her Share of Sorrow	By Wenona Gilman
1210—The Other Girl's Lover	By Lillian R. Drayton
1211—The Fatal Kiss	By Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
1212—A Reckless Promise	By Emma Garrison Jones
1213—Without Name or Wealth	By Ida Reade Allen
1214—At Her Father's Bidding	By Geraldine Fleming
1215—The Heart of Hetta	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1216—A Dreadful Legacy	By Geraldine Fleming
1217—For Jack's Sake	By Emma Garrison Jones
1218—One Man's Evil	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1219—Through the Shadows	By Adelaide Fox Robinson
1220—The Stolen Bride	By Evelyn Malcolm
1221—When the Heart Hungers	By Charlotte M. Stanley
1222—The Love that Would Not Die	By Ida Reade Allen
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1230—Wedded for Wealth	By Lillian R. Drayton
1231—Only Love's Fancy	By Ida Reade Allen
1232—Alone with Her Sorrow	By Charlotte May Kingsley
1233—Her Life's Desire	By Mrs E. Burke Collins
1234—For Her Husband's Love	By Charlotte M. Stanley
1235—Bound by Gratitude	By Lillian R. Drayton
1236—A Splendid Man	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1237—The Vanished Heir	By Mrs E. Burke Collins
1238—Somebody Loves Me!	By Ida Reade Allen
1239—A Question of Honor	By Charlotte May Kingsley
1240—No Mother To Guide Her	By Mrs E. Burke Collins
1241—The Seed of Hate	By Evelyn Malcolm
1242—A Wife Yet No Wife	By Lillian R. Drayton

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To be published in July, 1927.

1243—One of Life's Roses	By Effie Adelaide Rowlands
1244—With Beauty Beaming	By Emma Garrison Jones

To be published in August, 1927.

1245—She Could Not Forsake Him By Grace Garland

1246—After She Promised By Adelaide Fox Robinson

To be published in September, 1927.

1247—Bewitched By Evelyn Malcolm

1248—His Love for Her By Geraldine Fleming

To be published in October, 1927.

1249—Between Love and Conscience By Charlotte M. Stanley

1250—The Web of Life By Ida Reade Allen

1251—Love's Bitter Harvest By Effie Adelaide Rowlands

To be published in November, 1927.

1252—Just for a Title By Emma Garrison Jones

1253—A Little Impostor By Charlotte May Kingsley

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1254—The Wife He Chose By Mrs. E. Burke Collins

1255—The Wine of Love By Lillian R. Drayton

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13—The Master Man

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21—The Imperfect Lover

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23—The Scarred Heart

24—The Winds of the World

25—The Second Honeymoon

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To be published in July, 1927.

27—The Man Without a Heart By Ruby M. Ayres

28—The Phantom Lover By Ruby M. Ayres

To be published in August, 1927.

29—The Rose of Yesterday By Effie Adelaide Rowlands

30—As Pictured in Dreams By Ruby M. Ayres

31—Her Second Marriage By Viola Tyrell

To be published in September, 1927.

32—The Dancing Master By Ruby M. Ayres

33—A Life's Love By Effie Adelaide Rowlands

To be published in October, 1927.

34—The Ring on her Hand By Viola Tyrell

35—The Fortune Hunter By Ruby M. Ayres

To be published in November, 1927.

36—The Triumph of Love By Effie Adelaide Rowlands

37—The Woman Pays By Viola Tyrell

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38—The Little Lady in Lodgings By Ruby M. Ayres

39—Why Did She Shun Him? By Effie Adelaide Rowlands

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- 60—Frank Merriwell's Faith
- 62—Frank Merriwell's Iron Nerve
- 64—Frank Merriwell's Power
- 66—Frank Merriwell's Setback
- 68—Frank Merriwell's Club
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- 74—Frank Merriwell's Marvel
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- 78—Dick Merriwell's Promise
- 80—Dick Merriwell's Narrow Escape
- 82—Dick Merriwell's Revenge
- 84—Dick Merriwell's Delivery
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- 87—Dick Merriwell's Diamond
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145—Frank Merriwell's Talisman
147—Dick Merriwell's Regret
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155—Frank Merriwell's Worst Boy
157—Frank Merriwell's Air Voyage
159—Frank Merriwell in Wall Street
161—Dick Merriwell's Stanchness
163—Dick Merriwell's Stand
165—Frank Merriwell's Steadying Hand
167—Dick Merriwell in the Wilds
169—Dick Merriwell's Way
- 88—Frank Merriwell's Winners
90—Dick Merriwell's Ability
92—Dick Merriwell's Defense
94—Dick Merriwell's Mystery
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98—Frank Merriwell's Rescue
100—Dick Merriwell's Marked Money
102—Dick Merriwell on the Gridiron
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108—Dick Merriwell's Grit
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114—Dick Merriwell's Day
116—Dick Merriwell's Downfall
118—Dick Merriwell Abroad
120—Dick Merriwell's Pranks
122—Frank Merriwell's Challengers
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128—Dick Merriwell's Return
130—Dick Merriwell's Five
132—Dick Merriwell's Polo Team
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136—Dick Merriwell's Dare
138—Dick Merriwell's Team Mate
140—Frank Merriwell's Happy Camp
142—Dick Merriwell, Freshman
144—Dick Merriwell's Joke
146—Frank Merriwell's Horse
148—Dick Merriwell's Magnetism
150—Dick Merriwell's Best Work
152—Dick Merriwell's Debt
154—Dick Merriwell Adrift
156—Dick Merriwell's Close Call
158—Dick Merriwell's Black Star
160—Frank Merriwell Facing His Foes
162—Frank Merriwell's Hard Case
164—Dick Merriwell Doubted
166—Dick Merriwell's Example
168—Frank Merriwell's Ranch

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170—Frank Merriwell's Lesson 171—Dick Merriwell's Reputation

To be published in Aug., 1927.

172—Frank Merriwell's Encouragement 173—Dick Merriwell's Honors

To be published in Sept., 1927.

174—Frank Merriwell's Wizard 175—Dick Merriwell's Race

To be published in Oct., 1927.

176—Dick Merriwell's Star Play 177—Frank Merriwell at Phantom Lake

178—Dick Merriwell a Winner

To be published in Nov., 1927.

179—Dick Merriwell at the County Fair 180—Frank Merriwell's Grit

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181—Dick Merriwell's Power 182—Frank Merriwell in Peru

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| 11—His Friend the Enemy | 12—In the Web |
| 13—A Deep Sea Game | 14—The Paymaster's Special |
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| 17—Juggling with Liberty | 18—Back from Bedlam |
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| 21—In the Wake of the Scimitar | 22—His Audacious Highness |
| 23—At Daggers Drawn | 24—The Eighth Wonder |
| 25—The Cat's-Paw | 26—The Cotton Bag |
| 27—Little Miss Vassar | 28—Cast Away at the Pole |
| 29—The Testing of Noyes | 30—The Fateful Seventh |
| 31—Montana | 32—The Deserter |
| 33—The Sheriff of Broken Bow | 34—Wanted: A Highwayman |
| 35—Frisbie of San Antone | 36—His Last Dollar |
| 37—Fools for Luck | 38—Dare of Darling & Co. |
| 39—Trailing "The Josephine" | |
| 40—The Snapshot Chap | By Bertram Lebhar |
| 41—Brothers of the Thin Wire | By Franklin Pitt |
| 42—Jungle Intrigue | By Edmond Lawrence |
| 43—His Snapshot Lordship | By Bertram Lebhar |
| 44—Folly Lode | By James F. Dorrance |
| 45—The Forest Rogue | By Julian G. Wharton |
| 46—Snapshot Artillery | By Bertram Lebhar |
| 47—Stanley Holt, Thoroughbred | By Ralph Boston |
| 48—The Riddle and the Ring | By Gordon McLaren |
| 49—The Black Eye Snapshot | By Bertram Lebhar |
| 50—Bainbridge of Bangor | By Julian G. Wharton |
| 51—Amid Crashing Hills | By Edmond Lawrence |
| 52—The Big Bet Snapshot | By Bertram Lebhar |
| 53—Boots and Saddles | By J. Aubrey Tyson |
| 54—Hazzard of West Point | By Edmond Lawrence |

55—Service Courageous	By Don Cameron Shafer
56—On Post	By Bertram Lebhar
57—Jack Cope, Trooper	By Roy Fessenden
58—Service Audacious	By Don Cameron Shafer
59—When Fortune Dares	By Emerson Baker
60—In the Land of Treasure	By Barry Wolcott
61—A Soul Laid Bare	By J. Kenilworth Egerton
62—Wireless Sid	By Dana R. Preston
63—Garrison's Finish	By W.B.M. Ferguson
64—Bob Storm of the Navy	By Ensign Lee Tempest, U.S.N.

In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in July, 1927.

65—Golden Bighorn	By William Wallace Cook
66—The Square Deal Garage	By Burt L. Standish

To be published in August, 1927.

67—Ridgway of Montana	By Wm. MacLeod Raine
68—The Motor Wizard's Daring	By Burt L. Standish
69—The Presidential Snapshot	By Bertram Lebhar

To be published in September, 1927.

70—The Sky Pilot	By Burt L. Standish
71—An Innocent Outlaw	By William Wallace Cook

To be published in October, 1927.

72—The Motor Wizard's Mystery	By Burt L. Standish
73—From Copy Boy to Reporter	By W. Bert Foster

To be published in November, 1927.

74—The Motor Wizard's Strange Adventure	By Burt L. Standish
75—Lee Blake, Trolley Man	By Roland Ashford Phillips

To be published in December, 1927.

76—The Motor Wizard's Clean-up	By Burt L. Standish
77—Rogers of Butte	By William Wallace Cook

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| 1—Ted Strong, Cowboy | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 2—Ted Strong Among the Cattlemen | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 3—Ted Strong's Black Mountain Ranch | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 4—Ted Strong With Rifle and Lasso | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 5—Ted Strong Lost in the Desert | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 6—Ted Strong Fighting the Rustlers | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 7—Ted Strong and the Rival Miners | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 8—Ted Strong and the Last of the Herd | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 9—Ted Strong on a Mountain Trail | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 10—Ted Strong Across the Prairie | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 11—Ted Strong Out For Big Game | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 12—Ted Strong, Challenged | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 13—Ted Strong's Close Call | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 14—Ted Strong's Passport | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 15—Ted Strong's Nebraska Ranch | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 16—Ted Strong's Cattle Drive | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 17—Ted Strong's Stampede | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 18—Ted Strong's Prairie Trail | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 19—Ted Strong's Surprise | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 20—Ted Strong's Wolf Hunters | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 21—Ted Strong's Crooked Trail | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 22—Ted Strong in Colorado | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 23—Ted Strong's Justice | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 24—Ted Strong's Treasure | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 25—Ted Strong's Search | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 26—Ted Strong's Diamond Mine | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 27—Ted Strong's Manful Task | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 28—Ted Strong, Manager | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 29—Ted Strong's Man Hunt | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 30—Ted Strong's Gold Mine | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 31—Ted Strong's Broncho Boys | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 32—Ted Strong's Wild Horse | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 33—Ted Strong's Tenderfoot | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 34—Ted Strong's Stowaway | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 35—Ted Strong's Prize Herd | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 36—Ted Strong's Trouble | By Edward C. Taylor |
| 37—Ted Strong's Mettle | By Edward C. Taylor |

38—Ted Strong's Big Business	By Edward C. Taylor
39—Ted Strong's Treasure Cave	By Edward C. Taylor
40—Tod Strong's Vanishing Island	By Edward C. Taylor
41—Ted Strong's Motor Car	By Edward C. Taylor
42—Ted Strong in Montana	By Edward C. Taylor
43—Ted Strong's Contract	By Edward C. Taylor
44—Ted Strong's Stolen Pinto	By Edward C. Taylor
45—Ted Strong's Saddle Pard	By Edward C. Taylor
46—Ted Strong and the Sioux Players	By Edward C. Taylor
47—Ted Strong's Bronchos	By Edward C. Taylor
48—Ted Strong's Ranch War	By Edward C. Taylor
49—Ted Strong and the Cattle Raiders	By Edward C. Taylor
50—Ted Strong's Great Round-up	By Edward C. Taylor
51—Ted Strong's Big Horn Trail	By Edward C. Taylor
52—Ted Strong in Bandit Cañon	By Edward C. Taylor
53—Ted Strong at Z-Bar Ranch	By Edward C. Taylor
54—Ted Strong's Cattle Feud	By Edward C. Taylor
55—Ted Strong's Border Battle	By Edward C. Taylor
56—Ted Strong on U.P. Duty	By Edward C. Taylor

* * * * *

We have arranged with the author, Edward C. Taylor, to continue the stories, and the following, therefore, are new stories, right up to the minute. They are going to make a big hit, for we have abundant proof in the way of letters that readers of paper books are strong for Ted Strong.

* * * * *

In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in July, 1927.

57—Ted Strong's Lariat Duel	By Edward C. Taylor
58—Ted Strong's Vigilantes	By Edward C. Taylor

To be published in August, 1927.

59—Ted Strong's Mesa Foe	By Edward C. Taylor
60—Ted Strong Tries Prospecting	By Edward C. Taylor

To be published in September, 1927.

61—Ted Strong's Desert Round-up	By Edward C. Taylor
62—Ted Strong at Lost Gulch	By Edward C. Taylor

To be published in October, 1927.

63—Ted Strong on an Outlaw's Trail	By Edward C. Taylor
64—Ted Strong and the Two-Gun Men	By Edward C. Taylor

- 65—Ted Strong's Rodeo Ride By Edward C. Taylor
To be published in November, 1927.
- 66—Ted Strong's Ivory-Handled Gun By Edward C. Taylor
- 67—Ted Strong's Redskin Pal By Edward C. Taylor
To be published in December, 1927.
- 68—Ted Strong and the Sagebrush Kid By Edward C. Taylor
- 69—Ted Strong's Rustler Round-up By Edward C. Taylor
-

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| 1—Diamond Dick's Own Brand | By W.B. Lawson |
| 2—Buffalo Bill's Honor | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 3—Diamond Dick's Maverick | By W.B. Lawson |
| 4—Buffalo Bill's Phantom Hunt | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 5—Diamond Dick's Man Hunt | By W.B. Lawson |
| 6—Buffalo Bill's Fight with Fire | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 7—Diamond Dick's Danger Signal | By W.B. Lawson |
| 8—Buffalo Bill's Danite Trail | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 9—Diamond Dick's Prospect | By W.B. Lawson |
| 10—Buffalo Bill's Ranch Riders | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 11—Diamond Dick and the Gold Bugs | By W.B. Lawson |
| 12—Buffalo Bill's Death Trail | By Col. Prentiss Ingraham |
| 13—Diamond Dick at Comet City | By W.B. Lawson |

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To be published in July, 1927.

14—Buffalo Bill's Trackers By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

15—Diamond Dick and the Worthless Bonanza By W.B. Lawson

To be published in August, 1927.

16—Buffalo Bill's Mid-air Flight By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

17—Diamond Dick's Black List By W.B. Lawson

To be published in September, 1927.

18—Buffalo Bill, Ambassador By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

19—Diamond Dick and the Indian Outlaw By W.B. Lawson

To be published in October, 1927.

20—Buffalo Bill's Air Voyage By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

21—Diamond Dick and Gentleman Jack By W.B. Lawson

To be published in November, 1927.

22—Buffalo Bill's Secret Mission By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

23—Diamond Dick at Secret Pass By W.B. Lawson

24—Buffalo Bill's Long Trail By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

To be published in December, 1927.

25—Diamond Dick's Red Trailer By W.B. Lawson

26—Buffalo Bill Against Odds By Col. Prentiss Ingraham

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In this list will be included certain books by Edward Stratemeyer, Oliver Optic, and other authors who wrote the Alger type of stories, which are equal in interest and wholesomeness with those written by the famous author after which this great line of books for boys is named.

ALL TITLES ALWAYS IN PRINT

By HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

- 1—Driven from Home
- 3—Ned Newton
- 5—Tony, the Tramp
- 7—Helping Himself
- 9—Try and Trust
- 11—Jed, the Poorhouse Boy
- 13—Grit, the Young Boatman of Pine Point
- 15—From Farm Boy to Senator
- 17—Jack's Ward
- 19—In a New World
- 21—The Store Boy
- 23—A New York Boy
- 25—The Young Adventurer
- 27—Adrift in New York
- 29—Struggling Upward
- 31—Tom Tracy
- 33—Bound to Rise
- 35—Do and Dare
- 37—Tom, the Bootblack
- 39—Shifting for Himself
- 41—Sam's Chance
- 43—Phil, the Fiddler
- 45—Walter Sherwood's Probation
- 47—The Young Salesman
- 49—Facing the World
- 51—Strive and Succeed
- 53—The Erie Train Boy
- 55—The Young Miner
- 57—A Debt of Honor
- 59—Ben's Nugget
- 61—Frank and Fearless
- 63—Adrift in the City
- 65—Tom Turner's Legacy
- 67—Digging for Gold
- 69—In Search of Treasure
- 71—Bernard Brook's Adventures
- 73—Paul Prescott's Charge
- 75—Rupert's Ambition
- 77—The Backwoods Boy
- 79—Ben Bruce
- 81—The Telegraph Boy
- 2—A Cousin's Conspiracy
- 4—Andy Gordon
- 6—The Five Hundred Dollar Check
- 8—Making His Way
- 10—Only an Irish Boy
- 12—Chester Rand
- 14—Joe's Luck
- 16—The Young Outlaw
- 18—Dean Dunham
- 20—Both Sides of the Continent
- 22—Brave and Bold
- 24—Bob Burton
- 26—Julius, the Street Boy
- 28—Tom Brace
- 30—The Adventures of a New York Telegraph Boy
- 32—The Young Acrobat
- 34—Hector's Inheritance
- 36—The Tin Box
- 38—Risen from the Ranks
- 40—Wait and Hope
- 42—Striving for Fortune
- 44—Slow and Sure
- 46—The Trials and Triumphs of Mark Mason
- 48—Andy Grant's Pluck
- 50—Luke Walton
- 52—From Canal Boy to President
- 54—Paul, the Peddler
- 56—Charlie Codman's Cruise
- 58—The Young Explorer
- 60—The Errand Boy
- 62—Frank Hunter's Peril
- 64—Tom Thatcher's Fortune
- 66—Dan, the Newsboy
- 68—Lester's Luck
- 70—Frank's Campaign
- 72—Robert Coverdale's Struggles
- 74—Mark Manning's Mission
- 76—Sink or Swim
- 78—Tom Temple's Career
- 80—The Young Musician
- 82—Work and Win

83—The Train Boy
85—Herbert Carter's Legacy
87—Lost at Sea
89—Young Captain Jack
91—Out for Business
93—Nelson, the Newsboy
95—Jerry, the Backwoods Boy
97—The Young Book Agent
169—Ragged Dick
171—Mark, the Match Boy
173—Ben, the Luggage Boy
By EDWARD STRATEMEYER
98—The Last Cruise of *The Spitfire*
100—True to Himself
102—Oliver Bright's Search
104—The Young Auctioneer
106—Shorthand Tom
108—Joe, the Surveyor
110—The Young Ranchman
112—The Young Explorers
114—Boys of the Great Northwest
116—For His Country
118—The Young Pearl Hunters
120—Boys of the Fort
122—Lost in the Land of Ice

By OLIVER OPTIC

124—Among the Missing
126—Honest Kit Dunstable
128—The Young Pilot
130—Rich and Humble
132—Watch and Wait
134—Hope and Have
136—Royal Tarr's Pluck
138—Louis Chiswick's Mission
140—The Young Hermit
142—Building Himself Up
144—Three Young Silver Kings
146—Striving for His Own
148—Lightning Express
150—Switch Off
152—Bear and Forbear
154—Breaking Away

84—The Cash Boy
86—Strong and Steady
88—From Farm to Fortune
90—Joe, the Hotel Boy
92—Falling in with Fortune
94—Randy of the River
96—Ben Logan's Triumph
168—Luck and Pluck
170—Fame and Fortune
172—Rough and Ready
174—Rufus and Rose

99—Reuben Stone's Discovery
101—Richard Dare's Venture
103—To Alaska for Gold
105—Bound to Be an Electrician
107—Fighting for His Own
109—Larry, the Wanderer
111—The Young Lumberman
113—Boys of the Wilderness
115—Boys of the Gold Field
117—Comrades in Peril
119—The Young Bandmaster
121—On Fortune's Trail
123—Bob, the Photographer

125—His Own Helper
127—Every Inch a Boy
129—Always in Luck
131—In School and Out
133—Work and Win
135—Haste and Waste
137—The Prisoners of the Cave
139—The Professor's Son
141—The Cruise of *The Dandy*
143—Lyon Hart's Heroism
145—Making a Man of Himself
147—Through by Daylight
149—On Time
151—Brake Up
153—The "Starry Flag"
155—Seek and Find

156—Freaks of Fortune	157—Make or Break
158—Down the River	159—The Boat Club
160—All Aboard	161—Now or Never
162—Try Again	163—Poor and Proud
164—Little by Little	165—The Sailor Boy
166—The Yankee Middy	167—Brave Old Salt
175—Fighting for Fortune	By Roy Franklin
176—The Young Steel Worker	By Frank H. MacDougal
177—The Go-ahead Boys	By Gale Richards
178—For the Right	By Roy Franklin
179—The Motor Cycle Boys	By Donald Grayson
180—The Wall Street Boy	By Allan Montgomery
181—Stemming the Tide	By Roy Franklin
182—On High Gear	By Donald Grayson
183—A Wall Street Fortune	By Allan Montgomery
184—Winning by Courage	By Roy Franklin
185—From Auto to Airship	By Donald Grayson
186—Camp and Canoe	By Remson Douglas
187—Winning against Odds	By Roy Franklin
188—The Luck of Vance Sevier	By Frederick Gibson

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To be published in July, 1927.

189—The Island Castaway	By Roy Franklin
190—The Boy Marvel	By Frank H. MacDougal
191—A Boy With a Purpose	By Roy Franklin

To be published in August, 1927.

192—The River Fugitives	By Remson Douglas
193—Out For a Fortune	By Roy Franklin

To be published in September, 1927.

194—The Boy Horse Owner	By Frederick Gibson
195—Always on Deck	By Roy Franklin

To be published in October, 1927.

196—Paul Hassard's Peril	By Matt Royal
197—His Own Master	By Roy Franklin

To be published in November, 1927.

198—When Courage Wins	By Edward S. Ellis
199—Bound to Get There	By Roy Franklin

To be published in December, 1927.

200—Who Was Milton Marr?	By Frederick Gibson
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201—The Lost Mine

By Roy Franklin

202—Larry Borden's Redemption By Emerson Baker

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