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And the FORD BOYS.

By A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.



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Vol. I

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OLD KING BRADY AND THE FORD BOYS.

By A NEW YORK DETECTIVE,

Author of "Sentenced For Life and The House With 30 Steps; or, Old King Brady and the Great Pearl Street Poisoning Case," "Old King Brady and 'Billy the Kid,' or, The Great Detective's Chase," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRIENDLY MR. BROWN.

"EH, Dawson! Oh, Dawson! Are you there?"
"Here, captain! Yes!"
"But I don't want you there—I want you here."

"O. K. I'm with you as soon as I pull on my trousers."

"Better put on something beside your trousers, young man. I only want you to go over on Chouteau avenue, and it wouldn't look very well to have one of my detectives going through the streets of St. Louis with nothing but a pair of trousers on."

Thus saying, Captain Schack, of the St. Louis police, closed the door of the dormitory where his local detectives slept so as to be ready in case of need, and going down-stairs to the main room of the station-house, waited impatiently for Will Dawson, one of the brightest young detectives on the force.

Soon Detective Dawson came down-stairs fully dressed.

He was a fine specimen of young manhood certainly.

At least the St. Louis girls all thought so, and it is generally allowed that St. Louis girls know what is what.

He was twenty-five or a little less; tall, straight and muscular, with a fist like a butcher, and a pair of shoulders so broad and well-shaped that his tailor never had to calculate on any padding in his coat.

Add to that a pleasant face with a mustache whose ends had just the right curve, black, sparkling eyes and hair of the same color rising straight up from his forehead and you have Detective Will Dawson's picture in your mind's eye.

Certainly, there were worse looking men on the St. Louis detective force, and any quantity who were not half so smart.

"What is it, captain?" demanded the young detective as he entered the room.

"Old man Baker wants you, Dawson."

"What! Hezekiah Baker, the millionaire?"

"Yes."

"What does he want?"

"Don't know. He telephoned here a little while ago and asked me to send my best detective to his house at once."

"Indeed. And did he ask for me?"

"Why, no; not by name."

"Captain, you flatter me. I didn't know that you considered me your best detective."

"Oh, come now, Dawson, I didn't say that. He asked me to send him a young man and I've selected you—that's all."

"Thank you. I'm dumb. Any idea what he wants?"

"Not the faintest."

"Suppose he wants to engage me privately?"

"That will be all right."

"How will you fix it?"

"Give you a vacation. I can't afford to offend old man Baker, for he's a big gun in the Democratic party, and I expect to be chief this fall after election time, as you may be aware."

"I knew you were laying pipe for the office, captain."

"Laying pipe! Look here, Dawson, I don't exactly like that way of putting it. My long and faithful services on the force certainly entitle me to some recognition, and—"

"Oh, I understand. That's just what I meant. Perhaps I'd better go up to Mr. Baker's at once."

"I think it would be a good idea to do so before you say any more," retorted Captain Schack, a good deal misfed.

Will Dawson hurriedly left the station, and, going out on to Fourth street, took a cab, for Mr. Baker was a man who, when he wanted anything, wanted it, and would brook no delay.

Chouteau avenue, as every one who knows St. Louis is aware, is emphatically a street of millionaires.

Here the wealth of the city centers, here nearly all the really fine residences are located, and the finest among them was the mansion in which that rich old bachelor, Hezekiah Baker, had for

a generation dwelt; alone for more than thirty years, but of late with his pretty young niece, ready for Sadie, his brother's child, so it was said.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

Will Dawson, though up all through the previous night, had slept pretty much all day, and was consequently feeling in fine condition and almost anything that might come up.

In due time he reached Mr. Baker's residence, and for a full hour remained closeted with the millionaire.

When at last he left the house, he returned directly to the station, where Captain Schack was waiting impatiently to know what it was all about.

"Well, Dawson?" he exclaimed, as the young detective entered.

"Well, sir?"

"Confound it, man, don't try to fence me off. What did old man Baker want?"

"It's private business, captain."

"What! ain't you going to tell me?"

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Promised to tell no one."

"Pish—pshaw!"

"Can't help it. I've promised. I never break my word, captain. I want a vacation of at least two weeks."

"S'pose I've got to let you have it," growled the police captain. "I can't afford to offend Baker; but, all the same, I think you might tell me what he wants."

But Will Dawson told nobody.

All that Captain Schack succeeded in finding out was that he went South by the Iron Mountain Railroad next morning, which only served to increase his curiosity and make him all the more anxious to know more.

But he did not find out.

While he was trying Will Dawson was rattling along on the railroad.

We take the young detective up again on the following evening, somewhere between eleven o'clock and midnight.

The train was dragging its slow pace through Scott county, in the wildest portion of south eastern Missouri, then.

It was a desperate night.

The month was November.

It don't often snow in southern Missouri as hard as it was snowing then, yet the snow was of that peculiar sort which melts almost as soon as it falls.

A good deal had accumulated on the ground though, but not enough to seriously interfere with the progress of the train.

Will Dawson was seated in the smoking car with his little black gripsack beside him.

Pullman cars found no place in that train, for the road was only a branch beginning nowhere, and ending at a point even less important.

No matter just which road it was, for, like the real names of certain of the principal characters, we are under promise to keep it secret.

There are those among the actors of this stirring tale living to-day, who do not care to be identified with the occurrences which we are about to relate.

"Yandeltown! Yandeltown!" shrieked the brakeman, opening the door, as the train slowed down at a station.

Nobody got off at Yandeltown, but one man got on.

He was a tall, slab-sided Missourian, wearing a big slouch hat, and his trousers stuck in his boots.

He seemed to be particularly partial to chewing tobacco, if the condition of his scraggy beard could be accepted as a guide.

Now there were plenty of vacant seats in the smoking car, and yet the stranger deliberately planted himself at Will Dawson's side.

The young detective never moved.

"Does this fellow want to pick a quarrel with me?" he thought.

It scarcely looked so at first, for when he spoke it was in the most friendly, not to say confidential, tone!

"Tough night, stranger!" was his first remark.

He put his arm back of the seat, making it most uncomfortable for Will, at the same time thrusting his face most distressingly close.

"Yes, it's very disagreeable," replied Will quietly.

He would have changed seats if he had deemed it prudent, but the man's open coat displayed the handles of two revolvers, not to mention a bowie knife.

Altogether Will jumped at the conclusion that it would be more conducive to health and long life to remain where he was and not offend his seat mate if he could help it.

"Disagreeable! I say it's dogone tough," continued the man. "Never seed a wuss in November in there 'ere parts."

"The weather is apt to be uncertain at this season," replied Will quietly.

He turned his face to the window, but the stranger would not let him alone.

"'Quainted around here?" he asked.

"No."

"Thought not. Ever been in Scott County afore?"

"Never."

"Best county in the State."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas. Seen the corn so high that a man could ride through it on horseback and never be seen. Fact is I've ridden through corn that high myself."

"Well, well."

"How fur yer gwine?"

"Beyond Sikestown."

"Sho! I'm goin' that fur myself."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Glad you be. Allus like a pleasant feller to talk to when I'm traveling. What do you say to a game of poker, just to pass away time?"

"No, thank you. I don't play poker."

"Sho!"

"It's a fact."

"Sorry for yer. Life ain't worth nothin' without poker."

"Indeed!"

"I say so."

"I won't dispute you."

"Better not—I'm a bad man when riled. Whar yer from, stranger?"

"St. Louis."

"Sho! Big place, they tell me."

"Oh, yes."

"I war to Cairo once, but I never got ter St. Louis. Hope to some day, then I'll look you up. Say, whar's your name?"

"Will."

"That's Brown."

"Dear me!"

"Kinder curus, ain't it?"

"Very."

"Down here on biznis?"

"Yes. Certainly not for pleasure."

"Waal, ef yer wuz, ye couldn't find no better country."

"I dare say not."

"Gosh, how my boot hurts me! I hev to pull it off a little sometimes when I set down in a hot room."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, corns. Then my feet swell. I'm er-fraid to tech water to 'em ever cause it makes 'em swell wus. Guess if you'll excoose me I'll just yank off the right boot neow."

This was interesting conversation.

Will Dawson, it is needless to say, felt highly edified.

As the talkative Mr. Brown bent down to remove his boot, the detective involuntarily pinched his nostrils together and turned his head the other way.

Perhaps this was just what Mr. Brown expected.

If Will had kept his eyes upon him he would have observed that his seat mate was also looking at him—that he made no effort to take off his boot.

In a moment he raised up again.

"Guess arter all I won't pull it off," he said, "my corns don't hurt me so much now I've loosened it a bit."

"My stars! I can't stand this fellow, and I won't!" thought Will.

He was just about to brave the anger of this walking arsenal, when the train suddenly began to slow down, and in a moment stopped altogether.

"Gosh! What's this?" cried Mr. Brown, starting up, as did almost every one else in the smoker.

Outside loud talking could be heard, and the tramp of horses' feet.

Will tried to rub the steam off the window and peer out, but the darkness was so inky that he could distinguish nothing.

"I'll be dogoned ef I don't believe it's ther James Boys!" cried a big Missourian over on the other side of the aisle.

This was enough.

Had a fire-brand suddenly been dropped into the smoker, it could not have startled the passengers more thoroughly than did these simple words.

Everybody was on their feet in an instant.

"Shoot ther skunk ef he makes a row," yelled some one outside, and at the same instant the door was flung open, and in stalked a tall, heavily bearded man, with four or five others at his heels.

"Jesse James, I swow!" gasped Mr. Brown, making a bolt for the other end of the car.

"Gentlemen, we must trouble you for your valuables," said the new-comer, sternly.

Cocked revolvers covered every one in the car.

Now Will Dawson was as much alarmed as his neighbors—we don't pretend to deny that.

He had reasons for being disturbed that have not yet been disclosed.

Hastily he stooped down and seized his black grip-sack.

"Great Scott! I've been robbed of all Mr. Baker's papers!" he murmured, just as Jesse James and his companions burst through the door.

Some one had slit one side of the grip-sack from end to end.

A good portion of its contents lay scattered upon the floor under the seat.

Was this the work of the friendly Mr. Brown?

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE IN THE GLASS.

"WELL, sir, have you heard from that man Dawson?"

"No; not yet, Mr. Baker. It is most mysterious. Really I begin to think he must have been killed by the James Boys. I can't account for his silence in any other way."

"Thunder and Mars, man! I didn't ask you for a lecture! I only wanted to know if you had heard from your detective or not?"

"I tell you I have not."

"He is a fraud! He's run off with the five hundred dollars I gave him to cover expenses!" stormed Mr. Hezekiah Baker, striding up and down before the desk in the police station, behind which Captain Schack sat, looking a good deal disturbed.

"No, no. It ain't likely," answered the police captain. "Whatever else may be said of Will Dawson, he is no thief."

"Is it a fact that the James Boys held up the train on the Sikesville branch that night?"

"Certainly."

"Just what night was it?"

"Tuesday of last week."

"Humph. He might have been aboard easily enough."

"I think it altogether likely if he was on his way to Butler county, as you say, Mr. Baker."

"If he was! What the dickens do you mean, sir? Do you intend to intimate that when I have said a thing there can be any doubt about it?"

"No, no. But—"

"Schack, you always were more or less of an idiot. Don't you know it won't pay you to quarrel with me?"

"My dear sir, I haven't the remotest intention of quarreling with you."

"Well, you are trying to do it, then."

"But—"

"Shut up! I won't be contradicted. I want a detective to attend to that business I sent Dawson on. To find out what has become of Dawson, to do a whole lot of other things. Who can I get?"

"Well, there's old Pease."

"To the dogs with Pease! He don't know beans! I want a man with some jump to him."

"How would Phil the Ferret suit you?"

"Do you recommend him?"

"He's all right as long as he's sober. None better. The trouble with Phil is he will go on tares."

"He won't suit then. Hang it, Schack, I want the best there is to be had for money. Don't care what it costs. Here this fellow Dawson has been gone a week and not a word from him. Something has got to be done."

"I know what I would do if I were in your place, Mr. Baker."

"What?"

"Get Old King Brady."

"What, the celebrated New York detective?"

"Yes."

"The very thing."

"I think so. He's not one of the best in the United States, but the best. He is the only man who ever succeeded in capturing Jesse James, and he'd have held him, too, but for a mere accident. I say he's your man."

"I s'pose he charges like the mischief for his services?"

"Naturally. You said you didn't mind the expense."

"Neither I do. I'll wire him at once and mention a reward that'll be sure to fetch him. Good-day, Schack. See you later." And Mr. Baker walked straight to the Southern Hotel and sent the dispatch.

Now Old King Brady had sworn that he never would take a case in Missouri again after the perils he underwent in the James Boys affair.

Several telegrams passed between the great detective and Mr. Baker.

It ended in Old King Brady taking up the case.

What case?

The question is a reasonable one.

So far nothing has been told.

The interview which we are about to narrate will, however, give the reader some idea what it was all about.

One evening, about four days after the dispatch of Mr. Baker's first telegram, Old King Brady rang the door bell of the big house on Chouteau avenue.

He was admitted by a young colored boy, and upon giving his name, was immediately shown into a handsome library, furnished in the most comfortable fashion.

It was quite dark in the library when the boy ushered Old King Brady in.

"Just stand right still where you are, and I'll light the gas," said the boy.

Old King Brady obeyed. As the gas flared up a hasty glance about the room showed him that it was unoccupied.

He took a seat in a comfortable easy chair with his back to a large Japanese screen, and awaited the arrival of the master of the house. It was not necessary to wait long, however.

Mr. Baker came down-stairs immediately.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Brady," he exclaimed. "Don't rise, sir, don't rise. I am not one to stand on much ceremony, even if I am worth five millions. Some fools try to make it out ten."

"What can I do to serve you, sir?" asked the detective, ignoring the vulgar allusion of Mr. Baker to his wealth.

"I hardly know how to tell you."

"Put it any way you please. I have had so much experience in these delicate matters that I think I can comprehend."

"So they tell me, but you never had a case like this."

"No two cases are alike, Mr. Baker."

"No, no! But listen! Stay! First I must make sure we are alone."

"What a lot of mystery. I doubt very much if there is any such huge secret in it after all," thought Old King Brady as Mr. Baker got up and looked into the front parlor, afterward locking the door between the rooms.

He did not look behind the Japanese screen, nor did Old King Brady think of suggesting it—there was no particular reason why he should, being a stranger in the house.

As soon as the door was locked, Mr. Baker drew up a chair and began to talk:

"I suppose you have no idea what I want of you, Mr. Brady?"

"Naturally not, sir."

"I'm going to tell you."

"I wish you would."

"I own, among other property, a lead mine down in Butler county, this State," began Mr. Baker. "It has been operated for years, and has proved immensely profitable. At one time my brother had charge of the works, and that brings me around to what I want to say."

"I'm all attention."

"Some years ago my brother discovered a small pocket of gold running alongside of the lead," continued Mr. Baker.

"It is a very unusual occurrence, but it sometimes happens. Out of that pocket, Mr. Brady, he took in a few days more than a hundred thousand dollars, all in free gold. At least so his letters claimed."

"That was great luck, Mr. Baker."

"Not to my brother, sir. It drove him mad. That's what it did. You see his brain was always weak and this turned it. Mr. Brady, he hid that gold so securely that nobody has ever been able to find it since."

"Then he got the idea that he was one of the Rothschilds, that he was worth all the money in the world. Next thing he wandered off among the hills and has never been seen since."

"Of course he is dead?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"And the hiding place of the gold you say was never discovered?"

"Never. Hold on now. I'm getting off my thread. I want to get back."

"Very good. I'll do the heavy listening," said Old King Brady, with a smile.

"After my brother's disappearance, I took his daughter to live with me," continued Mr. Baker. "At the time my nephew, Col. Jerome Ricker, late of the Confederate service, was stopping at my house."

"To make a long story short, Jerome Ricker fell in love with his cousin, Sadie."

"I wouldn't have it. She wouldn't have him. I swore I'd cut him off in my will if he persisted. He swore he'd marry her in spite of all obstacles. I kicked him out, and he went to the bad. That's part number two. You are taking it all in, my dear sir?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Now for number three. I made a will leaving my whole estate to Sadie. Meanwhile, I hired a man named Dike Duncan to work the mines. This was about a year ago, and it has never paid since."

"About six weeks ago, Sadie, who wasn't very well, wanted to go down to Kittle Black, her old home, where the mine is."

"I consented, and she reached Kittle Black all right and wrote me a letter which shook me all up. What do you suppose it told me?"

"I'm sure I can't guess."

"Nor could you in a month of Sundays."

"She told me, Mr. Brady, that Dike Duncan was none other than my scallawag nephew, Jerome Ricker. That the reason the mine didn't pay was because he was doing no work but it—just drawing on me for expenses to the tune of a thousand dollars a month or so, and pocketing the money. How's that?"

"Pretty rough on you. How could such a thing happen?"

"Why, he was engaged by a mining engineer while I was in Europe, that's how it happened. Of course I was furious."

"Naturally."

"I went down to Kittle Black at once for the purpose of hounding him."

"And did you do it?"

"Do it! Why, do you know, the scamp had made off, taking Sadie with him against her will?"

"No!"

"It's a fact."

"What became of them? Are they since married?"

"I don't know a blessed thing about it. I've been almost wild about Sadie, but I could never get any track of her."

"Strange."

"Ain't it? I sent a man down to scour the country for them, for you can easily see my business wouldn't let me stay in Kittle Black, even if the whole lead mine went to smash."

"And what was the report?"

"Didn't get any. The man never reached Kittle Black, and has never been heard of since."

"You don't mean it?"

"Fact."

"Then I sent a detective down to see if he could find Sadie or get any trace of her. A young fellow named Will Dawson. That was near ten days ago."

"And he has reported?"

"No, he hasn't. He's disappeared, too, and I can't get any word about him."

"This is mysterious—or rather would be for any other State but Missouri. I suppose it is very wild down around Kittle Black."

"The wildest kind of a country, and the toughest people you ever met."

"Did young Dawson actually reach Kittle Black?"

"No. Just about that time a train was stopped by the James Boys. It's the general opinion that he was on board that train, Mr. Brady, and was killed."

"Dear me! But what can I do? Will I have any better luck?"

"Hold on. You haven't heard all yet."

"Oh, there's more, is there?"

"Yes, sir. Just after I got back from Kittle Black I received a mysterious telegram."

"Ah!"

"I'm going to read it to you."

"I wish you would."

Mr. Baker drew a telegraphic dispatch from his pocket and read as follows:

"H. BAKER, NO. — CHOUTEAU AVE., ST. LOUIS: Send seal ring to Triptolemus Trott at Doniphan. He will tell bearer where your brother, Eldad, hid that gold."

"No signature?" asked Old King Brady.

"No."

"Have you any idea who sent it?"

"Not the faintest."

"What did you do?"

"Why, as I was unable to go myself I gave the seal ring to Detective Dawson with a letter telling this man Trott to recognize him as the proper person to receive the secret."

"Do you know Trott?"

"No."

"Dear me! It was very foolish."

"Why?"

"If you had only inquired about him first. It may have been just a trap to intercept any one you might send to Kittle Black."

"Why bless you, man, Doniphan is in Ripley county, away beyond Kittle Black."

"Then my theory won't work."

"Of course it won't. Now that's about all, I believe. I'm wild about Sadie. All upset by the strange disappearance of these two men—more disturbed than you can guess."

"What was there about the seal ring? What was its history?"

"Oh, it's an old family heirloom. It belonged to my father. Hold on a minute, and I'll show it to you."

"What! Thought you said you sent it down to Doniphan by Detective Dawson."

"Well, I did say so."

"Then how can you show it to me?"

"Easy enough. I didn't put it quite straight when I told you that. Fact is, Mr. Brady, I had an exact duplicate of the ring made. That's what I sent down to Doniphan by young Dawson. The original I have still. Just wait a minute, and I'll bring it down-stairs and let you see what it looks like."

"Pardon me, but what do you expect me to do with it?"

"Anything you blame please!" roared Mr. Baker, who was anything but choice in his language at times. "I've brought you all the way from New York because I couldn't get no satisfaction out of our St. Louis detectives. Now you can handle the case any way you like."

"Very good. Go get the ring."

"I'll do it. Have a smoke while I'm gone?"

Mr. Baker pushed an open box of cigars toward the detective, who selected one, and cutting off the end proceeded to light it.

Just as he was about to blow out the match the reflection caught a large mirror, which hung against the opposite wall, and flashed back. Naturally this drew Old King Brady's atten-

tion to the mirror, and he carelessly glanced toward it.

Fancy his astonishment at catching a glimpse of the reflection of a head just dodging down behind the screen in front of which he sat.

It was very startling.

The head was a man's, and was surmounted by a military hat something like those worn by the members of the Grand Army of the Republic.

It startled Old King Brady, naturally.

He jumped so suddenly that somehow he managed to tip his chair over.

It went crashing against the screen, and the detective in his effort to save himself somehow managed to get entangled.

Screen, chair and Old King Brady all went sprawling together upon the floor.

"Heavens and earth! What's the matter here?" cried Mr. Baker, rushing in.

He was just in time to find the detective at the open window; the screen was broken in three pieces, into the chair.

"A man—he was in the room listening to our conversation," cried Old King Brady.

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Where?"

"There!"

"Good gracious! I see him now in the garden dodging about among the bushes! Hold on! Hold on! You'll break your neck."

But Old King Brady had leaped unhesitatingly out of the window, landing in the garden below.

He had just missed the spy, and he was furious.

Doubtless the fellow saw the screen coming, and dodged.

Before the detective could regain his feet, Mr. Spy had thrown up the sash of the bay window behind them, and leaped out into the night.

Mr. Baker immediately ran to the side door, and clapping on his hat, joined Old King Brady in the garden.

"Do you see anything of him, Mr. Brady?"

"No."

"What sort of looking person was he?"

"Tall, fairly well built, black mustache and imperial, with a military hat."

"Thunder and lightning!"

"What's the matter?"

"Your description sounds just like my scapegrace nephew."

"Colonel Ricker?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say that he was in the house—"

"No, no! Of course not. I haven't seen him for years."

"I didn't mean to intimate that; only—look, look! There he is now!"

"Where?"

"There on top of that wall."

"By George, you're right! It's Jerome!"

Old King Brady had pointed to a high brick wall which skirted the grounds of the Chouteau avenue mansion in the rear.

The lights from the street showed him the man in the act of climbing the wall.

In a second he had vaulted lightly over it and was gone.

"Thieves! Police!" yelled Mr. Baker. "Arrest him, Mr. Brady! Arrest him, though he were fifty times my sister's child."

He sprang to a gate opening out through the wall, but before he had finished fiddling with the lock, Old King Brady had vaulted over and gained the street.

Too late!

There was no one visible on the entire block.

If Mr. Baker was right, and the intruder was actually Col. Ricker, he had managed to make good his escape.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE OUTLAWS.

"HANDS up, gents, hands up!"

It was Jesse James who spoke.

He and his brother Frank stood at opposite ends of the smoker with cocked revolvers leveled.

While Jesse entered at one door, Frank came in at the other.

The only thing peculiar was that Frank had been a little slow about it. There had been just time for the escape of the friendly Mr. Brown.

There was no use to think of resistance—in fact, nobody attempted it.

Back of Jesse was Clel Miller and one or two other noted members of the band, while Frank, to reinforce him, had Bob and Charlie Ford, those notorious traitor outlaws, who afterward betrayed Jesse James and put an end to his evil career.

"Shell out, gents!" ordered Jesse sternly, "and be blamed quick about it, too. We've got the next car to attend to yet."

In a moment every one had handed over their watches and pocketbooks.

Jesse did the collecting, and, to Will Dawson's surprise, passed directly by him, paying not the least attention to him.

Seeing this, the young detective coolly gathered up his belongings from the floor and stuffed them into his ruined gripsack, tying a string around it to hold it together.

By the time he had finished Jesse had completed his work.

"You attend to the other cars, Frank," he called.

He turned abruptly upon Will Dawson now, covering him with his revolver just as Will thought he was going to escape notice.

"Young man, you walk out of this car," he said, sternly, "and if you attempt to escape I'm going to shoot you—understand?"

Will was thunderstruck.

"What's that for?" he demanded.

"None of yer blame bizness. Trott!"

The last word gave the young man a start.

Could it have a double meaning?

Trott was the name of the jeweler in Doniphan whom Mr. Baker had instructed him to visit.

Could Jesse James know this?

Will thought not.

Much as he felt like resisting prudence forbade him.

Jesse's reputation as a dead shot was far too good to make it safe for that.

Will picked up the gripsack, and, a prey to a thousand disagreeable sensations, walked out of the car.

As he leaped to the ground Jesse followed him, and stood quietly by his side with the revolver so near his head that Will dared not move.

For some moments they stood there in silence.

Loud voices from the other car told him that the work of robbery was going steadily on.

"Look here, what's this for?" asked Will at last, summoning up courage to speak.

"I told you before," answered Jesse grimly.

"No, you didn't."

"Didn't I? Told you it was none of yer bizness. Ain't that enough?"

"But I consider it very much my business."

"Shut up your head," retorted Jesse.

"There's been too much talk already. I won't have any more."

In a moment Frank appeared, followed by the Ford boys.

Will, who had seen the pictures of all three, recognized them at the first glance.

"Let her go!" roared Jesse.

A man jumped out of the engine cab at this, and the train moved on.

Long before it was out of sight, Will Dawson found himself sitting on Siroc, in front of Jesse, galloping along a wood road through the snow and slush.

It was terribly disappointing, to say nothing of the other disagreeable aspects of the situation.

Will felt chagrined to the last degree.

Still he could do nothing, and there was no use in saying anything.

Jesse was silent most of the time, and as for Frank, who rode beside his brother, when the width of the road would admit it, he never spoke a word.

Had the robbery of the train been undertaken for the express purpose of capturing him?

Will began to think so.

"Looks as though I'd fallen into a trap," he muttered.

Then he thought of the man who had started to go to Kittle Black in Mr. Baker's interest before him.

Naturally he wondered if he had fallen into the clutches of the James Boys too.

Still he found it hard to believe this, as that portion of Missouri had never been invaded by the James Boys, that he was aware of.

In short, it was all very disagreeable and very mysterious to Will.

On they rode, taking their time to it and evidently fearing no pursuit.

As they continued to advance, the country grew more broken and steep; wooded hills began to rise about them.

Not a house was visible; the country seemed entirely wild.

For more than two hours the silent advance continued. Meanwhile, the snow had changed to rain, making the travel dreadful to a degree.

Somewhere about two o'clock, Jesse suddenly reined in at a fork in the road and gave the signal to halt.

"Hey, Frank!" he called to his brother.

"What's the matter?" demanded Frank, in his usual snarly fashion.

"We're most thar!"

"I know it."

"Hadn't one of the boys better go ahead and see ef it's all serene?"

"Don't see ther necessity of it, Jess."

"I do."

"O. K. I'll go myself, then."

"Wish you would."

Frank galloped off down the right hand road which extended into a deep hollow, or bottom, to use the Missouri term.

In a moment or two he was back again and reported the coast clear.

Now the band moved on again, coming presently to an old ruinous building which seemed once to have been a grist mill, standing by the side of a rushing stream.

Here they entered, and trooping into the main room of the building, which seemed to occupy the entire ground floor, settled themselves down for the night, Frank looking after the horses outside.

Now all this time Will Dawson had been kept close by Jesse's side.

Every attempt to question the outlaw had proved quite useless up to the time that they entered the mill.

Now, however, Jesse began to talk of his own accord.

"Come, young fellow, shell out!" he said sternly.

"You've got all that belongs to me—what more do you want?" answered Will in dreary tones.

They had taken the gripsack from him when he was forced to mount.

"Dry up!" said Jesse. "What we wanted ain't in your gripsack."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You lie, you do."

"You are complimentary. If you hadn't relieved me of my revolver I'd make you swallow that word."

"Don't be a fool. Empty your pockets!"

There was no help for it. Will was forced to obey.

He had the satisfaction of seeing Jesse coolly count and appropriate the \$500 which Mr. Baker had given him for expenses, together with all his own belongings.

Even so rich a haul as this did not seem to satisfy the outlaw, however. He continued his search, even going so far as to make Will strip off his clothes.

Now Frank took a hand in the game, and together they examined the different garments with the greatest care.

Nothing seemed to come of it, however.

Will, who watched them quietly, saw that Jesse was working himself up into a furious rage.

"Where is it?" demanded the outlaw, at length. "Where is it?"

"What?"

"You know well enough!"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"You lie—you do."

"Don't you tell me I lie!"

"You little counter-jumper! You gol-busted snip! I'll blow the whole head off of you!" roared Jesse, furiously.

But Will had stood all that he could endure.

He lost all control of himself now.

Leaping upon Jesse James he dealt him a furious blow in the face with his clenched fist, which sent the outlaw sprawling upon the mill floor.

It was foolish—very.

"Take that!" roared Frank.

Crack! Crack!

Inside the old mill two shots rang out, and Will Dawson, with the blood pouring from his naked side, felt like a log.

Jesse James was on his feet in an instant, bellowing like a mad bull.

"You dogoned fool, Frank James!" he roared.

"Won't you never get no sense? You've gone and killed the goose what was a-goin' ter lay gold eggs fer us, sure's ever a man did in this world."

He bent over poor Will's naked body, and for a moment examined it with deep attention, muttering to himself.

"Say, Jess, I only did it for your sake, brother," whined Frank.

"All ther same yer a fool. How be we ever gwine ter get ther ring now? Don't yer know what depends onto thet?"

"'Spose I do, but I was nfeared he'd kill you, Jess?"

"Stuff and nonsense! Did any one ever kill me yet?"

"N—o—o, but—"

"Nor ther man don't live what kin do it."

Oddly enough the Ford Brothers were facing him at that very moment, having crowded around with the rest.

Jesse James little dreamed that he was looking at the man who would take his life.

"He's dead as a wood-chuck," he said at last, rising. "Frank, I swar ef you wuzn't my brother I'd send you to keep him company. Dogon me ef I wouldn't now."

"Oh, you dry up. You always wuz an on-grateful cuss," snarled Frank. "Instead of thankin' me fer savin' yer life, that's the way yer talk."

"Snre he's dead?" asked Jim Cummings, pressing to the front.

"Cock sure," answered Jesse.

"Then the hull grand scheme is busted less we kin find that ar' finger ring."

"Yes."

"Hev yer sarched the grip thorough?"

"Yes, it's been slashed open. Somebuddy's took something out."

"Most like it wuz him when we fust captured ther smoker."

"Yaas."

"Orter hev it now, then."

"That's what I say, only I can't find it. Mightier hung him up by ther thumbs and made him confess whet he done with it, ef Frank hadn't been so all-fired smart."

"Say, you want to quit pickin' at me," snapped Frank. "Thar'll be trouble pretty soon ef yer don't."

Bob and Charlie Ford so far had said nothing, but remained silent spectators of this stormy scene.

"Say, you two don't wanter do no more squabblin'," interfered Clel Miller. "Is ther cuss really dead, Jess?"

"Yes."

"Let's dump him then. I, fer one, don't love corpses."

"Might's well, I s'pose," growled Jesse. "I don't love 'em nuther. We hain't got no use fer his carkase ez I see."

Stooping down, he seized poor Will by the shoulders and dragged him roughly to a trap-door, some distance from where they stood.

Clel Miller had preceded him and opened the trap.

Without the slightest hesitation Jesse pushed the body through the trap and closed it down.

"It's too gosh blamed bad!" he stormed.

"Here we air way outer our beat just on account of this story of yours, Bob Ford, and now what's come of it? Nothin' but a few hundred dollars and—Catamounts and pollywogs! What's that?"

Startling sounds had been heard without.

"Some one's a coming up ther gully!" breathed Frank.

"Sounds mighty like it."

"Hain't no doubt of it."

Nor was there.

The sharp click of horses' hoofs could be distinctly heard outside the mill.

"We wanter git ter them hosses, fellers!" whispered Jesse, "and we don't wanter be all night erbout it nuther. Like enough it's ther sherill' after us on account of that train affair."

All rushed from the mill and made for a long shed, where the horses had been tied.

"Mount!" ordered Jesse.

In a moment the whole band was drawn up in front of the mill.

Meanwhile, the sound of the approaching party grew plainer.

It was evident that in a moment they must come in sight round the turn in the road.

"Charge!" called Jesse. "It's a dash, fellers! Know it's ther sherill. I feel it in my bones!"

Jesse and Frank led off, as they always did.

Usually Bob and Charlie Ford managed to keep pretty close behind their leader, but on this occasion they were the last of the little company, bringing up the rear.

On they dashed in the direction of the approaching sounds.

"Keep cool now, boys!" called Jesse. "Let 'em have it soon's they're in sight. Frank and me, along with Clel Miller an' Jim Cummings will do the man killing; rest of you fellers aim low and take the hosses. Now then fer ther old Missouri yell!"

And they gave it with a will, making the woods fairly ring.

Well might the mounted men, who now suddenly came into view before them, have thought that the old days of Quantrell's guerrillas had returned.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"
 "Crack! Crack! Crack!"
 The shots flew like rain.
 "W-h-o-o-p!" yelled Jesse, speeding Siroc directly at the attacking party, which had suddenly reined in and had begun firing.
 There were fifteen of them, all told, big bearded fellows, who looked as if they ought to be good for Jesse's gang, which numbered only ten.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" came the answering fire.

"Crack, crack, crack,"
 Jesse's rifle had spoken again, Frank's following suit.

In an instant there was one grand tangle of men and horses, while the stillness was broken by wild shouts and yells.

Then Jesse, Frank and the rest were seen to separate from the crowd and go dashing through the glen.

They had cut their way through, and the sheriff's party was in hot pursuit, but badly broken up.

Could Jesse hope to escape?
 Well, he usually managed it.
 This was not his first dash by many.

The effects had been fearful, though.
 Eight men lay dead or wounded; four splendid horses had fallen to rise no more.

But, as usual, Siroc succeeded in distancing all pursuers.

Some took to the woods, others followed along the bed of the creek.

It was every man for himself, and Satan take the hindmost.

Probably Satan must have caught Bob and Charley Ford, for after the moment of the first daring dash, neither of the traitor brothers had been seen by Jesse, nor did he see them for months again.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NIGHT ESCAPE.

"I'se comin'! I'se comin'. My head is bendin' low. I hear the children's voices callin' Old Black Joe!"

Thus sang a deep, strident voice and then a banjo strummed.

"Say, Moll! Hain't supper most ready?" roared a second voice.

"Pretty near!" answered a third—a woman's—heard in the distance as though from another room.

"Waal, I'm gosh blamed glad of it. I'm hungry ez a badger, I am; so's Bob."

Then: "tum! tum! tum! tummy—tum—tum!" the banjo began again.

Wondering much what it all meant, wondering more where he was and why he felt too weak to move, Will Dawson lay upon a rude bed in a narrow room adjoining that from which the sounds came forth.

Not from the moment of Frank James' shot had he known anything until now.

Suddenly the banjo playing ceased and a young man entered the chamber.

He had his trousers stuck in his high top boots, wore a red shirt and big slouch hat.

"Bob! Oh, Bob! He's come to!" he shouted, as soon as his eyes rested upon Will.

It was Charlie Ford.

In a moment Bob had joined him.

Will could only stare at them, and wonder what it all meant.

"Hello, pard! All right now?" asked Bob, bending over the bed.

"I don't know—I don't know! What has happened?"

"Oh, a dence of a lot has happened sence ther night we hauled you out of ther erik onderneath ther old mill in ther Red Gully, ef that's what yer mean."

"I don't understand."

"Mebbe not. Jesse James chucked you thar—that's all," said Bob.

"An' you were as good as dead," put in Charlie. "You've got one of Frank's bullets into you neow."

"Have I been shot?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Thigh—left one."

"And I owe my life to you?"

"Yass."

"Great heavens! Can this be true?"

"Anything the matter with us? Hain't we ez good ez ther next?"

"Yes—yes. I don't mean that. How long have I been here?"

"Oh, the matter of a week's time."

"You don't mean it?"

"Sartain."

Charlie was doing the talking now, Bob remaining a silent spectator at the door.

It was a terrible revelation to poor Will Dawson.

Yet he could be only too thankful that he was living at all.

"I know you—you are the Ford Boys," he said feebly.

"You've hit it," answered Charlie. "You are the son of a gun of a detective what old man Baker of St. Louis sent down to Kittle Black."

"You seem to know my business."

"Waal, we jest do neow."

"I'm sare I'm very grateful to you."

"You'd orter be. We've quit our chances with Jesse James purpose to stay behind and look arter you."

"You never did that for nothing," said poor Will feebly, for he knew this breed well.

"You bet we didn't."

"What's your lay?"

"We want the seal ring what Mr. Baker give you, and we want that there letter to old Trip Trott over to Doniphan."

"I thought so."

"You thought right, then. Tell us whar they be and I'll be dogoned ef we don't divide with you, and they tell me thar's a cool hundred thousand into this."

"Sorry I can't accommodate you. I haven't got the things you want though."

"I know that. But you hid 'em somewhere!"

"You are mistaken."

"Don't rile me, young feller, I'm a kerwhallopin catamount from Oshkosh when I'm riled and Bob's wus'n two of me, ain't yer, Bob?"

"You kin jest bet yer sweet life I am," chimed Bob.

In spite of his weakness, Will tried to raise himself in bed—tried and failed.

"It ain't any use to ask me. I was robbed on the train before you fellows attacked us at all," he earnestly said.

"No!"

"Yes, it's a fact."

And Will told the story of the friendly Mr. Brown.

"It's all a blame lie. You cut the bag open yerself and hid them things somewhar," stormed Bob, furiously angry. "Now you'll tell whar's somewhar, young feller, or you'll find thar's gwine ter be a heap of trouble on the old mau's mind. Think it over now. Charlie, les go to tea."

But neither threats nor urging could extract from Will Dawson what he did not know.

It was quite impossible to make the Ford Boys believe this, however.

Evidently they knew all about Will Dawson's errand in that lonely region.

How did they find it out?

Here was a question which sadly puzzled Will.

What puzzled him more, though, was to know who the friendly Mr. Brown was and how he knew of the ring and letter.

Evidently he was equally unknown to the Ford Boys and to Jesse James.

Who then was he? Where had he sprung from?

"If you would only believe me we might try and see what could be done to head that fellow off," said Will, one night about a week later.

He had got so that he could move about the room now, and Charlie Ford had come in after supper to visit him.

Just where he was or what the pair proposed to do with him was still a mystery.

The Ford Boys would answer no questions and kept him a close prisoner in the little room, even the shutters being barred on the outside.

But what made it the more certain that Will would not attempt to escape was the fact that he had nothing on but an old cotton night shirt.

His own clothes he could get no satisfaction about.

Such was his desperate fix when on this particular night, shortly after twelve o'clock, Charlie Ford, almost too drunk to stand, burst into the room, and for at least the hundredth time, tried to make Will tell him where he had hidden Mr. Baker's ring.

"You don't want to tell me that yarn no more, nuther!" he snarled, when Will alluded, as usual, to the story of the friendly Mr. Brown.

"There's no use in telling you lies."

"That ain't the truth."

"I say it is."

"Wouldn't believe a detective, nohow."

"Don't know what I can say to you then."

"I'm gwine ter make you find out what to say pretty dogoned sudden," snarled Charlie.

"Let me have my clothes and I'll help you hunt up this man Brown."

"Oh, go West! Tell you what I'll do with you."

"What?"

"I'll let you hev yer clothes and the best hoss thar is to be had in this here ranch—an' I want you to onderstand thar's lots of good ones—ef you'll give me the right steer. Then you shall stick by us, an' we'll discover that air gold old man Baker's brother hid—share and share alike. Come now, I couldn't speak you no fairer nor that."

"Certainly not," replied Will musingly.

"What d'yer say?"

"I'm thinking about it."

"Tell yer what."

"Tell it."

"It shall be jest me an' you, ef you like. We won't let Bob inter ther scheme at all. He's full as a goat an' snoozin' on the sofy out thar. Come, Dawson, be sensible and tell a feller. Come on—what d'ye say?"

"I swear I believe I'll do it," answered Will, who had been seized with a sudden idea.

"Now yer shoutin'. It'll be jest you an' me. Let Bob go to pot."

"Your own brother!"

"Oh, thet's bizness. Relations hain't to be considered when thar's bizness on hand."

"Who told you about the ring? How came Jesse James to get on my track?"

"I'll tell you that after you tell me whar you hid the ring," returned Charlie with a cunning leer.

Now, Will was in bed of course, and Charlie Ford was sitting on the edge while talking; his short coat did not quite conceal the butt of a big revolver which projected from his hip pocket.

"All right. I'll own up," said Will, at length. "I've got the ring, Ford, just as you said—managed to hold onto it through all."

"Know'd it. Whar is it?"

"Under the bed."

"This bed?"

"There ain't any other bed about, is there?"

"Whar under the bed?"

"In the toe of that old slipper you lent me."

"Gosh, all snakes! 'Twon't be long 'fore I hev it then!" cried Bob.

He did just what Will expected he would do; dropped off the bed, and falling on his hands and knees, crawled partly underneath, leaving his legs exposed.

Like a flash, Will slipped off the bed and seizing the revolver, pulled it out of Charlie's pocket.

"Move one inch and your goose is cooked!" he called. "I've got you covered, Charlie Ford."

"Good gosh!" was the cheerful though muffled exclamation which came back from under the bed.

If ever a man had another "dead to rights" Will Dawson had Charlie Ford then.

If Charlie had been sober he never would have permitted himself to be thus entrapped. Had he been like other drunkards he would have turned on Will with double fury, regardless of the consequences, too.

But Charlie was one of those peculiar fellows who no matter how drunk they may get in their legs, never lose their head. In fact, the fuller he got the more cautious he became.

Not for worlds would he have moved now.

"Saay, ye've got the drop onto me, Dawson," he growled, "but you better look out. Ef you not get too fresh I'll yell for Bob."

"Do it, and you're a goner. I'll shoot you before the first sound is out of your mouth. After that Bob and I will fight it out."

"Gosh! yer a hard one! Let me back outer here, won't yer? I've got a big jag on, and the blood is all rushing into my head."

"No."

"What do you want?"

"Want you to listen while I talk, Charlie Ford. You wouldn't believe me when I told you the truth, so I had to lie to you. The ring ain't in that slipper. I don't know any more than you do where it is."

"Don't believe you now."

"Can't help it. Take off your coat and pitch it out."

"Shant do it!"

"You must."

There was a lot of growling, but out came the coat.

"Spouse you'll want my britches next," snapped Charlie.

"Exactly! That's just what I do want. You can put mine on if you know where they are. They cost me ten dollars, at Nobbe, the tailor's."

in St. Louis, and are enough sight better than yours."

"Yer must be off yer base."

"Never mind me. Off with the breaches!"

"Shant do it."

"One—two——"

Oh, dogon it all I s'pose I've got ter," groaned Charlie.

With much labor his pants were unbuttoned and Will helped him pull them off, warning him that the revolver had him covered all the while.

But Charlie did not try to show fight.

The peculiar position in which he was crouching sent the rum to his head with a rush.

He was getting drunker every moment.

"Shoes and stockings now!" ordered Will.

He had to take them off himself though, for Charlie couldn't.

No sound from the house yet.

"Charlie must certainly have dropped off asleep," thought Will, as he pried off the staple which secured the door.

There were three horses in the barn. Two were ready saddled and probably belonged to the Ford Boys.

Will managed with some difficulty to mount the best one after leading him out into the yard.

All was profoundly silent in the house, as he rode off into the night.

CHAPTER V.

TITTERINGTON—HA! HA!

DONIPHAN is the county seat of Ripley County.

In appearance it resembles most towns in Southern Missouri and I think all who have

He was just too late.

The train had already got under headway.

As the fellow jumped his foot caught in an inequality in the platform boards and he fell sprawling.

By the time he recovered his feet the cars were gone, and Old King Brady too.

There was some tall swearing done at the Doniphan station then, for there was no other train that night.

Meanwhile Old King Brady, anxious to avoid a quarrel, had walked round behind the station and made his escape.

He half expected the fellow would follow him and try to renew the disturbance, but he did not.

In a few moments Old King Brady was on the



"Bang! bang!" went the rifles. But the aim was faulty. Black Jim had taken the tree without a balk, and was carrying Will Dawson in safety over the rift.

"Now, just hold on a moment more while I put them on," he said, "then I'll help you out."

But Charlie seemed almost past answering.

He was no longer crouching, he had tumbled over flat.

"All right, Dawson," he muttered thickly.

"All right, good feller! You'll show me whar yer put ring. No matter—won't tell Bob nottin'. Good night."

"I do believe he's off to sleep," muttered Will, grasping the clothes. He silently stole into the adjoining room, where Bob Ford lay slumbering on the sofa.

Now was his chance to escape—he might never get such another.

Besides the Ford Boys and himself there was only an old woman in the house, which, he rightly guessed, was in a lonely situation far from any traveled road.

Old Mollie was in bed long ago, and no one ever thought of locking the doors.

Will pulled the key down off a nail and, shooting through the door, shut and locked it.

"Phew! but it's cold!" he shuddered, as the night air struck his naked legs.

"Twas a wonder he didn't get his death, coming right off a sick bed.

Fortunately, though, he was very much improved by this time. Bob was something of a surgeon, and had extracted Jesse James' bullet at the start, since which operation Will had been steadily on the mend.

He now bent down to put on the clothes and then hurried to the barn.

visited that section will agree with us in saying, that there is no use in attempting to describe the natural beauty of its surroundings, for the excellent reason that there is nothing to describe.

One afternoon, shortly after Old King Brady's visit to Mr. Baker, at a little before sundown, the train stopped at Doniphan depot, and a single passenger got out.

He was a tall, elderly man, wearing a long blue coat and a white slouch hat, looking as little like the loungers about the station as possible.

Gripsack in hand, he strode to the station door, and was just about to enter, when a man rushing out came in sudden and violent contact with him, almost knocking him down.

"Dogon you! Why don't you look whar yer gwine!" roared the man.

"Steady, friend! steady!" answered Old King Brady, for the stranger was none other than the great detective, down in Ripley county on Mr. Baker's business.

"It's your fault. You've no business to be running into honest folks. I've a good mind to break your head."

"Better not try it."

"Why not?"

"Two can play at that game."

"Bahl you long-tailed Methodist."

"Tut, tut!"

Toot! toot! went the engine whistle, and the belligerent Missourian gave one wild snort and a spring for the train.

main street and had forgotten all about the ridiculous affair.

Now there was nothing very lively about the main street of Doniphan—it was certainly not Broadway.

There was the bank, the Baptist church, three or four substantial-looking stores and a few more which were mere shanties.

Outside of the biggest store, which had a drinking saloon attached, a dozen saddle horses were hitched to a bar, while their owners were hitched to the bar inside.

Then there was also the Grand Southern Hotel, which, in spite of its name, was anything but a portentous affair.

Old King Brady entered the hotel, and handing his grip-sack to the polite clerk inquired where he could find a watchmaker, mentioning that his timepiece needed repairs.

"There are two in town," replied the clerk. "Sperry is right next door here. He's the best—a young man up to date. Beside him there's Trip Trott, a regular old botch. Fixed my watch a year ago, and in spite of all that Sperry can do it has never kept time since."

"Where is his shop?"

"Further down on the right, but you don't want to go there—that is not if you value your watch."

Old King Brady smiled, and after some further conversation with the clerk about a room, went in to supper—a dreadful affair which he was glad to hurry through.

After it was over the detective lit a cigar and sallied forth.

Evidently his regard for his watch must have been very slight, for he passed directly by Sperry's, and a few moments later entered a little shop before which was the sign T. Trott, Clocks, Watches and Jewelry.

One clock, two old brass watches in the case, and a few cheap rings and pins seemed to constitute the stock in trade.

Over these a sleepy-looking old man with a brown wig presided.

He was smoking a pipe and was reading an old number of the St. Louis Republican—which oddly enough is a Democratic sheet—as Old King Brady entered the shop.

"Good evening," said the detective pleasantly.

"Evenin'!"

"This is Mr. Trott?"

"Ya'as."

Old King Brady took from his pocket a small box wrapped in white paper.

Removing the paper, he opened the box and drew forth an old-fashioned seal ring, gold with a white cornelian stone, representing a serpent coiled with a sunken motto around the rim.

Without a word he laid this ring upon the case.

Sleepy! Did we accuse Mr. Trott of being sleepy?

Why, never was a man more thoroughly wide awake than the old jeweler appeared to be now.

He stared first at the ring and then at Old King Brady. Next he adjusted his old silver spectacles and stared at both again.

"Wha—what's this?" he stammered.

"A ring."

"I see."

"Do you recognize it?"

"Great heavens—yes!"

"What is the matter? You seem disturbed."

"I guess you'd be disturbed if—but there's no use talking. Look here!"

He turned, and, from a little cabinet of drawers behind the counter, drew forth another seal ring which he laid down beside Old King Brady.

They were the exact counterpart of each other in every respect.

Now it was the detective's turn to be surprised, and he was, although he never moved a muscle.

"Friend, where did you get that?" he asked.

"Where did you get the other?"

"Stop! We must not play at cross purposes any longer. I am an agent of Mr. Hezekiah Baker, of St. Louis. Mr. Baker received a telegram the other day directing him to send this ring—which was once the property of his brother, Eldad Baker—to you. Here it is."

"Great heavens! Why, that's just what the other one said," cried the watchmaker.

"What other one?"

"The man who brought this ring here."

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know any more than you do. I only know that he brought the ring."

"That ring is not the genuine one."

"I see now that it is not. It is new. I wonder, that even with my bad eyesight, I could have been deceived."

"When did it come in?"

"About an hour ago."

"Can you describe the man who brought it?"

"Yes, yes. He was most as big as you are, had black hair and beard, wore a hat something like yours, and had his pants tucked in his boots."

"Great Scott! That's the man who ran into me at the station!" exclaimed Old King Brady.

There seemed no need of further diplomacy here—rather the reverse, and Old King Brady told the watchman just what his errand was.

"Did you send that telegram to Mr. Baker?" he asked.

"No, no!" It must have been sent by his brother, Eldad, a very old and dear friend of mine."

"Impossible—Eldad Baker is dead, is he not?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No. The world believes him dead, but I believe that he is living still."

"Have you seen him?"

"No; not since he left Kittle Black, insane, they said, years ago, but I have heard from him twice since that."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"How did you hear from him?"

"By letter. The first came just after his disappearance. In it he told me where he had hidden that gold and bound me to keep the secret."

"How bound you?"

"Oh, he knew that his mere request would be

binding enough. I was under big obligations to El Baker. We understood each other as very few folks do."

"And he told you where he hid the gold you say?"

"Yes, yes. Don't tell no one till I send you word, Trip," he said, "in the letter, and I didn't, though years has passed since then."

"And the other letter?"

"Came just a few days ago."

"By mail?"

"No. I found it on the store floor one morning. Some one must have pushed it under the door in the night time."

"What did that letter say?"

"Why, it was jest a few lines. Read it fer yourself."

Thereupon Mr. Trott pulled a sheet of paper from his greasy pocket-book, and handed it over to the detective across the case.

"Dear Trip," it read, "I still live, in spite of man and the devil, but I intend to kill myself to-morrow at ten minutes past four o'clock. I hid that gold—you know. It's been a curse to me. Look here, Trip; when someone hands you my seal ring, it will be from Hezekiah. Whoever it is, tell him where the gold is hid, and that's the last thing you can ever do to oblige

"Your old friend,

"EL."

"And you told this man?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Of course. What else could I do? I supposed it was all right."

"On the contrary, it was all wrong. The fellow must have stolen the ring from the young detective Mr. Baker sent down here. There's something wrong somewhere. Thank Heaven, there's no other train to-night, so it isn't likely the fellow will leave town."

"You can't tell that."

"Of course not, certainly. Mr. Trott, you had better tell me the result and let me go."

"But how do I know you have any better right to it than the other?"

"Who brought you the genuine ring?"

"You. Oh I know that. Yours is El's ring. I'll swear to it. Stupid in Baker to have that copy made."

"Never mind that! The secret."

"Dear me! Dear me! I don't know what to do."

"There's only one thing to do. Tell it."

"But I may be doing the wrong thing, an' I want to do jest right."

"You'll be doing just right if you tell me," replied Old King Brady earnestly.

It needed but a half a glance to see that Mr. Trip Trot was an honest old soul, and meant every word he said.

It required a little more urging, but in the end Old King Brady got the secret out of him. He was allowed to copy the faded writing on a bit of card which had been enclosed in Eldad Baker's first letter, written years before.

"I hid the gold in the cellar in Sile Marsh's hut in Black Mingo Swamp," it read. "It's under the big flat stone."

"Where is this Mingo Swamp?" Old King Brady demanded.

Mr. Trott explained that it lay between Wayne and Stoddard counties, about forty miles to the northeast.

After that Old King Brady left the store in a very perplexed frame of mind.

He had however, recovered his spirits before he reached the hotel.

"Something gained and nothing lost," he muttered. "Upon thinking it over, I can see that I had every reason to expect something of this kind. That fellow belongs to the James gang most likely. They captured that young detective, and like enough have killed him. It all resolves itself now into who can reach this Black Mingo Swamp first, my quarrelsome friend at the depot or I."

He hurried back to the depot now to ascertain what had become of the man.

"Yes, I seen the feller," said the depot master. "He was so allired mad when he found the train had gone that he was going to tear the house down I thought. He swore he'd pop you, kun'l, fust time he laid eyes onto you. Better look out."

"Nonsense! I'm not afraid. Which way did he go?"

"Last I seen he wuz walkin' up street toward Bogg's livery stable."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Ever see him before?"

"Seen him when he got off the train this morning."

"But before that?"

"No. He's a stranger in these here parts."

From the depot Old King Brady hurried back on the street to the livery stable.

Here he learned that the stranger had bought a saddle horse and departed, while he—the detective—was yet eating supper at the Grand Southern Hotel.

"Which way did he go?" asked Old King Brady.

"He took the Kittle Black Road; that's all I know," replied the livery stable keeper.

"Didn't say where he was goin'?"

"Said he was bound further than Poplar Bluff."

"That's beyond Kittle Black, ain't it?"

"Yes. On the Big Black river, over in Butler County, about fifteen miles from here."

"What did you tax him for a horse?"

"Fifty dollars for the hull thing, saddle an' all. Say, Kun'l, I've got jest ther purtiest little gray mare in the stable thet ever you laid your eyes onto."

"Let me see her. If she see snits me I'll buy without your saying one word more," said Old King Brady.

The gray mare proved to be all her owner claimed for her and more.

Half an hour later Old King Brady rode out of town astraddle of the beast, taking the Kittle Black road.

"Now my job has began in earnest," he thought. "Wonder what that fellow's idea was in taking the train going in the other direction? Was it for a blind or was his taking this road a blind. Wish I knew."

But there was no way of finding out and Old King Brady rode on.

He soon found that he was on the right track.

Houses were scarce, but at every one he passed when inquiry was made he found that the man he was chasing had gone before him.

He seemed to be gaining too.

Notwithstanding the excellent qualities of the gray mare the stranger was evidently better mounted.

At Kittle Black, through which village the detective passed shortly after midnight, he learned that the man was headed straight for Poplar Bluffs.

No one knew him in Kittle Black it was said.

He had given the name of Brown to Old Trip Trott, but, of course that went for nothing.

Nevertheless Old King Brady got to calling him Mr. Brown in his mind as he rode along, and Brown he shall be for convenience sake, if nothing else.

Now, this was not Old King Brady's first visit to Kittle Black.

He had spent two hours in the place earlier in the day.

All that Mr. Baker had told him was confirmed upon inquiry.

The only new development was that the detective learned to a certainty that his young predecessor, Will Dawson, had never reached the place.

All that night and all the next day and the next night, the chase for Mr. Brown continued, but without satisfactory result.

Try as he would he could not come up with him—and both had fresh horses by this time, Brown having exchanged with a stable-keeper in Poplar Bluff, Old King Brady doing the same.

There was but little doubt now that Mr. Brown was heading for the Black Mingo swamp.

By sun-down Old King Brady who was following the Bloomfield road, had crossed the St. Francois river and entered Stoddard County.

The swamp was not more than ten miles distant now, he calculated. It might be nearer still.

It grew darker.

The road winding among the oak bluffs was desperately lonely.

All night long he followed it.

How for he was from Mr. Brown, as dawn drew near, began to be an important question with Old King Brady.

From information which he had received at the last farm-house he had stopped at, the detective felt certain that his long chase was nearing its end.

"What shall I do when I meet him?" he thought as he rode along through a stretch of thick forest. "I can't arrest him. I don't want to shoot him. If I took away everything he had about him he would have the secret still."

He had thought of all this before, but it returned to his mind with redoubled force now, and he felt that in a few minutes he would be called upon to decide.

"Thunder! how lonely it's getting, and how

dark!" muttered Old King Brady. "Just the place for a gang like the James Boys to hang out."

So black was all about him that he could see nothing ahead of the horse's nose.

On either side of the road the oak-covered hills were higher than any he had yet seen.

Fortunately there were but few cross-roads in that wild region, and hence but little chance of losing one's way.

"If I don't get out into the open country soon I shall be in despair," thought Old King Brady. "It can't be a great way now to the swamp, and—heavens and earth! what's that?"

"Tit-tit-tit-Titterington, ha! ha!" shrieked a voice off through the darkness. "Tit-tit-tit-titterington, ha! ha! Ho! ho! Ha! ha! Ho! ho! Ha! ha! Tit-tit-tit-titterington ha! ha! ha! h-a-a-a!"

The cry died away at last, leaving Old King Brady in a state of deep perplexity.

He had reined in very naturally, and scarcely knew whether or not to proceed.

"Can that be a panther?" he thought. "It can't possibly be a bird, that's sure."

He knew nothing of panthers beyond the fact that they existed in Missonri, and had a cry strangely like the human voice.

Suddenly a bright light flashed ahead.

It startled the old detective terribly, for it showed him the road for some little distance in advance, and there, directly in the middle of the wagon track, stood a tall man, without any other clothing than something looking like bathing trunks about his middle.

His head was bare and his hair and beard long and tangled.

In his hand he swung a lighted lantern back and forth, shouting wildly as he did so:

"Tit—tit—tit! Titterington, ha! ha! Tit—tit—tit Titterington, ha! ha! Ha—ha—ha, h—a—a—a!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHO'S IN THIS CHIMNEY?

"Bob! Bob! Bob, Gosh blame it all, wake up!"

"What in thunder's the matter with you, Charlie?" mumbled Bob Ford, rolling off the old lounge and staggering to his feet.

"Matter enough. Our bird has flown."

"Dogon it—no!"

"Yes, he has."

"Whar you been all the while?"

"Same's you."

"Ersleep?"

"Yes."

"You said you'd stay on watch."

"Can't help it. Ain't no use in lyin', brother. I fell asleep. Them last two drinks fixed me out."

Bob sprang to his feet "ripping and roaring," as Charley expressed it.

"Sa'ay, did he get your britches off while you was asleep?" he roared.

"Gosh, no!"

"What then?"

"Bob, don't kill me."

"Kill nothin'. I'd kill you ez quick ez the next man, Charlie, ef I thought you'd went back on me."

"No, no, Bob!"

"What's all about it then?"

"I wuz thet sonnd I'd'n know, Bob. Muster pulled off my clothes myself, and laid down on the bed alongside of him."

"And he's taken your clothes and skipped?"

"Thet's about ther size of it."

The storming of Bob Ford was horrible to hear.

"Get a pair of britches on and be ready to do something!" he yelled, rushing himself for the door.

When he came back he was in still worse humor.

"Charlie, Charlie!" he came in shoutin'.

"What's the row now?" asked Charlie, who was dressed by this time.

"He's taken Black Jim!"

"Thought he would. Thet young feller ain't nobody's fool."

"He's ben' playin' possum, makin' out he was so weak."

"He's weak enough. Don't believe he'll get far now."

"Meanwhile he'll hev the ring put beyond our reach, cuss him, an' you, too, Charlie Ford, you got busted fool!"

"Easy, Bob, easy. I'm a bad man when I'm riled."

"So'm I, an' I'm riled now."

"No matter. I was drunk an' so wuz you. Run did it, Bob."

"Arter all our trouble, too. Whv, when I found that feller lyin' on them shavin's under the old mill and knowed thar wuz life into him, I thought my fortune wuz made. He knows whar the ring is, says I. Les' take care of him an' get the secret out'n him, says I. Then you says—"

"Say, Bob?" interrupted Charlie.

"What is it?"

"What ther dickins is the use in goin' over all that? Don't you s'pose I know it ez well az you do?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"Oh, dry up. Be we gwinter foller him?"

"Yaas, in course."

"Waal, we'd better be gwine then."

"Sartain. How long d'ye s'pose he's gone?"

"Dunno. Can't tell nawthin erbout it."

"What time is it now?"

"Half pas' three."

"What's the last time you seen him?"

"Somewhere's along midnight."

"Likely he's been gone ever sence then."

"Yaas."

"Then our chance of ketchin' him is mighty slim."

"Waal, 'tain't the best, but we mought ez well try. Say, let's be off."

They were galloping over the oak bluffs soon after that trying to follow certain footprints of a horse, but it was hard work.

"What in thander d'ye s'pose made him leave the road, Charlie?" asked Bob, whose good nature had been pretty well restored.

"Dunno. Les' he got looney."

"Yer don't think thet?"

"Dunno. It wuz a big undertaking for a feller what's ez weak as he is anyhow."

"Tell you what."

"Tell it."

"Mebbe we ain't followin' him at all, mel'be we hain't been sence we quit the road. Mebbe he tumbled off or got off, and it's only Black Jim we've been trackin' arter all."

"Thought of thet."

"I believe it's so."

"He may be lyin' long the road sumurs then."

"Ya'as like ez not we passed him."

"What kin we do?"

"Dunno."

"It's impossible to tell which is which."

"You're right. Guess best thing we can do is to keep arter the boss till we know something definite."

And thus talking the Ford Brothers rode on through the oaks until morning dawned.

They were in the wildest part of Stoddard county, a region scarcely known to the outside world.

Every now and again they would descend a hill and cross some stream, but it was only to come to a higher hill beyond, up which they would climb, skirt along its top a little way, and then down again into the next bottom.

They were still following the trail which they had taken up at the barn door.

"We're pickin' up on it!" exclaimed Bob at last. "There hain't no doubt but what thet's so."

"Wouldn't wonder ef we caught sight of them top of ther next hill," replied Charlie.

"What makes yer tlink so?"

"Oh, kinder feel it."

"You're makin' out ye're a second Jesse James," sneered Bob, "talkin' about yer feelin' this and sensin' that. Fact is, you dunno no more about it nor the next one, and— Dogon it, Charlie! Thar he is now!"

They had just come to the top of a hill, and emerging from among the oaks, saw ascending the hill ahead of them a solitary horseman, looking in the distance the very duplicate of Charlie Ford.

He was mounted on a black horse and was riding along unconcernedly, not seeming to have the slightest idea that he was being chased.

"Thet's him! Thet's Dawson!" cried Bob.

"No time to be lost, Charlie. Now for a rush!" One hollow only lay between them.

Putting spurs to their horses the Ford Boys sped down the hill.

It was Will fast enough.

The young detective was already beginning to feel the effects of his long ride, and for some time had been hoping against hope that he would come to some farm house where he could rest.

But not a house had he seen thus far.

Weak and depressed, Will fell to dreaming as he rode under the silent stars.

First, he knew he was off the road altogether and striking across country among the oaks.

"Never mind!" he muttered. "I won't go back. There must be a road beyond here somewhere, and in case I'm followed it's all the better."

He pushed straight ahead, therefore, and was still looking for the road when the sun rose.

"Daylight at last," murmured Will. "Thank Heaven for it. I thought the night would never end."

He turned around to have a look at the sun, and to his horror beheld Bob and Charlie Ford galloping toward him down the hill which bounded the bottom out of which he had just ascended on the other side.

Will almost tumbled off his horse he was so frightened.

"Hold up thar, ye dogoned boss thief!" yelled Charlie, seeing that they were discovered. "Hold up!"

But Will only drove the spurs into Black Jim's flanks and sped away the faster.

"Stop! Stop!" shouted Charlie. "You can't get no further that way. Yer gotter stop an' mought as well do it afore yer have us riled."

But Will paid no heed.

His horse was a splendid animal and full of fire in spite of the distance they had come.

"There's a good chance of my distancing them," thought Will, "and if I can't why it'll be time enough to fight when I have to—heavens and earth! What now?"

Black Jim had come to a sudden halt, almost throwing Will over his head.

To the young detectives horror, he saw a great gulf yawning before him—a rift in the bed rock perhaps twenty feet across—the bottom was lost in the shadows of the early dawn.

Will jerked at the rein and backed away in a hurry.

"Crack! Crack!"

Two shots rang out behind him, falling, however, far short of their mark.

"What 'd I tell you?" yelled Bob. "You can't do it no how; better hold up."

But Will made no answer.

At some distance down the rift he had seen a possible means of escape, and he now urged Black Jim toward it at the top of his speed.

"Why don't the fool hold up?" cried Charlie.

"He's right in front of Black Guily, thet's what's the matter. He must know he can't get over ef he's got any sense."

"Dogoned ef I don't fire to kill next time!" answered Bob, digging the spurs into his horse.

"No, no. Don't do that."

"I'm mad enough to."

"T won't pay. Dead men don't tell secrets, an' we've got a secret to get out er him."

"Let him hev another jest to scare him, then."

"Crack! crack!" went the rifles again, but Will did not seem to scare very badly, for he kept straight on.

"Look! look!" yelled Bob suddenly.

It was a startling sight.

Will had come to a place where a great tree had been felled over the rift—or had blown over, it was impossible to say which—forming a bridge as dangerous as it was rude.

"Black Jim will never take it!" cried Bob. "Never in the world!"

"But he is taking it!" roared Charlie, "an' I'll be dogoned ef I believe our horses will. Gosh blame it I'm going to hit ther cuss, secret or no secret. Letter go!"

"Bang! bang!" went the rifles.

But the aim was faulty.

Black Jim had taken the tree without a balk, and was carrying Will Dawson in safety over the rift.

In a moment Will had gained the rocks beyond and disappeared down the hill.

"Now is my chance, and my only one," he thought.

Urging the faithful animal forward, he gained the bottom, and plunged into a thick growth of oaks.

Was he still followed?

There was no telling.

It had required all Will's nerve to make the dangerous passage.

It was quite impossible to tell whether the Ford Boys would be able to cross the bridge or not.

"By George, they've done it!" exclaimed Will suddenly as their shouts were heard behind him.

Suddenly he came out upon a road bounded by forest on both sides.

It was a mere cart track, and appeared to be but little used.

Should he follow it, or plunge into the forest beyond?

For one fatal moment Will hesitated.

Crack! crack! went the rifles behind him again.

Calamity had come at last.

Black Jim gave a wild leap and stumbled, pitching Will over his head.

This alone saved the detective, for the poor

horse had been shot in the left flank, and did not rise again.

"Bang! Bang!" went the rifles once more, but Will plunged into the thicket just in time to escape.

He was desperate now, and dashed on madly, heedless of the direction he was taking.

In a few moments he gained an oak grove that was tolerably open, next he came out into a clearing before a small dilapidated house two stories in front, and low, sloping roof in the rear.

The door was closed, and the windows concealed behind heavy wooden shutters.

There was not a sign of life to be seen about the place.

"What shall I do? I can go no further," Will thought.

Indeed his strength seemed to have become utterly exhausted all of a sudden, and beside that the fall had bruised his left leg so badly that he felt it quite impossible to go another step.

At that moment he caught sight of the Ford Boys riding into the opening from the other end.

"Surrender, Dawson? You can't escape us!" yelled Bob. "Tain't no use!"

Will's only answer was to spring away behind the house.

But he could go no further.

Beside the big water butt which stood under the sloping eaves he stumbled and fell. His strength was all gone now.

What should he do?

Every instant was precious.

Acting by sudden impulse he climbed upon the water butt and drew himself up upon the roof just as Bob and Charlie came darting round the corner of the house.

"Gosh blame it all! he's here sommers!" stormed Bob, looking round the yard. "He can't have got away."

"Hiding, most likely," replied Charlie.

"Bet he's inside."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Whose house is this?"

"Dunno. Never knowed it was here afore."

"Say, perhaps he's on the roof," suggested Bob.

"Gosh! Never thought of it! Pr'aps he is—'twould be easy enough to get up," cried Charlie.

He dismounted, and tossing his horse's bridle to Bob, climbed upon the water butt and surveyed the roof.

There was no one visible, however.

Anticipating this very movement with that keen good sense which had won him many laurels as a detective, Will had noiselessly drawn himself further up the roof while the brothers were talking below.

In a few seconds he had gained the big chimney, which contained but a single flue, and that plenty wide enough to afford an excellent hiding-place.

"Just what I want," thought Will. "They'll never look for me there."

With some difficulty he managed to climb upon the chimney which was quite cold, and let himself down inside.

There was no trouble about the last for the chimney was built of rough stones which gave him easy footing.

Will stepped from one to another, and was just beginning to feel himself safe, when suddenly a voice speaking from the depth of the chimney sent a cold chill to his heart.

"Look out there, friend. Don't come any lower!" came in deep tones from beneath him. "Another step and you'll be on my head!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE LONE HOUSE IN THE WOOD.

"Tit—tit—tit! Titterington, ha! ha! Ho! ho! Ha! ha! Tit—tit—Titterington ha! ha!" yelled the naked man, who had so unexpectedly arisen in Old King Brady's path.

In one hand the man held a lighted lantern, which he waved to and fro as he gave utterance to his peculiar cry.

Old King Brady's horse reared and plunged, almost throwing him.

"Hold on there! Stop shaking that lantern. Are you mad?" the detective called.

With a wild, unearthly laugh the naked figure gave the cry again, and gliding in among the bushes by the road-side, disappeared.

What could it mean?

So suddenly had the whole thing come upon him and vanished again that the detective found it difficult to believe now that it had happened at all.

He urged the horse forward and gained the spot where the man had stood.

There was no trace of him, however.

All was now as dark and silent as the grave.

"Hello! Hello, there!" cried Old King Brady.

No answer came.

Again and again the old detective shouted, but the result was just the same.

Just then Old King Brady perceived a cart path leading off into the forest on the left, the direction which the naked man had taken.

He leaped down, and keeping hold the horse's bridle proceeded to examine it, for his sharp eyes had caught sight of something which looked like fresh tracks made by horses' hoofs.

"Some one has just ridden in here," he muttered, discovering that he was right. "What's the matter with its being my man?"

Once the idea had seized him there was no getting rid of it.

For some distance back Old King Brady had observed these tracks, and had more than once wondered if they could have been made by the horse ridden by the man who had led him this long chase.

"I must follow this up a little way at least," he thought. "It may be that I'm on the verge of some discovery. Anyhow, I shall want breakfast pretty soon, and this road must surely lead to some house."

He hastily mounted and pressed forward, coming in a few moments into an opening, in which stood a small dilapidated cabin, surrounded by the forest on every side.

"I'll do better on foot," thought the detective. "I'll leave my horse here at the edge of the woods."

He dismounted, and leading the animal into the thicket made him fast to a tree; then returning to the opening, pushed on to the house.

"Looks though no one had lived here this twenty years," he muttered, "and yet here are the tracks still."

Yes, there they were, leading straight up to the closed door; there also was the place where the rider had dismounted; beyond that the tracks could be seen leading round to an old barn behind the house.

Stealthily the detective followed them.

There was no difficulty in entering the barn, for the door was only closed by a wooden pin put through a staple.

Opening it, the detective flashed his dark lantern inside.

The interior was gloomy and deserted. Dust covered the floor an inch deep, there was no sign of either hay or farming implements, but there were the tracks still leading directly to a stall in which stood a bay mare tied to an empty crib.

"Brown!" muttered the detective. "As true as I'm a sinner it's Brown."

He had the description of the mare firmly impressed in his memory just as he had received it from the livery stable keeper at Poplar Bluffs.

There was no doubt about the horse, but where was the rider?

Old King Brady shut the door carefully and returned to the house, walking twice entirely around it, hoping to catch a glimmer of light.

Not a ray penetrated the shutters, however, nor was there a sound to be heard.

"There's only one thing for it," muttered the detective, "and that's to knock on the door."

He walked boldly up to the entrance and began beating a tattoo upon the panels which might have awakened the seven sleepers had they been inside.

Presently the shutters of the window immediately above him were heard to open, and a cracked voice called down:

"Hey! Who's that?"

"A friend," replied Old King Brady; "I want some breakfast and am willing to pay for it. Come down and let me in."

It was hard to see much, the way the blinds were held, but the detective succeeded in catching a glimpse of the face of an old woman with a white nightcap on her head, peering down upon him like some elderly ghost.

"Kun! I don't run a tavern," she called in shrill, whining tones. "Go on, won't yer, an' leave a poor lone widdy in peace."

"But, my dear madam—"

"What! What! You call me your dear! Oh, you wicked old man! I'll set the dogs onto you. Here, Jack! Jack! Sic him, boy!"

But no dog came, and Old King Brady felt sure there was none about the premises. How could there be one without making itself heard before this?

"Say, old woman!" he called—"say! listen to reason. I've got a five-dollar gold piece down here to pay for something to eat. You'll come down and get it if you are wise."

"What's that you say? I'm hard of hearing."

"Five dollars in gold. Yours for a breakfast."

"Gracious sakes alive! It's more money'n I've seed in six months."

"Better come and get it then."

"Wall, I'd like to most mightily, but—"

"But what?"

"I hain't used to strangers. I'm all alone here."

"You needn't be afraid of me."

"Wall, you don't look az though you wuz very harmful."

"You can trust me."

"Wall, I guess I will. You jest wait thar by ther door an' I'll let you in in a minute. 'Fraid though, you won't be satisfied with my grab."

"Oh, anything will do for me," replied Old King Brady. Then the shutters closed and the night cap disappeared.

In a few moments a light flashed through the cracks in the door and bolts and bars were let down.

It was not the custom in these wild regions to secure a house in this fashion. There was something suspicious about this the detective thought. In a moment the door was flung open and there stood a tall, angular female, wearing a faded calico wrapper which hung about her like a bag on a bean pole.

She held up an old lamp with a cracked chimney in one hand, clutching a cocked revolver in the other.

Evidently the old hag was ready for business in case of necessity, but Old King Brady was not cowed.

"Why have you got the shooter?" he demanded coolly.

"Why wouldn't I? I'm a lone widdy woman. How do I know what gang you belong tew, squire?"

"I belong to no gang."

"Who be ye, then?"

"I'm an honest traveler. I've lost my way."

"Travelin' on foot, eh?"

"Yes."

"You lie."

"My good lady—"

"Hold on now. I hain't good, though I'd like ter be; an' I hain't a lady, an' don't wanter be, Cuss yer fine ladies I say. Iole, good for nothin' creeturs, sittin' with their hands folded from dawn till dark with gold spoons stuck into their mouths."

"But my dear madam—"

"Hold on now! Ef you dear me again it'll be the wuss fer ye. On second thoughts I guess I won't let yer come in at all. I've got a character to sustain in this ere community, an' though the next house is five miles away ther neighbors may get on to it an' talk."

"You needn't fear me."

"I hate a liar."

"Tut! tut!"

"Said you was afoot. What yer got spurs onto your boots fer then? I hate a liar—allus did."

"She has me there," thought Old King Brady, nonplused for the moment. "What shall I say?"

He would have preferred to face a dozen men than this strange old creature.

Worse than all he felt that every movement he made might be observed by other eyes—possibly those of the mysterious Mr. Brown.

"Money talks," he thought, and thrusting his hand into his pocket he pulled out a gold piece—not a five, but a ten, and held it up.

"That's my card, missus," he said. "Yours for a breakfast—no more words."

"A strange, greedy, expression came over the woman's face."

She wanted the money, but for some unknown reason did not seem to dare to take it.

Was that reason in any way connected with Mr. Brown?

"Come in!" she said, suddenly. "Come in an' let's have it. Ycu won't stay long though. Ef you do—"

She paused suddenly, and flinging the door wide open, stood aside for the detective to pass.

Old King Brady stepped in, and the door was closed.

He now stood in the living room of the house, which, with the attached bedroom and kitchen opening off, occupied the entire ground floor.

"Set down," said the woman, "an' make yerself to hum. I'll dust up something for ye inj ust about two shakes. It'll be cold, though. I can't make no fire, that's flat."

"All right. I'll take it anyway. Here's your money."

The old woman snapped at the gold piece eagerly.

"Much obliged, mister," she said. "What might be yer name?"

"It might be Sampson, ma'am, and yours."

"Oh, I'm Mrs. Titterington, ha! ha!" Old King Brady started, as he remembered the strange character he had encountered in the forest.

"Titterington!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Titterington, ha, ha! Funny name, ha'n't it? Always hev to laugh when I say it myself. Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a curious laugh, and it set Old King Brady's nerves on edge.

"I must know more about this interesting female," he thought.

But he refrained from questioning her until she had put a dish of cold pork upon the clumsy wooden table, and thanked it with lamps of cold corn bread as tough as leather and as heavy as lead.

While he ate Mrs. Titterington seated herself in an old rocking chair, and producing a short, clay pipe, well blackened, deliberately filled it with tobacco which she hacked from a plug with a pair of scissors, lighted it and began to smoke.

"She must be alone here," thought the detective. "Surely she would never be so cool if she was trying to conceal anybody's presence from me."

"Do you live here all alone?" he ventured to ask.

"Ya'as. Hev ever since Titterington died."

"Your husband?"

"Ya'as."

"Is he long dead?"

"'Bont ten years."

"It's hard to lose our loved ones, Mrs. Titterington."

"Great grief! Titterington wasn't no loved one. He was hanged by Jedge Lynch to ther limb of a tree fer hoss stealin', an' you bet I was glad when he croaked."

"Bless my soul, madam," murmured the detective, who in spite of the gravity of the subject could scarcely keep his face straight.

"Yaas. Ther wuz ther way of it. Sence then I've been livin' alone."

"Indeed. How do you make out?"

"Blamed rough."

"You don't seem to run the farm?"

"No. It's a reglar Hagar's hole, all stones and stumps. 'Fore the war it wuz all different. Them dogoned Yankees hev ruined everythink deown here."

"Did the Yankees put the stones on your land and plant the stumps?"

"Wall, neow, yer think yer pretty dogoned cute, don't yer?"

"I beg your pardon."

"'Course ther Yanks didn't put ther stones on to my land, but les' yer one yerself you know how they've fixed us eout in Missouri. Why, they tell me ther grass is er-growin' in ther streets of St. Louis, an' every second house fer sale or to let."

"Who ever told you that was making game of you, Mrs. Titterington? I was in St. Louis not long ago, and saw nothing of the sort. The city is growing like a weed."

"Sho! Yer don't mean it."

"Fact, but look here, I want to ask you a question."

"Ask away."

"Don't get mad now, but do the men in these parts usually go about without any clothes on, and shouting your name?"

Mrs. Titterington turned pale, and made one leap to her feet.

"What! What! What are you saying?" she exclaimed.

Old King Brady repeated the remark.

"Did you see a man like that?" she asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Just before I got to this house."

"Where?"

"Out on the main road, just as you turn off to come in here."

"Humph! Wuz ye scared?"

"Well, rather."

"What became of him?"

"He ran off into the woods at last."

"Wall, I swow!"

"Who war he, do you know?"

"Yes," replied the woman shortly, "I do."

"Who?"

"He's the wildman."

"The wildman?"

"Yes. He lives in ther woods 'bout here, and never wears no clothes, winter nor summer, no they say."

"What's his name?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, of course not."

"Then don't ax me, for I couldn't tell you if I would. I never seen him in my life."

"Well, he's certainly not a pleasant person to meet," said Old King Brady, pushing back his plate.

"Through," asked Mrs. Titterington.

"Yes."

"Good. Then git!"

"What?"

"Git. I've ained my money, and want'er go back ter bed."

"One moment. Whose horse is that in the barn?"

"None of your blamed bizness. Git!"

"Tut—tut!" said Old King Brady, soothingly, "you wouldn't turn me out."

"Git, I say! Whar's my shooter? Gosh! Someone's taken it. Hev you?"

"Yes. It's in my pocket," replied Old King Brady, quietly.

"What! what! I knowed you was a thief!" cried the woman, her eyes flashing with rage.

"Softly, madame, softly!"

"Give me that shooter!"

"Sit down!"

"You old tramp! Do you mean to threaten me?"

"Not at all. I only mean to prevent you from threatening me. Sit down."

Old King Brady had taken the revolver out now.

"Waal, I vow! Whatever do you want?" gasped Mrs. Titterington, sinking down into a chair.

"I want you to answer my questions."

"Shan't do it."

"You must. Woman, whose horse is that in the barn?"

"Sh!" exclaimed Mrs. Titterington, raising her finger warningly. "Sh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Someone's a-comin' into ther openin'. Don't you hear 'em?"

"No."

"They are, sure's you live! Le's look eout ther winder an' see. I tell yer what 'tis, Mr. Sampson, these 'ere is tight times an' one can't be too kearful!"

She arose, walked to the window and threw up the sash.

"Shucks! Kean't get ther shutters open no-how," she muttered. "Mister, you try."

"I didn't hear any one," said the detective, "but if you insist upon it—Merciful heavens! Help!"

As Old King Brady stepped to the window the woman stepped away from it.

The instant the detective's back was turned and he bent over the shutter fastening, she stooped down, and seizing an iron ring which had until now been concealed under a strip of carpet, pulled it with all her might.

Instantly that portion of the floor upon which Old King Brady stood sank downward.

With a startled cry the detective vanished, clutching at the window ledge, but in vain.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the old woman. "The prettiest I ever planted yet. You may come out now, pa. He's gone."

"Eh? Did you do it?" said a voice behind her.

Then the bedroom door was opened and a man's head, with long hair and tousled beard, was thrust out.

"You bet I did."

"Gosh!"

"Get yer close on, will yer? Don't stand blinkin' and wiakin' at me like some blessed old chipmunk. This man may hev a dozen others outside."

"Guess not."

"Guess yer don't know what yer talkin' er-bout, pa. You allus wuz a fool."

"All the same I'm gwinter make you a rich woman, ma. I'll give you yer kerridge and as many niggers as you can shake a stick at—you'll see."

"Get yer clothes on! Get yer clothes on, and be ready to meet ther kun'l," retorted the old woman, angrily. "Yon chartering old Jay-lawker, you never will learn to hold your tongue."

"Wull, thet's pretty good for you, ma," replied the man. "Mine does get a rest by apells, but you're never wuz known to stop, nights, days nor Sundays. Shet that 'ere trap an' stop a-bulldozin' on me neow, fer I won't take no more of yer sass."

"There, there! Don't keep er chinnin'!"

"What yer say? Sambuddy's got to talk. Ther wouldn't never be nothink done ef 'twasn't fer me. Git inter your close will yer, and go deown sullen an' chase thet old coon eout."

"Sartin, ma. Right away."

Mr. Titterington (the hanging story was only a

little fiction of Mrs. T.'s) flung the bedroom door open and began hurriedly drawing on his nether garments, talking all the while.

"Who d'ye s'pose he is, um?" he presently asked.

"Don't s'pose nothin'. He's a detective arter ther moushiners—thet's who he is."

"Sho! Wuz the gold piece a good one, ma?"

"Good for me—no good for you, 'cause you won't never see it."

"Yer mean ez mud, ma, and me a-workin' for ye ther way I've been; er-workin' the last ten days."

"Git eout! You've been drunk ther heft of ther time sence you left. I kin tell."

"Thet's a lie, ma."

"I say it's ther truth."

"There, there! I'm all ready. Jest hold on 'till I come up an' I'll give yer enough to buy the purtiest silk dress in Poplar Bluff."

"Pooh!" snorted the woman. "Ef you don't give me every blame cert yer get yer know what'll happen, Tit. I'll snatch yer balder headed than you be a'ready. I'd go down jest to watch yer ef 'twasn't fer my rheumatics; thet's powerful bad jest neow."

To this Mr. Titterington made no reply, but proceeded to light a small lantern, and opening a concealed door in one of the panels beside the chimney piece, immediately disappeared.

"May ez wull git the kun'l's breakfast ready," grumbled Mrs. T. filling up her pipe again.

"It'll be mornin' in half er-nour, an' he mought be erlong at any time. While Tit's cleanin' eout that feller down sullen, I'll jest fetch an armful of wood."

She opened the back door at the end of the shed kitchen, and was about to step out into yard when a tall, gaunt figure suddenly sprang past her into the hut.

"Lawful sakes!" shrieked Mrs. Titterington jumping back.

It was a man, naked save for a pair of bathing trunks strapped round his waist.

His eyes were blazing with an insane light as he pointed a long, gaunt finger toward the frightened woman.

"Titterington! ha! ha!" he shrieked. "Tit—tit—tit—Titterington, ha, ha! Ho! ho! Ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL IN A BUNCH.

"GREAT gosh! What do you want with me?" gasped Mrs. Titterington drawing back against the wall.

The wildman—for such indeed was the name by which this strange being was known throughout the surrounding country—struck a theatrical attitude, and began throwing kisses to the old hag in the most rapturous way.

"Queen of my soul, I want nothing but to warn you of approaching calamity!" he cried. "A base kind approaches thy humble cot, bringing with him a fair damsel, whom thou wilt be asked to hold a prisoner. See that thou do it not!"

"Gosh! D'ye mean the kun'l?" asked Mrs. T.

"Titterington! ha! ha! fairest flower that beams in the South Missonri swamps, I do mean the 'kun'l,' as you, in your illiteracy style him. He comes! No matter! I'm ahead, as usual, to warn my Dulcinea of dangers of his approach."

"Much ohleeged, I'm sure."

"Don't mention it. Show your gratitude by taking good care of the captive maiden. Woman, hear and ponder well. If one hair of that fair head is injured, by the powers of darkness, by the north wind that sweeps through the gully, by the thunderbolt that falls from heaven to smite the noble dandelion, thou wilt be made to repent it in sack cloth and ashes—principally ashes. To hear is to obey. Ha! Ha! Give me beef, beer, brandy, bread, bacon, bones—anything beginnug with a B. I have taken a vow to eat no food beginning with any other letter. Ha! ha! ha!"

"You crazy coat! Wisht I could give yer a crack longside ther head," muttered Mrs. Titterington.

But she did not answer aloud, simply went to the cupboard and began rolling up some corn-bread and bacon in an old newspaper.

This she handed to the wildman without a word.

"Hul! It is well!" he cried. "Charge it to the State. Send in the bill on the first Sunday that comes in the middle of the week. Now farewell! Good night! Remember! Beware!"

Waving his hand wildly the man darted out into the night.

"Lawful sakes! how he scart me!" gasped Mrs. Titterington. "I shan't never get used to

him ef I live a hundred years, yet I've gotter speak him fair. Why in time don't it come back? Ah, here he is now."

She had closed and fastened the shed door, giving up the idea of getting the wood apparently.

As she turned to the room there stood Mr. Titterington in the middle of the floor, looking badly scared himself.

"Say, ma! He's gone!" he stammered.

"Don't I know it? Didn't I jest see him go?" snapped the woman.

"What yer talkin' erbout?"

"'Bout the wildman, of course."

"What! has he been here?"

"Yes."

"Gosh!"

"Didn't you mean him?"

"Thunder, no, I meant that detective feller—"

"Sho!"

"Yes. Hain't thar."

"Great grief! he must be. Didn't I let him deown."

"Course yer did an' yer let something else deown tew."

"What yer talkin' erbout, Tit?"

"That air feather bed what you dropped deown las' night fer ther kun'l to lie on to. Twarn't taken away an' it must've saved the detective. Anyhow he hain't thar."

Mrs. Titterington swore right out:

"Wuz there ever sich a fool ez I be," she cried. "What's to be done?"

"Gotter hunt him up—thet's all."

"Kean't now. The kun'ls a-comm'. He musn't find you here."

"No, no! Who says so?"

"Ther wild man."

"Did he say anything about you know what?"

"Not a word. Seemed to hev forgot that he ever told us."

"Good enough. He wcn't never remember it again."

"Dunno. In my opinion it's all bosh anyhow."

"No tain't neither now. That man is just who we think he is. What he told us came out true to the letter. I've got ther winning keards all in my hand. I only want a chance to play them—that's all."

"Well, you kean't do it now with the kun'l comin'."

"No, no! But I kin wait."

"What's more, he's bringin' a gal with him, ther wild man says."

"A gal!"

"Thet's what he says."

"Oh, he must be wuss an' usual—kean't be so."

"Dunno. Guess it is."

"Hark!" exclaimed Mr. Titterington, suddenly.

"What's ther matter?"

"Don't I hear a hcss?"

"Gosh, yes!"

"It's the kun'l. Ma, what shall I do?"

The sound of a horse approaching could now be distinctly heard.

"Hide! Hide! You'll hev to hide!" exclaimed Mrs. Titterington.

"Whar?"

"Git eont in ther woods."

"Bnt I wanter know what's goin' ou."

"Git in ther chimblly then."

"Ther very thing! But, say, ma, spos'n he wants breakfast?"

"I'll tell him ther chimblly smokes, so we kean't light no fire."

"He won't believe yer."

"You'll hev to git som'ars, then, Tit, for here he is."

Just as Mrs. Titterington spoke there came a thunderous rap on the door.

"Good-day. I'm off," said Mr. T.

He made one dive for the capacious fire-place and disappeared up the chimney.

He had no difficulty in doing this, for the rough stones furnished ample footing.

It was not the first time by several that Mr. Titterington had found it convenient to retire temporarily to the same place.

Waiting only to see his big boots disappear the woman hastened to open the door of the hut, admitting a tall man wearing a military hat and high top boots, and carrying a rifle swung over his shoulder.

Accompanying him was a young girl of some eighteen years, whose white, scared face and careworn look indicated anything but a peaceful state of mind.

"Good-morning, mother" exclaimed the man. "You see I'm back again."

"Well, I hain't gone blind sence you left, kun'l."

"Ha, ha! No! Trust your sharp eyes. I've brought you company, you see."

He turned to the horse which bore his companion, beside which the one he had ridden himself quietly stood.

"Come, my dear, we stop here," he said.

The girl made no answer, and he assisted her to alight.

She seemed perfectly dazed, and too badly frightened to speak.

"Go in," said the man, kindly. "Mother T. will make things comfortable for you, won't you, Mother T?"

"Well, I hain't egzactly in shape fer company," grumbled the woman, "but any friend of yours is welcome, I'm sure, kun'l, so I'll hev to do my best."

"That's all right. I'll jest take ther horses round to the barn, and give them a feed. See, it'll be daylight in a few minutes. We've had a hard ride of it, Mother T."

He went off with the horses while Mrs. Titterington ushered the girl into the sitting-room.

Poor child! She seemed utterly tired out.

Without waiting for an invitation, she sank down into a big rocking chair and buried her face in her hands.

Mrs. Titterington scanned her features narrowly.

"Who are ye, dearie?" she asked after a moment in her whining way.

"My name is Sadie Baker," replied the girl sadly.

"Ye don't say! Be you his wife?"

"No, no! A thousand times no!"

"Mought I ask then what yer doin' hyar?"

"I have come to meet my father, madam."

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"Do you expect to find him hyar?"

"Yes—he said so."

"Who?"

"Colonel Ricker."

"Ho! Him?"

"Yes."

"Child, he's a-lyin' to yer. Yer father hain't hyar."

"Oh, don't tell me that. Don't! I've been so sick. I'm weak still. If—"

"If what?"

"If I thought it was all a lie I'd kill myself—that's all."

"Gosh! So it is that serious?"

"I mean just what I say."

"Who is your father?"

"His name is Eldad Baker."

"Eldad Baker! Great Gosh!"

"Do you know him? You seem surprised."

"No—no. I don't know nothin', only this much. Ther hain't enother house in five mile, an' I'm blame sure your father hain't in this."

"Oh, let me go then! Let me go!" cried the girl, trying to rise. "I've been tricked! I won't stay here. I—"

"Hold on! Ye kean't go neow!" exclaimed the woman, "for here he comes."

At that moment Colonel Ricker entered by the front door of the hut, closing and locking it behind him.

"How do you feel now, Sadie?" he asked in the same kindly tone.

"Don't speak to me," flashed the girl.

"Don't!"

"What, what?"

"Oh, I mean what I say, Jerome. You have tricked me. I know it now. Not satisfied with what you have done already, you have been playing on my tenderest sympathies. You—"

"Stop!" cried the man. "Stop! You shan't excite yourself. Woman, this is your work. By heavens, you can never hold your tongue."

He turned furiously upon Mrs. Titterington with the last remark.

"Well, neow, thet's hard," whined the old woman. "I never said a blamed word."

"Shut up, you old liar. I know you. Where's your husband?"

"Dunno. He went to St. Louis a couple of weeks ago. I hain't seed hide nor hair of him sence."

"I believe in my soul you're lying now."

"I hain't, kun'l. I swar I hain't!"

"Shut up! What did Tit go to St. Louis for?"

"Dunno."

"You'd better tell, old woman."

"How can a body tell what a body don't know? Oh, gosh!"

"Well, well, we'll drop the subject. How's everything going on since I was here?"

"Well at last accounts."

"Any trouble?"

"Don't know of none."

"Gool. Now look here. This young lady is my cousin. She is up here on important business. For the present you must make her as comfortable as possible. I may take her, you know where, and I may not. It depends upon circumstances. Meanwhile she must be treated with every respect."

"I'll do my best, kun'l."

"See that you do. Now brush up some breakfast for us, will you? Whose horse is that in the barn?"

Mrs. Titterington started, but immediately recovered herself.

"Come hyar, an' I'll te you," she whispered.

Drawing her visitor to one corner, she said, in a low voice:

"Say, I didn't know ther wuz a horse in ther barn. Must b'long to the detective feller what wuz up hyar."

"What! A detective! Woman, why didn't you tell me that before?"

"You knocked it all out of my head."

"But a detective! Who was he? What did he want? Where did he go? Speak!"

"Oh, you needn't be afeared. I dumped him."

"Ha! You're as shrewd as ever I see."

"Yes, but thet hain't all."

"Well, well?"

"I'm erfraid I've missed it. I wuz deown below jest before ye came in, an' couln't find his body."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Titterington told about the feather bed, substituting herself for her husband.

"Well, well! This is a pretty kettle of fish!" exclaimed Colonel Ricker. "Still he can't get away, let him try as hard as he will. What kind of looking man was he, Mother T.?"

"Oh, an' old feller—old enough to be my grandfather, but with thersmoothest tongue you ever saw."

"Thunder and Mars! Did he have a big white hat?"

"Yes."

"And a long blue coat?"

"Yes, yes."

"It's Old King Brady!" breathed Colonel Ricker. "How in the name of all that's wonderful did he get here?"

"Dunno. Ye'll hev to ax some one else beside me."

"But I must know what has become of him at once," exclaimed Colonel Ricker. "Look to the girl, Mother T. I'll be back in a little while."

He made a quick dart for the chimney, opened the secret panel, and disappeared. Warned by the anger of this man, whom she evidently feared, Mrs. Titterington did not allow her curiosity to get the best of her again. Meanwhile Sadie—we shall speak of the girl by the name Colonel Ricker gave her—sat motionless in the big chair, weeping softly.

She paid no attention to Mrs. Titterington, as that woman went bustling about setting the table and making other preparations for the meal.

"Never mind, dearie, It'll come eout right," said the woman. "No matter how long ther lane thar's allus a turnin'—you know that ez well ez me."

"I want to go right away from here," breathed Sadie. "I want to go at once, and you must help me to do it. Will you? You seem good and kind."

"Oh, I'm good. I've jined every church I could get on to in my time, so's to be sure I'd hit ther right one. I'm a Methodist an' a Baptist an' a 'piscopal, an' two or three others. You can trust me every time, dearie. Got any money erbout you? It sometimes helps."

"Unfortunately, no."

"Thet's bad. Don't see what yer gwine ter do then."

"Can't you suggest some way? Your neighbors—"

"Tell you I hain't got none."

"If I was only stronger, and you would help me to saddle the horse, I could go alone."

"Go whar?"

"Anywhere."

"Lord, child, the painters would eat you—ther woods is full on 'em. Ef they didn't get yer ther moonshiners would, an' ye'd fare better with the painters, let me tell you that."

"I don't understand what you mean by painters and moonshiners?"

"Lord! Did you never see a painter?"

"O! course; but what do you mean by the woods being full of painters? What are they painting?"

"Ha! ha! Did you think I meant house painters?"

"Yes."
 "Sho! You are green. A painter is a big wild cat."
 "Oh, a panther!"
 "I call it a painter."
 Sadie shuddered.
 "And what do you mean by moonshiners?" she asked.

"Guess you wuz never down hyar afore, Miss?"

"Never!"
 "Thought not. Wall, a moonshiner is—my gracious sakes alive, what's that?"

It sounded just as if some one had dropped a heavy stone upon the roof.

"Some one is on the top of the house!" cried Sadie in alarm.

"No, no. It's only the turkeys," said Mrs. Titterington.

She thought she knew what had caused the sound the moment she stopped to think about it, but she had never been more mistaken in her life.

Just then the sound of horses dashing into the yard outside roused her again.

"Good gosh! Something's wrong," she exclaimed.

In another instant she had blown out the lamp, leaving them in total darkness.

"Hush!" breathed Mrs. Titterington, catching Sadie's hand.

"Who do you think it is?"

"Dunno. May be all right though."

"Oh, I'm so frightened."

"Don't be. 'Tain't likely any hurt'll come to you. Stand right still whar ye be. I'll try an' find out."

She crept toward one of the windows, and cautiously moving a small slide in the shutter, peered out.

Two young men with red shirts, cowboy hats and big boots were beside the water butt at the eaves.

One of them had dismounted and stood looking up at the roof.

"Gosh! It's some of Jess James' boys, I'll bet a cookey!" muttered the woman, closing the slide.

She returned and communicated her fears to Sadie, whose terror was only increased by the news.

"What shall we do?" she gasped.

"Don't you move. I'll call the kun'l."

"Oh, I wish you would."

"I'll do it. Keep still as a mouse now."

Mrs. Titterington slipped through the secret panel at the chimney-piece and disappeared.

Meanwhile, the racket outside increased, and with it Sadie's alarm.

A moment later and some one was heard on the roof again.

Then a voice shouted:

"Thar hain't no one hyar!"

Next Sadie thought some one leaped off the roof to the ground, and then after a moment there came a tremendous pounding on the front door.

"What shall I do?" murmured the poor girl, almost beside herself with terror.

"Hello, Sadie! What's the matter?" spoke Colonel Ricker's voice, and out from behind the chimney came the colonel with a bound.

"There's some one at the door, Jerome!" cried Sadie.

"I should say there was! Mother Tit says it's the James Boys."

"I'm sure I don't know."

"By thunder, then I will in a second. Jesse James ain't interfering with me you bet. He's too good a friend of mine."

He leaped toward the door and without the slightest show of fear, flung it open.

There stood Bob and Charlie Ford covering him with their revolvers.

"Here, here! Boys, you don't want to point those things at me!" cried Col. Ricker, starting back with both hands clenched, for he saw the danger of his situation.

Meanwhile Sadie, with an exclamation of terror, had run around behind the table, where she remained looking anxiously on.

Bob and Charlie burst out into a hearty laugh.

"Hello, Kun'l! Thet you?" cried the latter, letting his revolver fall.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Oh, nothin' much. Never thought of seein' you."

"And I must say I never thought of seeing you, Charlie Ford. But, come in boys, come in. This is my cousin—Miss Baker. What in the name of wonder brought you here?"

They were inside in a moment, but not, how-

ever, until Mrs. Titterington had come through the panel unobserved.

"Hello, Mother T. It's only the Ford boys—friends of mine," cried the colonel. "Sit down, Bob. Make yourself at home, Charlie. How's Jess? An' how is it you're here alone?"

The brothers moved toward the fire-place, paying no attention to the proffered chairs.

"Say, looker here. We didn't look fer you!" Charlie said.

"No?" queried the Colonel.

"No. We were lookin' for a young feller what give us the slip someers 'bout hyar. Seen him?"

"No. I haven't seen anybody. I've just come in. Where's Jess?"

"Dunno nothin' about Jess. We've quit ther gang," said Bob.

"The dence. What's that for?"

"Fer fun. 'Bout this hyar hoy."

"Do you know of any boy being in the house, Mother T?" asked the Colonel.

"Thar haint nobuddy hyar but what yer see."

"Must be," said Bob, decidedly.

"Who is the boy?" asked Col. Ricker.

"Well, he ain't exactly a boy—he's a young snip of a detective from St. Louis, and we want him."

"You must be off."

"No, we ain't, nuther. He came in hyar. Kun'l, we seen him, and thet's all there is to it. He must be hyar someers now."

"Mother T., what does it all mean?" demanded Colonel Ricker. "Are you hiding any one here?"

"Sakes alive, no."

"Liar!" shrieked a voice, coming apparently from without the hut.

"Who spoke?" cried the colonel.

"Liar! Look up chinney," shrieked the voice again.

Bob and Charlie never stopped to reflect who was speaking.

Instantly Bob was inside the fireplace, while Charley, still keeping Colonel Ricker covered with the revolver, pressed beside him, his eyes turned toward the room.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" wailed Mrs. Titterington.

"Leggo my legs! Leggo!" bellowed a voice from the depths of the flue.

Then all of a sudden down tumbled a man upon the hearthstone, knocking Bob flat and sending Charlie sprawling.

Somehow Charlie managed to catch Mrs. Titterington's dress as he fell, pulling her down, while she in turn, to save herself, clutched at Colonel Ricker's arm.

Down they went all in a bunch.

Sadie was the only one who was not upon the floor.

Down from the chimney soot fell like rain.

"Lemme go—lemme go!" bellowed the man who had tumbled down the chimney.

"Don't kill him—don't kill him! He's my old man!" came Mrs. Titterington's voice out of the twisting mass of legs and arms.

Meanwhile the door was wide open and the way clear.

Seeing her chance, Sadie Baker glided out noiselessly and ran round the corner of the hut, thence striking toward the forest with the speed of the wind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VAULTED WAY.

LEAVING our young friend, Will Dawson, still in the chimney—since he did not come out along with Mrs. Titterington's husband, he must be there, of course—let us return to Old King Brady, who had just tallied one more to his list of remarkable escapes.

"Thank Heaven for feather beds!" muttered the old detective, when he scrambled up and by the light of the small dark-lantern, which he always carried, realized what had saved him, "or, rather, thank whoever dropped that bed here."

He was terribly shaken up, though, was the old detective, for the fall had been a good fifteen feet.

Flashing the lantern about he now perceived that he stood at the bottom of a circular shaft, or well, and not, as he had supposed, simply in the cellar of the hut.

There was no way apparent at the first glance of getting either up or down.

"What in thunder shall I do?" thought the detective.

It occurred to him that there might be something of interest under the feather bed which had saved his life and he pulled it aside.

One glance showed him that he had hit the nail squarely on the head at the first guess.

The floor of the vault was of stone, cut into

diamond shaped pieces, and covered all over with curious markings which looked like hieroglyphics.

In the middle of the circle was a huge stone ring, attached to the pavement by means of a copper bolt.

It was a most peculiarly-shaped ring.

When Old King Brady flashed the light on it and got a closer look he found its form was that of two serpents with their tails twisted together, carved in solid stone.

Now the old detective was a man who was pretty well posted on things generally, but knew no more about the subject of American antiquities than a child.

Had he been better informed he would at once have recognized this ring, the pavement and hieroglyphical inscription upon it, as the work of that mysterious people, the mound builders, the remains of whose architectural structure lie scattered all over the Western country, and in Missouri do most especially abound.

But Old King Brady never stopped to think anything about it.

He had discovered a mystery, and he was resolved to explore it, particularly as he saw no other way of getting out of the hole.

He pulled on the ring with all his might, and up came the piece of stone to which it was attached, disclosing a stone stair case beneath.

It was the regulation secret vault, the kind found in every well regulated sensation story.

If it had been discovered beneath some ancient European castle, it would have been quite correct, but to find it under this lonely cabin, in the wilds of southeastern Missouri, puzzled the detective not a little, it must be owned.

He hastily descended the steps, taking the precaution to close the trap after him, that he might have at least a moment's warning in case any one were to follow.

Down, down, down the steps led him.

Old King Brady counted one hundred of them.

They were very broad—fifteen inches at least to a step. If this was correct, then the detective would be at least 125 feet below the ground.

"It's the shaft of some old lead mine," thought the detective, "that's what it is. I've stumbled upon a secret, I guess. Thought there was some strong reason for that old hag being so unwilling to let me in. Neither would she have played this trick on me she did, nor had the means of playing it so ready without cause."

He flashed the lantern about him.

As he had suspected, he was standing at the bottom of a lead shaft. The walls and sides were all glittering with galena. Directly in front of him was a door made of heavy timber.

Its face was covered all over with rude pictures of snakes, beasts and birds in most peculiar attitudes.

Old King Brady wondered who had been foolish enough to waste time making them. He never dreamed that they and the mine too, were older than American history, the work of a once mighty race whose very name has passed beyond the memory of man.

He had no difficulty in opening this door.

Beyond it lay a vaulted passageway arched up with brick, leading off as far as the lantern's light would reach.

"Just the kind of mystery I love," thought Old King Brady, and passing into the vaulted way, he closed the door behind him.

None too soon either.

In less than three minutes the virtuous Mr. Titterington came toiling down into the upper shaft to look for his wife's capture.

He might have heard the detective bustling about at the foot of the stairs, but once beyond the door it was not possible to make sufficient noise for that.

Next came Col. Ricker.

He got as far as the door of the vaulted way, and was just about to open it when a sharp whistle was heard above, and suddenly came Mrs. Titterington's voice as through a speaking-tube announcing that the Ford Boys were in the hut.

This called Col. Ricker back, and left Old King Brady, who knew nothing of all this, plenty of time to pursue his investigations in the vaulted way in peace.

Meanwhile in the hut above, all was dire confusion.

Never was there a worse tangle of human heads, legs and arms than on Mother T's, fireplace just then.

Phew! How the Ford Boys did swear. It was frightful to hear them.

Bob managed to pull himself loose first, and Colonel Ricker dragged off Mother T.

The knot was broken at last.

All were on their feet in a moment, with faces neatly frescoed with soot.

"Hold on! Hold on!" roared the colonel, as everybody tried to speak at once. "One at a time, please. Mother T., look out for the girl! Tit, you lying old rascal! What the mischief were you hiding in that chimney for—speak!"

He was in a furious rage, was Colonel Ricker, so much so, that he not only seemed to forget all about the presence of the Ford Boys, but even Sadie escaped his mind.

"Wal, neow, kun'l, I didn't mean no disrespect to you, sn," drawled Mr. Titterington. "I heard ther row, an' jest went up chimby fer fear it mought be ther sheriff—"

"Shut up, you old idiot! You're lying!"

"Kun'l, I swar I hain't. D'ye think I'd lie to you, sir!"

"Do I think! Don't I know you'd rather lie than tell the truth? What did you go to St. Louis for? Speak, man! I must know—there'll be trouble if I don't."

"Wal, neow, kun'l, it wuz to see my sister, who's been very sick. That's God's truth."

"Bosh! You never had a sister. Things like you don't have sisters. Own up to the truth now—quick!"

"I'm a-tellin' on it. 'Deed I am."

"Liar?" hissed the colonel, suddenly springing upon him. "I know you too well."

Catching Mr. T. by the throat, he pinned him against the chimney, at the same time covering him with a cocked revolver.

Then, with all the skill of a professional, he ran his hand into every pocket the man possessed.

In vain did Titterington protest, and Mrs. T. scold and sputter.

Col. Ricker was too much enraged to hear what was said.

As for the Ford boys, they had looked up the chimney, and assuring themselves that no one else was concealed in it, remained silent spectators of this strange scene.

A jack knife, a bowie knife, a plug of tobacco and sundry other things were produced, and then came a big leather wallet, fastened with a strap.

Mr. Titterington set up a terrible howl when this appeared, and made a dash at the colonel to try and recover it.

Instead of discharging his revolver, Colonel Ricker dealt the man a crushing blow with his fist, sending him cracking back against the chimney again.

Suddenly, to the amazement of Bob and Charley Ford, the whole end of the chimney tumbled inward, Titterington disappearing with it.

The last they saw of him were two legs ending in two huge cowhide boots paddling away furiously, like the arms of a threshing machine.

"Oh, lawful sakes! You've killed him!" shrieked Mrs. T. "Will you listen! The gal's gone! It serves you blame well right!"

"Gone!" roared the Colonel, thrusting the wallet into his outside coat pocket.

"Yes!—gone!"

"Where—what—!"

But Col. Ricker got no further than this, and for an excellent reason.

As he turned suddenly round, there stood Bob and Charley Ford covering him with their revolvers.

"Now, you jest hold on thar, kun'l!" said Bob, firmly. "You seem to hev' got all mixed up hyar, so Charlie and me hev' concluded to boss this lyar bizness. Drop them shootin' irons of yours and be blame quick about it too."

How the mighty Colonel spluttered.

It was ludicrous to hear him.

Still it was no use.

The Ford boys were masters of the situation, and meant to keep so evidently.

"Give us that ere wallet," said Bob.

Reluctantly Colonel Ricker obeyed.

Bob did not stop to open it—simply thrust it into his pocket.

Meanwhile Titterington had come crawling out of the opening behind the secret panel, and stood looking on from the corner, while Mrs. T. had dropped into a chair and just sat there groaning and wringing her hands.

"Now looker hyar," said Bob; "we don't want no more nonsense. Charlie an' me hev' quit the James boys and are jest on the dead make."

"You'll suffer for this, Ford!" stormed Colonel Ricker.

"Shut up! Answer my questions, all of you. Fust an' foremost who's that there gal?"

"She's my consin," growled the colonel.

"And your prisoner?"

"You say so."

"What fer?"

"Find out."

"Let's hev it blame quick."

"Well, I mean to marry her, if you must know."

"Humph! That's how the cat jumps, is it? Looks ez though she didn't care 'bout marryin' you, so we'll just let her go."

"But she'll lose herself in the woods."

"Letter; we hain't got time to fool with her," sneered Bob. "Now, old woman, it's your turn. Whar's the young feller what came in hyar a few minutes ago?"

"I never seed no young feller and I'll swar to it," snapped Mrs. Titterington.

"Look eout."

"It's true."

"She's tellin' the trewth, Bob," put in Charlie. "Thar hain't no use pressin' that further. I kin tell."

"Most like he's took to the woods," said Bob. He turned to the cowering Titterington.

"What's in behind ther chimby?" he asked.

"D—d—on't ax me!" stammered Titterington, "ax the Kun'l—it's his business, not mine."

"It's your turn, Kun'l said Bob.

"I've nothing to say, gentlemen," answered Col. Ricker, who had mastered his temper at last, and was now cool.

"You'd better tell."

"Be very sure I never shall tell."

"Good! Then we'll have to make you," said Bob. "Go ahead and lead the way neow. We're gwin ter explore the secrets of this place."

"Gentlemen, I warn you," said Col. Ricker. "You risk your lives in doing this."

"No back talk now," said Bob, sternly, "lead on."

"Very good, gentlemen," answered the Colonel. "I ask for nothing better—come on."

Now Charlie seemed to hesitate.

"Hain't we better drop it, Bob?" he whispered.

"Not much," answered Bob. "Thar's some mystery lyar, an' I mean to see the end on it. If you're scart, you kin stay behind."

"As though I'd do that," muttered Charlie.

Colonel Ricker was on his feet now, and led the way to the secret panel.

"Hold on!" cried Bob. "I'll go ahead. You keep him covered behind, Charlie."

"An' what erbout the others?"

"Oh, let 'em be. They can't do nothin'."

In a moment they were descending a flight of steps with Colonel Ricker between them. Before they had gone far, Bob called out that there was a door.

"We must have a light here," he said. "Charlie, go back and get one."

Presently Charlie returned with a lighted lantern, and Bob began fumbling about the door looking for the lock.

"You can't open that door, gentlemen," said the colonel, calmly.

"No, but you can, and you'd better do it," answered Bob.

Colonel Ricker made no objection.

Touching a secret spring the entire door moved sideways into an aperture in the wall.

They now found themselves in the vault into which Old King Brady had fallen.

Bob's sharp eyes soon spied the ring, and he ordered the colonel to open the trap.

Following the same road the detective had taken they found themselves, after a moment, moving along the vaulted way.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURED BY THE WILDMAN.

AND what, meanwhile, had become of Will Dawson?

Having left the young detective to look out for himself while all these events were taking place, it is now necessary that we should return and see what he was about.

The sound of the voice from the depths of the chimney startled Will terribly, and he hastened to pull himself up to the top again, and lost no time in scrambling out upon the roof.

Where were the Ford Boys?

Just then Will's ears caught the sound of loud voices talking below him. In a moment or two, as he lay crouching upon the shingles, there came a thunderous racket below.

"They've got something else on their hands beside looking after me," thought Will. "Whatever it is, now is my time to light out."

He slid down to the eaves, and by the aid of the water butt managed to climb to the ground.

His next move was to steal cautiously around the house.

The horses of the outlaw brothers stood quietly beside the hut, and Will could easily have possessed himself of one of them, but he was resolved to find out the meaning of all the racket inside first.

He crept cautiously to the open door and peered in, thus becoming a witness to part of the strange scene which was being enacted inside the hut.

At a glance he saw that the Ford Boys had undertaken a new contract, and he thought a dangerous one.

Nor was this all he saw.

In the valorous Mr. Titterington, who crouched in a corner, Will recognized instantly his friend on the train—Mr. Brown.

"Hello!" he muttered. "I'll just hold on here a bit and see how this thing ends."

It ended in the disappearance of Colonel Ricker and the Ford Boys through the secret panel, as we have already related.

Will watched and waited.

Instead of injuring him, the excitement of the last few hours actually seemed to have done him good.

All his detective instincts returned in full force. "I've got business with you, my friend," he muttered as he watched Titterington gather himself up, "and I mean to transact it too."

And pulling out the revolver which he had taken from Charlie Ford, he stood ready at the open door waiting for the time to act.

Inside the hut Mr. and Mrs. Titterington stood staring at each other, rage, disappointment and fear written on the faces of each.

"You're a blamed old coward, pa!" snapped the woman at length. "You see what's come of it. Our game is up."

"Quit, woman! Don't you see I'm almost mad!" the man exclaimed.

"Ef them loafers kill the kun'l whar's our livin' comin' frum?"

"Dry up!"

"I won't."

"You're a fool!"

"You're another. What ever made you go gallavantin' off to St. Louis? Why didn't you stay home and attend to bisness?"

"Chut! What's that got to do with it? Didn't I go to St. Louis because I wanted to ketch on to the hidin'-place of El Baker's gold?"

"Bah! A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"Be quiet. Didn't I watch Baker's brother night and day? Didn't I ketch on when he started that young snip of a detective for Kittle Black? Didn't I get on the train ahead of him and lay for the ring? Didn't I get it? Didn't I go to Doniphan and capture the secret? Wasn't a fortune in our grasp when all this row came on to us? It's just too blame bad!"

Never, perhaps, was so much that seemed mysterious cleared away in a single sentence before.

Will Dawson smiled grimly, and, cocking his revolver, stepped inside the hut, covering his man.

"Good-evening, Mr. Brown," he said, dryly. "I hope I see you well."

Titterington gave a snort of amazement.

Mrs. T. flung up her hands and dropped into a chair.

"Oh, Lord! here's more on 'em!" she cried. "Whar's this thing gwine ter eend?"

"Who are you?" demanded Titterington in trembling tone. "W—what do you want?"

"Oh, I reckon you know me."

"Wuz it you in the chimby?"

"Yes. Much obliged to you for not giving me away."

"You'd orter be. I'd a done it, though, but fact is, I clean forgot ye in all the hubble. Whad ye want?"

"I gness you know."

"Durned ef I do."

"Have you forgotten about my grip-sack?"

"Dunno nothin' erbout yer grip-sack."

"Be careful!" cried Will. "I'm in no mood for nonsense. I am an officer of the law, and shan't hesitate to shoot you unless you instantly tell me what I want to know."

Titterington trembled.

"What's that?" he demanded in hollow tones. "I have heard something of what has been going on in here, and all of your conversation with your wife. You know the secret hiding-place of the gold hidden by Mr. Baker's brother. I order you to tell me where it is."

"Say, young feller—"

"Hold on! No more talk."

"But—"

"Yes or no!"

"I wuz about to obsarve—"

"I'll count three, my friend," interrupted Will, with imperturbable calmness. "If you don't do as I ask before I have finished, your wife will be a widow. Make no mistake."

"Oh, Lord! What shall I do?" groaned Titterington. "Ma, k'ean't you help?"

But Mrs. T. was by far too frightened to move.

"One!" cried Will, in firm, distinct tones.

"Stranger, let's argy the case. I——"

"Two!"

"Gosh! I only want——"

"Three!"

"Hold up! I'll tell!" roared Titterington. "The treasure is hid underneath a hut in ther Black Mingo swamp."

"You've barely saved your life," said Will, sternly, "and you'll lose it yet if you ain't mighty careful. Answer my questions now, and answer them promptly. At the first show of hesitation, I'm going to shoot."

"All right, stranger, all right. When I give up I give up, and that's the end on it."

"Where is this swamp?"

"Well, then, that you cut open my gripsack and stole my papers and the ring?"

"Oh, I'll admit anything."

"You took the ring to Mr. Trott—he gave you this information?"

"Yes, yes. You understand that."

"Very good. Now, my friend, there are two horses outside. You will mount one of them with me, and we'll lead the other to use it in case we get to understand each other a little better. Move on."

It was of no use for Mr. Titterington to protest or his wife to ejaculate. Will was firm.

"I've been er-ridin' steady this last two days and am clean knocked out," groaned Titterington. "I know I kean't stand it. I'll die on the road."

"Your kind don't die so easy," retorted Will.

"How do you suppose they found out anything about it, Mr. Titterington?"

Titterington gave a grunt.

"Seems to you like a big mystery, don't it?" he snapped.

"I own it does."

"Wal, there hain't no mystery about it. You've got the drop on me an' I s'pose you'll keep it. Anyhow 'twon't do me no harm to tell you how that came about."

"I wish you would. I confess I am curious."

"'Twas my doin's."

"How so?"

"S'pose you heard what I was telling the old woman—you said you did."

"I heard all."

"Good enough. Then understand that Clel,



He leaped toward the door and without the slightest show of fear, flung it open. There stood Bob and Charlie Ford covering him with their revolvers.

"'Bout twenty mile from hyar."

"And the hut—do you know where it is?"

"Yes; right on the edge of the swamp."

"Who lives there?"

"Dunno."

"Be careful."

"Folks say the wildman lives there, but ez I never seen him into it, how kin I tell?"

"Is there a road to the hut?"

"Part of ther way—yes."

"Very good. Now then, where hev those people gone who were here?"

"Dunno!"

"Careful now!"

"Down into the cave then."

"Is there a cave underneath this hut?"

"Not egzactly onderneath it, but you kin git to it that way."

"What's going on down there?"

"Now, say, that's none of yer bizness, an' the kin I'll kill me ef I tell, whined Titterington.

"Kean't yer let me off on that?"

"You must tell."

"Tell him, ma, an' tell him low. Whisper it," groaned Titterington.

Clumblin' as she arose Mrs. Titterington whispered a single word in Will Dawson's ear.

"Humph," said Will, "I've no time to fool with that sort of thing."

"Told you so," snapped Titterington. "Hain't you most ready ter go?"

"I'll go when I like, an' I not before. You n

"For my part I'm just off a sick bed. Yet I have no fear. No more words now. Move on."

Will chose Bob Ford's horse, which was the best animal of the two.

At his order Mr. T. procured a halter, which was put round the neck of the other horse, Will making the loose end fast to his own saddle.

Forcing Titterington to seat himself on the saddle in front, Will now took his own station behind him, and in this shape Mrs. T. saw them ride out of the clearing, Charlie Ford's horse trotting on behind.

"Wall, yer a blamed plucky chap for one so young," remarked the man as they struck the road.

Will laughed.

"Circumstances helped me, my friend," he said.

"Blame sarcumstances."

"You may blame them, I don't. Do you know how I came to be at your house?"

"No."

"The Ford Boys were chasing me."

"Might'er guessed it."

"Do you know what they were chasing me for?"

"How should I know?"

"They wouldn't believe me when I told them you stole the papers and the ring out of the gripsack. They thought I had them hidden somewhere."

"Sh!"

Miller an' me wuz on a tight together in St. Louis an' I rather think I split."

"That explains it."

"Clel's Jesse James' right bower, yer know. 'Twas that what brought ther gang down into these hyar parts. Tell you what it is, squire, ef I hadn't er managed to drop off that train jest when I did I wouldn't be hyar neow, betcher sweet life on that. Fact is—gosh all snakes! Look thar!"

"What!"

"Thar!"

Will looked in the direction indicated by Mr. Titterington's pointing finger.

"It's only a girl running along the road," he said.

"Only a gal! Tket's enough, stranger, that gal is the one who escaped—oh, great gosh!"

Echoing the cry, Will dug his heels into the horse's flanks, sending the animal forward with a rush.

Too late, though, to prevent the girl, who ran on at a short distance ahead of them, from being suddenly seized by a naked, heavily bearded man, who dashed out of the bushes by the road side.

"Help! Help!" shrieked the girl in piteous tones.

"Bang! Bang!" went Will's revolver.

But for fear of hitting the girl he had to aim low and he missed.

"It's the wildman!" cried Titterington, as the

strange creature, holding the girl in his arms, disappeared among the trees.

"It's the wildman! Great Gosh! It's all day with that poor creetur, whoever she be."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLIES.

BENT upon penetrating the mysteries of the vaulted way, and never guessing that he had passed so close to "Mr. Brown," Old King Brady kept on through the passage, allowing himself just as little light as possible, and shielding even that with his hand.

He could not imagine what any one should have made such an excavation for.

"It must have cost thousands of dollars!" he murmured, "and I can't see what it's got to do with the lead mine back there."

The detective now tackled the one on the left. He pushed, pulled, poked and pried in fruitless endeavor to find the secret spring.

Suddenly, just as he was about to give it up altogether, the whole piece of wall moved outward of its own accord, disclosing behind a small closet-like apartment, in which stood one of the strangest looking objects he had ever seen.

It was a big square block of stone, upon which rested a small but particularly hideous idol, carved rudely from a grayish stone.

The nose was broken off, and one ear was gone, but to make up for these deficiencies, perhaps, some one had planted a battered old hat upon the head of the statue and stuck a stumpy clay pipe between its open jaws.

Beside the idol there were other things various and sundry in the closet—we shall call it a closet

Nearer and nearer the footsteps approached.

Presently a light struck into the closet through a narrow slit between two of the bricks which Old King Brady had not previously noticed.

Pressing his eye to this, he found that he could obtain a perfect view of the passage without, and after a moment he was rewarded by the sight of Bob and Charlie Ford marching their prisoner up against the brick wall.

"Hello!" shouted Charlie. "This here seems to be ther end."

"Jest so, gentlemen," answered the colonel, dryly.

"How do you get on?" demanded Bob.

"Well, that's a secret."

"Out with it, quick."

"Really I see no way. Titterington is the only man to tell you that. You made the huge mis-



There, at the very edge of the bluff, was Bob Ford, struggling with a rough-looking, heavily-bearded fellow, who was trying to finish him with a long, keen-bladed knife.

The further he advanced, the more perplexed he became.

The walls of the passage were built of unusually small bricks of a yellowish shade, and so closely set that it was almost impossible to distinguish their joining.

The pavement was made of the same diamond shaped stones, laid with a skill almost equalling Mosaic.

Now the strangest part of it all was that small stones are exceedingly scarce in Missouri, and these were all small and all of nearly the same size and shape.

After Old King Brady had gone on for a distance of at least a thousand feet, as nearly as he could estimate, he was astonished to find the passage come to an abrupt end, a cross wall blocking his further progress, which seemed as solid as a rock.

"Thunder! This is odd," muttered the detective. "What am I going to do now? Go back?"

It seemed impossible to go forward.

Just then Old King Brady while examining the walls on either side perceived that there were two doors opening out of the passage, one on the left, the other on the right.

They were not ordinary doors, however.

In each case the bricks seemed to be laid in a sort of frame-work which was shaky when he pushed it.

Doors they certainly were, but how to open them was a problem that he found difficult to solve.

—pieces of rope, a set of coopers' tools, two kegs of nails, and some odds and ends of old iron.

What the detective was looking for he could not find, though—namely, the way out.

Now, to an archaeologist this find would have been most marvelous, but once he arrived at the conclusion that no progress could be made in this direction, Old King Brady lost his interest in it, and was just about to try the door on the other side of the vaulted way, when he suddenly became aware that some one was approaching along the passage.

"The fun is coming now," muttered Old King Brady. "Guess I'll wait and see how the cat jumps before I make the next move."

He shut off the lantern slide the first thing, peering back along the passage the next.

From the sounds it seemed to him that several persons were approaching.

Presently he saw a light ahead which showed him that the new-comers were three in number—all men.

"I'll slide in here and see what happens," muttered the detective. "If they open the door they'll have to talk quick or they'll never do much talking afterward."

He stepped in beside the idol and pulled the door shut.

Previous to this he had made a careful examination of the secret spring and knew that he would have no difficulty in operating it from the inside.

take, gentlemen, of dragging me here and leaving him behind."

"Come now! That won't work!" said Bob, sternly. "You don't trust your secrets to a man like Titterington, not by a jugful."

"I assure you I don't know."

"Charlie," said Bob, "we must try the persuader. Jam your gun in his ear, let drive when I count three."

Charlie was just about to raise his revolver to comply, when the colonel shouted:

"Hold on, boys! I cave; I'll have to show you, I suppose."

"You waste a heap of time by your nonsense," growled Bob. "Bimeby I'll shoot you just to get on farther. Show us the door."

"It's right here beside you."

"I don't doubt it. Jess had his headquarters in one of these old mound builders' arrangements onct. I understood jest what this wuz soon's ever I put my eyes on to it."

"Bully place to hide, ain't it?"

"Well, yes; kinder damp, though. Say, boss, what's yer lay hyar. Mought ez well tell a feller. In a minute we'll know, anyhow."

"No, I shan't tell you," replied the colonel, who was fumbling about the wall. "If you find out it ain't my fault. 'Twould be, though, if I broke my oath and told what I know."

"That's right. That's the way for a feller to talk," cried Charlie. "All the same, ef I had my way I'd make you tell."

"How the deuce would we get on hyar if we popped him?" said Bob. "He's got the secret

an' we ain't. Come, boss, be lively, or I'll turn over to Charlie's way of thinking all of a sudden, an' maybe the results will be kinder unpleasant to you."

"I'm going to open the door," answered Colonel Ricker. "I'm looking for the secret spring."

"Bosh! Don't tell us you can't put your finger onto it last crack," snapped Charlie, "fer I know better."

"It's a fact though," replied the colonel, for the first time looking round in such a way that his face was fully shown to Old King Brady, whose eye was glued to the peep-hole in the other door.

To the detective's amazement he recognized the face instantly.

It was the same face that he had seen reflected in the mirror in Mr. Baker's house.

"Thunder!" breathed Old King Brady.

"That's the man! I'm in luck."

He had already suspected that the interloper in the library that night was none other than Mr. Baker's recreant nephew, and now that the Ford Boys kept calling this man "colonel," he felt sure of it.

"Now is my time," muttered Old King Brady.

"I'll bag them all three."

He drew two revolvers and with one in each hand noiselessly opened the door, covering the Ford Boys, who as well as Colonel Ricker stood with their backs turned—the colonel was kneeling down before the secret door.

"Gentlemen," cried the detective in that deep, resonant voice which the crooks of New York knew so well. "Gentlemen, I will trouble you to throw up your hands."

A sharp exclamation from Colonel Ricker—bad language from Bob and Charlie.

But Old King Brady had the drop on them, and as all hands wheeled about, filled with astonishment, three pairs of hands went up.

"Who in thunder are you?" cried Bob.

"Ah! it's my friend, Old King Brady," sneered the colonel, with remarkable coolness. "Boys, let me introduce you to Old King Brady, the famous New York detective. We haven't the honor of being personally acquainted, but—Ha, ha, ha, ha! Hands up! Hands up and revolvers down. I've got you now!"

Right in the midst of Colonel Ricker's introduction the secret door on the right hand side of the passage had flown open, and there stood six determined looking fellows with leveled rifles covering both Old King Brady and the Ford Boys.

"Ha! Brother Brady, it's my turn now!" chuckled the colonel. "Will you walk into my parlor, says the spider to the flies! Come in, boys! Come in! You shall be treated with all the consideration you deserve!"

CHAPTER XII.

LOST IN THE BLACK MINGO SWAMP.

"WHAT does it mean? Who is that girl?" cried Will Dawson, filled with excitement.

Fact is, Will had caught a good look at the girl's face and saw that it was exceedingly pretty, and the young detective was just at the proper age to be stirred up by the sight of a pretty face.

"Dunno! But that feller'll soon find out," cried Titterington. "He's ez crazy ez a bug, an' runs about these woods naked. Gosh! it's too blame bad."

"We must follow, and rescue her!" exclaimed Will. "Off with you, old man—quick!"

"With all my heart, kn't," answered Titterington. "It's a truce between us, is it?"

"Will you swear not to try to escape?"

"Yaas. I'll swar to anything, party liddle creetur. When I fust seed her in the heonse my heart went eont to her. I'm goll durned fond of children, mister—specially gals!"

They leaped off the horse, and making both the leader and the follower fast to trees, dashed into the underbrush, following the trail of the wild man, easily to be distinguished by the way the bushes were beaten down.

"Who brought the girl into your hut?" Will had asked at the start, as they ran.

"Colonel Ricker," answered Titterington.

"Know him?"

"Colonel Ricker! Look here, wasn't that man known as Dike Duncan? Wasn't he at one time superintendent of the mines at Kittle Black?"

"Stranger, yer jest shontin'. That's ther very identical individual."

"How came he at your place?"

"You know—he's the boss!"

"The duncel. You mean of what your wife told me?"

"Yaas."

"Well, well! This mystery is beginning to unravel itself. That girl must be Sadie Baker then, niece of Mr. Hezekiah Baker, who owns the mines at Kittle Black."

"Thunder and blazes! Yer right, an' I never thought on it!" cried Titterington. "Gosh, how funny! Jewillikens! Hool. Hool. Now I understand!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothin'."

"Nonsense."

"I'm beginning to ketch on—that's all."

"So am I then," muttered Will. "Here's the very girl I was sent to find. A second more and I would have had her—now here she is captured under my very nose."

For a few moments they went crashing through the bushes in silence.

"Who is this wild man, Mr. Titterington?" demanded Will at last.

"Gol busted ef I know," answered Titterington. "He's been prowling around the woods and the Black Mingo swamp fer years."

"Always naked?"

"Yaas: should think he'd find it blame chilly sometimes. I've seed him walking through ther snow without a screed onto him 'cept them tights more'n once."

"Of course he's crazy?"

"Wal, now I guess ther hain't much doubt of that."

"Will he harm the girl—is he dangerous?"

"Dunno. Some sez he is, some declares he isn't."

"How far is it to the Black Mingo swamp from here?"

"Why, we're into it now—this is the beginning of it," answered Mr. Titterington, when all at once there broke upon their ears a loud cry of distress.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"There they are!" shouted Will, dashing ahead.

The bushes were terribly thick at this point, and the ground had grown soft and marshy.

It was all Will could do to force his way along.

He supposed that Titterington was following him, but for the moment he totally forgot the man.

On he went, crashing through the young birches and horse-brier tangles.

He expected to hear the cry repeated, but it was not. On the contrary, all was still.

Suddenly Will became conscious of a disagreeable fact—he had lost the trail of the wild man completely.

He paused to look about him, and as he did so another dawned upon him.

He was no longer followed by Mr. Titterington.

All was silent behind him, and it was just the same in front.

"Hello! hello!" shouted Will, a decidedly unpleasant feeling coming over him.

There was no answer save the shrill cry of some night bird.

Will tried to retrace his steps, but so thick was the undergrowth that he found it almost impossible to find even his own trail.

Certainly the swamp had not been named "black" for nothing. It was almost as dark as night.

"Great Scott! The fellow has deserted me and I'm lost," breathed Will at last after some fifteen minutes of plunging about.

Again and again he called, but it was no use—he could get no answer.

Mr. Titterington was evidently gone.

Still he kept on bravely, for it was not his nature to give up without an effort.

At the end of half an hour, though, matters had assumed a most serious look.

There was no use in attempting to disguise the truth any longer. Will Dawson was lost in the Black Mingo swamp.

"By gracious! this is a bad business," muttered the young detective, leaning against a tree and trying to collect his thoughts.

"The further I go the worse it gets. This comes from trusting one of these fellows. They are all alike about here—a set of treacherous thieves, every one."

He could scarcely realize his situation yet, so unexpectedly had it come upon him, but now that he stopped to think of it he saw what danger he was in.

Before leaving St. Louis Will had carefully studied the map of Missouri, devoting his attention particularly to the southeastern part.

He needed no one to tell him that the Black Mingo swamp was of vast dimension and extended for many miles.

He knew, without any one telling him, that

once lost he might wander there for days, until he finally perished with starvation and cold.

"I've got to get out—that's all there is about it," muttered the detective. "I struck in at the south-east corner of the swamp—I must have done so. I'll go south-east—that's the surest way of getting out."

But before he had gone far, he found the ground getting so soft that it would no longer afford him a foothold, and consequently was obliged to alter his course.

He now struck northwest, guiding his course by the sun, and tried to make the circuit of the boggy land, but after a good hour's hard work was no better off than before.

It was utterly useless. There seemed to be no end to it. Every time he turned south-east he would encounter the bog again.

For hours he wandered about aimlessly.

At last the sun got so low that he could no longer see it.

Night was coming on, and Will was still lost in the swamp.

By this time he had begun to grow desperate. Hunger and the most painful fatigue assailed him.

He had made a noble fight—done far more than, in his weakened condition, he had any business to do.

No wonder he felt like giving way to despair.

It was of no use to upbraid himself for what he had done either, for he had acted only for the best.

"I'll have to look out for some place to sleep," he muttered, "for positively I can't go much further."

He paused now and looked about him for the hundredth time, hoping to see some lighting up in the thick growth which surrounded him on every side.

Was it imagination, or was there really light ahead on the left?

Filled with renewed hope, Will pushed on, coming out after a few moments upon the banks of a stream of considerable width, close to which stood a small log hut of time-worn, deserted appearance, so close to the water that it washed the very sill of the door.

Will gave a shout of joy.

"Good luck!" he cried. "This is more than I dared to hope for. I can sleep here, anyhow, if I can't do any more."

Of course he hoped to find the hut inhabited, but in this he was doomed to disappointment.

The door stood wide open, hanging by one hinge; the interior of the hut, though, was to Will a decided surprise.

Evidently the place had been recently occupied, yet there was no one visible inside.

The water crept up over the floor, extending in as much as two feet from the doorway, but back of this was a table, two chairs and an old bedstead, with the tumbled bedding showing that some one had occupied it within a very short time.

More than this, there were the remnants of a meal upon the table and some battered crockery in which it had been served.

Cold hoe cake and bacon are not inviting under ordinary circumstances, but feeling as he did then, Will found them most toothsome, and devoured them with all the appetite of a hungry dog.

Still he saw no one.

The hut contained only one room, so there could be no mistake about its being deserted, unless the owner had taken to the chimney, and Will proved by personal examination that such was not the case.

The young detective found himself a new man when the last bit of bacon was consumed, and as there was certainly not more than half an hour of daylight left, he began to do some hard thinking.

Should he attempt to push on or content himself where he was for the night?

Common sense told him to stay, his restless nature urged him on.

He walked to the door and glancing out saw something which brought him to a decision at once.

This was nothing more nor less than a small dug-out—a canoe hollowed out of the trunk of a tree.

It lay in the stream a little below the hut, fastened to a tree trunk by a bit of old rope.

"This stream must run into the St. Francis river," thought Will, "and I can't be far from the junction. Just like us not there's a house along it somewhere. There's this hut, and if there is one there must be another. I was going to stay, but I declare I think the best thing I can do is to go on."

A rude log bridge led to the spot where the dug-out was fastened, and Will started over it.

When he reached the canoe there was a good paddle lying in the stern, and as the rude craft seemed perfectly tight he was more inclined to venture on than ever.

"Upon my word I believe I'll try it," he muttered. "I can rest just as well in the canoe as in that bed—better, I believe. I've lost so much time now that I do hate to waste any more."

He jumped in, deciding the matter without further thought.

Untying the rope, he took up the paddle and pushed out into the stream.

It was a new business for Will. Being his first experience in dug-out paddling, it could be hardly expected that he would manage it right.

Indeed, it is doubtful if he could have forced the clumsy craft up stream at all, but down it was different, the current helped him; at last he understood that his principal task was to hold the dug-out steady, and thus he floated on.

Night soon set in.

Every moment his surroundings grew more gloomy.

Now there were no banks at all, the water seemed to thread its way among tree trunks on either side, and it would have been hard work to make a landing even if he had wanted to.

Somewhere among the thick bushes an owl was hooting dismally, and every now and again the shrill scream of a night hawk woke the echoes.

Most heartily did Will wish he had remained in the hut.

"I shall catch the shakes here, as sure as fate," he muttered, "if I don't do worse. What an infernal fool I was to come."

Suddenly the scream of the hawk came again, and with it Will thought he heard another cry—a woman's.

Was it imagination? Certainly it sounded like a human voice.

In a moment it came again—then again.

The voice was human beyond all doubt.

It sent a cold chill down Will's spine to hear it.

There seemed something almost unearthly in the cry. He had been unable to distinguish any words.

Suddenly the stream bent to the left and the dug-out shot round a heavily wooded point, where the trees were mostly very tall.

"Thunder!" cried Will. "What's all this?"

A new scene burst upon him.

He seemed to have come suddenly out of the swamp.

Right ahead of him a low bluff arose, upon which stood a large, square mansion of ancient appearance—such a house as any traveler in this desolate region might well be surprised to see.

Nor was this all.

Suddenly came that cry again—wild, despairing.

No need to ask what it was.

Right ahead of Will was another dug-out which had just made the bank, and as he looked, out of it leaped the naked wildman, bearing the girl in his arms.

"Great heavens!" cried Will, grasping his revolver.

He did not dare to fire, though, and in a moment it was too late, for the wildman, with the shrieking girl held tight, had dashed up the bank and disappeared around the corner of the big house.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMONG THE MOONSHINERS.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Colonel Ricker, throwing back his head with a great guffaw. "I've got you tight, Brady. Bob, don't you even think of your shooter. As for you, Charlie, if you budge an inch your goose is cooked."

It was a complete surprise and a perfect success so far as Colonel Ricker was concerned.

Old King Brady and the Ford Boys in the same boat for once saw nothing for it but to surrender, and six hands went up at once.

"O. K.!" cried the colonel, almost smothering with laughter. "That's the talk. You fools! you thought I was trying to open the door when I was only sounding the signal that brought these brave boys of mine to my assistance. Ha! ha! ha! This is rich—rich as a Christmas pudding. Look here, Brady, how's this?"

He raised his hat slightly and running his hand up under it, down came a mass of long black hair tumbling, which dropped about his neck in true Missouri style.

"Richard's himself," again he shouted. "No more playing gent for a while. Cale Gannon, you

get up-stairs instanter and tell old Tit that girl must be captured, you to help. I'll be along in a moment. The rest of you secure these fellows. We'll make short work of 'em too, for I've all together too much business on hand to spend time fooling."

Evidently to hear was to obey down in this old underground passage of the mound builders.

Resistance was simply out of the question.

Beside the five armed men who now surrounded the prisoners at least a dozen more desperate looking fellows, all with long hair and big boots, came crowding in upon them full of curiosity and questions, anxious to know what the row was all about.

There was such a noise and clatter now that Old King Brady could scarcely hear himself think.

So far he had not spoken a word, and he resolved to keep silent until the time for talking came.

The Ford Boys, who were swearing at a fearful rate, fared no better than he did in spite of the noise they made.

In a few moments all three prisoners with their arms bound behind them were driven through the left hand doorway into another and wider passage and hurried forward, surrounded by just about the toughest crowd Old King Brady had ever found himself among.

"Come on, boys! Come on!" shouted Colonel Ricker, who went forging ahead. "I've got private business to attend to, and want to settle these fellows before I do anything else."

What sort of a place were they going to?

Never had Old King Brady's curiosity been more thoroughly aroused.

He thought of counterfeiters, a second James Boys gang—everything, in fact, but the right thing.

Suddenly they were led out of the passage into a large open space, and the mystery was a mystery no more.

The detective glanced about him curiously, for the place was lighted by half a dozen blazing pine knots almost with the brightness of day.

It was a natural cavern glittering with beautiful stalactites.

Just the place for the old mound builders to make the temple of their religious worship, and this no doubt was what they used it for; but it was used for a very different purpose now.

Ranged along against the gyplum-covered wall were four huge stills, boiling away at a great rate and sending out clouds of steam.

Here a vast store of grain lay piled; there, barrels of spirit by the dozens stood up on end, around which two coopers were busily at work with hammers tightening up the hoops.

And beside these things there were others, all of which went to prove to Old King Brady that he had stumbled upon a moonshiners plant—an illicit distillery on a huge scale.

"This way!" shouted Colonel Ricker. "I want the old man. Bob and Charley Ford I'll interview later. This way!"

He led the way around behind the still himself, and opened a door which communicated with a room rudely partitioned off from the rest of the cave.

"Get in there!" he said, giving the old detective a rough push. "Lively, now! Git!"

Old King Brady entered—it was a sort of office with a bed in one corner—and the door was closed.

A lamp burned on a table, giving light to the place.

Throwing himself down in a rickety old arm-chair behind the table, Colonel Ricker fixed his eyes upon Old King Brady, and burst out into another of his disagreeable laughs.

"Well, why don't you say something?" he growled. "I know you ain't dumb. Speak!"

"I am not aware that I have anything particular to say, sir," replied the detective. "Besides, you seem able to do all the talking yourself."

"How came you behind us in the passage back there?"

"I was in the closet."

"Are you the man Mother Titterington dropped into the old lead shaft?"

"I am."

"Good! I thought so."

"You thought right then."

"Evidently. Look here—your name is Brady, is it not?"

"It is. You seem to know all about it."

"Old King Brady, they call you?"

"Exactly."

"You are the man who chased me out of Mr. Baker's house on Chouteau avenue, St. Louis, the other night?"

"Quite correct."

"Didn't expect to find me here, I dare say?"

"Really I wasn't thinking about you at all, Mr. Dike Duncan, or Mr. Colonel Ricker, whichever you are pleased to call yourself down here."

"I am Colonel Ricker—I have dropped the Duncan."

"May I ask what you propose to do with me?"

"You may ask, but I shan't tell you yet."

"I can't make you."

"Well, I guess not. Listen to me now. You were sent down here by my precious uncle for a purpose?"

"Yes."

"I know exactly what that purpose is."

"I do not doubt it. You were behind the screen in Mr. Baker's library long enough to hear all that was said, I presume."

"I was."

"How did you get in?"

"Bribed the servant whom in former years I knew; but enough of this. You shan't question me—I want to talk to you. What have you done since you came here?"

"Oh, save your breath, my friend, I shan't tell you," returned Old King Brady shortly.

"Have you been to Doniphan?"

"None of your business!"

"Have you seen Trip Trott?"

"I won't tell you."

"How came you in this part of the country?"

"I've nothing to say to you about the matter at all, unless you are willing to answer my questions as well as to expect me to answer yours."

"Well, by time! There is some justice in that. What do you want to know, boss?"

"First of all that girl you spoke of—who is she, Sadie Baker?"

"Cool, upon my word! Actually one would think I was your prisoner, instead of you being mine. I'll answer you, though, for I admire your sublime impudence. Yes, my friend, that young lady is Miss Sadie Baker, my cousin and intended wife."

"How came she to be with you?"

"What! Another question. No matter. I'll answer it—it will make no difference. If you must know, I inveigled her away from Kittle Black with a promise to take her to her father, who disappeared years ago under circumstances which you know all about. Are you satisfied now?"

"Not quite. Where has she been ever since?"

"Sick in a farm-house. I had a notice published in the paper, saying that she had eloped with me. Some fool showed it to her and spoiled my game. She's just getting about again. Anything more you want to know?"

"Why, yes," said Old King Brady coolly, "there are several things that you might tell me while you are about it."

"Oh, don't be bashful. Perhaps you would like me to sign a deed giving you the whole distillery here—it's only worth about \$50,000—don't hesitate if you want it. Only say the word and it's yours."

"Thank you, not to-day. You may tell me what these Ford brothers captured you for, and all about that part of the business."

Colonel Ricker, who seemed to enjoy Old King Brady's cool assurance thoroughly, gave another laugh, and related something of what had transpired in the hut.

"They must be after the young detective who was sent down ahead of you," he added. "If they had caught him, 'twouldn't have amounted to anything, though."

"Why not?"

"What they want is the information you and I possess alone."

"I don't understand."

"Black Mingo swamp—understand now?"

"No."

"You lie."

"You are complimentary."

"I am not disposed to waste time. I know you saw that man Trott, I know you presented the ring and got the secret."

"You know a good deal, it seems to me."

"I know more than that. I know that your young brother spy was robbed on the way down here. I know that the fellow who robbed him called himself Brown, but was really Titterington, husband of that old hag up above, and a man in my employ. Look here, Boss Brady, I've got the papers right here in this pocketbook, which I took from this fellow. Wouldn't Bob and Charlie Ford club themselves if they only knew."

He pulled out the leather wallet and shook it in Old King Brady's face.

"Well!" exclaimed the detective. "What I've been chasing you've got."

"Precisely, and what's more, I've got you."
 "So it seems."
 "You needn't hope to get away, either."
 "I'm not figuring on that."
 "You lie, you are. You've got as many lives as a cat, and in spite of the fix you are in, expect to get away this time. Oh, I know all about you, my long-nosed friend."
 "I am flattered. May I inquire again what you propose to do with me? It is a matter that I naturally take some interest in—you can understand that without me stopping to explain why."
 "I'd just as soon tell you."
 "I wish you would."
 "I could kill you."
 "No doubt."
 "At first I thought I would, then I came to the conclusion I wouldn't—for, confound you, I like your impudence—now I'm about of the mind again that you have to die."
 "Is there no help for it?"
 "Well, how can there be? Look at it yourself. Here's a secret. It involves a big pot of money, enough to make me rich at one jump. Now I want to be rich. I've been figuring on it for years—all my life. You own the secret, and so do I. We can't both use it. One of us must give way to the other. Naturally, you will have to give way to me."
 "You reason well. Go on. I like to hear you talk," sneered Old King Brady.
 "You won't like what I'm going to say now quite so well."
 "Better say it, though."
 "Well, then, I've made up my mind to kill you."
 "Yes? How?"
 "You take it cool."
 "I've learned to take things coolly by long experience."
 "You want to know how?"
 "Well, I'm interested."
 "Find out then!" cried Colonel Ricker, in tones of intense maliciousness.
 Suddenly he raised his hand and pulled a cord which hung against the wall on his right.
 Old King Brady had noticed the cord and wondered what it was for.
 He had a chance given him to find out now.
 Instantly the floor seemed to sink beneath his feet as it had done in the hut.
 For the second time on that night the brave old detective found himself falling into unknown depths.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD MANSION ON THE BLUFF.

BUT to return to Will Dawson, whom we left staring at the wildman, who with poor Sadie Baker in his arms was running swiftly up from the creek toward the old mansion on the bluff.
 Not long though did Will remain idly staring.
 In less time than it takes to write it he was on shore and giving chase.
 Fire at the strange creature he dared not, for fear of wounding the girl.
 "I must get closer—then I'll try a shot," thought Will.
 But before he had got close enough to satisfy himself the wildman had disappeared around the corner of the mansion, and when Will got round was no longer to be seen.
 "Thunder! I'm too late," panted Will. "He's gone, but where?"
 Where indeed?
 All was as still as death.
 An air of profound mystery seemed to hang about the place.
 "He must have gone inside the house here," muttered Will, staring about. "Shall I follow him? It's risky, but I can't go back on that girl. If I can't serve Mr. Baker one way I must do it another. Beside, I'd save the girl for her own sake if I could, of course."
 Such was the reasoning of the young detective. That it was at once sound and highly creditable to him I think every one will admit.
 Will now pulled himself together, and made up his mind to go at the thing systematically.
 It was too dark to make it safe to venture inside the old mansion without a light of some sort, and he set himself to work to get one first of all.
 The house was a large, square structure of stone with many windows, all concealed behind heavy shutters both front and rear.
 In front were two verandahs, one above the other. Here the door was tight shut and immovable, but in the rear it was unfastened, swinging plainly enough by what round the wildman made his escape.
 The shed doors behind the mansion were burnt,

sheds and various outhouses, one connected with the other, and all with doors wide open.
 Will explored them all the best he could by aid of a few matches, which he had found in the hut and appropriated.
 There was everything in these outhouses usually found in such places but horses.
 Wagons, buggies, plows, harrows and other farming utensils, a stock of hay and feed and a thousand other things.
 All had an ancient appearance, however, and evidently had remained there a long time unused.
 "What a singular place," thought Will. "Who can it belong to? Evidently no one lives in the house now."
 What he wanted was a lantern, and after some search he found one hanging to a peg in one of the stall posts.
 Fortunately there was the stump of a candle inside and Will lighted it, congratulating himself on having accomplished the first step.
 "Now for the house," he muttered. "I don't believe the wildman can have done the girl any serious injury. He had time enough to do that before if he was going to. He may be only some harmless old lunatic after all."
 Thus reasoning, he walked boldly into the mansion by the open back door, carrying the lantern in one hand, his cocked revolver in the other, ready for whatever danger might present itself.
 Something about the weird strangeness of the situation had aroused him to the fullest extent. Never in his life had he been more thoroughly cool and collected than now. Now, if the outside of the mansion had been a surprise to Will Dawson, the inside was a still greater one.
 The door led directly into a handsomely furnished room, which was fitted up as a library.
 A soft carpet covered the floor, the windows were concealed behind heavy damask curtains. Ranged around the walls were shelves extending from floor to ceiling and loaded with books, tier upon tier. There was also a good deal of expensive furniture scattered about, but as in the barns, etc., everything wore an ancient appearance, was thick with dust and far gone on the road to decay.
 It was just the same all through the house. Parlor, dining and bedroom were each explored in turn.
 Everywhere evidences of wealth and luxury were visible, but in none of the rooms save one were there signs that any one had lived in the house for years.
 The exception was the kitchen.
 Here a table was spread, upon which the remains of broken victuals lay scattered as in the hut.
 There was also a little pile of sticks in one corner, and ashes, showing that a fire had been recently lighted in the rusty stove.
 "What a singular place!" thought Will. "Looks just as if everybody had walked out and left it half a century ago. What can it all mean? Who would have expected to find a house like it here in this swamp?"
 He got tired of asking himself at last.
 Positively he could find no trace of either the wildman or Sadie Baker.
 Three times he made the rounds of the house, even visiting the cellar, where there was nothing but old boxes and barrels.
 At last, thoroughly worn out by his exertions, he gave it up, and returning to the library, placed the lantern on the table, and flung himself into a big, moth-eaten easy-chair, too tired to make another move.
 "I'll just rest myself a few moments, and then see what I can do about sounding the walls," he reflected. "There must be some secret room here. Of course the wildman came in, and I don't believe he has gone out without my knowing it."
 He closed his eyes, and for some moments sat there pondering upon the strangeness of his situation.
 Of course the fatigued condition in which the young detective found himself there could be but one result from this.
 In a few moments Will Dawson was fast asleep.
 Unfortunate Will!
 Had he but known it, the trials of that night had but just begun.
 Now it was always quite impossible for Will to determine how long he slept on that occasion. Into that night so many things were crowded that he lost all run of time.
 Suddenly he awoke with a sense of fear strong upon him, a loud noise as though something heavy had fallen ringing in his ears.

Terribly frightened, Will sprang up from the chair, all in a tremble.
 The room was as dark as pitch, and utter silence reigned.
 It took him several seconds to collect his scattered senses and remember where he was.
 "What is it?" he murmured. "Have I been asleep—dreaming? Have—ah, what is that?"
 It was a wild, maniacal laugh ringing through the darkness.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" it sounded, "ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha!"
 Loud and shrill at first, the laugh seemed to die away at the end into a sort of ghostly gurgle. Then for a moment silence reigned as before.
 "Who's there? Who's in this room?" demanded Will, mustering courage, and at the same time feeling for his revolver, which he had carelessly placed on a table beside the big chair.
 There was no answer.
 To add to his terror he found that the revolver had vanished.
 He was unarmed—left to face that fearful, shrieking thing in the darkness alone.
 "Who's there?" repeated Will. "Who's there? Speak! Man or devil, I do not fear you! You'll find me ready to fight till the last!"
 "Ha—ha—ha! Ho—ho—ho! Ha—ha—ha!"
 In answer the ghostly laugh came again.
 Then suddenly a blue, lambent flame shot up, shedding a weird light over everything.
 Will gave a gasp—he could scarcely refrain from shouting in terror, for the light showed him a tall white figure standing in one corner of the room with his own revolver cocked and leveled at his head.
 It was the wildman.
 There he was, naked save for that singular clout about his waist, his eyes blazing with the light of madness, his mouth working in a most peculiar way.
 By his side, on a little stand, stood a pan containing some kind of burning liquid—spirits, probably—blazing away at a great rate.
 He did not speak, but just stood there working his jaws like some wild beast about to spring upon and devour his prey.
 "Great God! I am lost unless I can pacify this madman!" thought Will. "What in the name of Heaven shall I do?"
 Just then it seemed to him that he had nothing to fear more than darkness. The fire in the pan could not hold out long, but there was the lantern on the table still, and a piece of the candle inside still remained unburned.
 "Good evening, friend!"
 Mustering all his courage Will spoke with wonderful coolness.
 He had heard somewhere, or perhaps he had read it, that to control a lunatic a man must thoroughly control himself, just as when one seeks to control a horse, a dog or any other animal.
 And he was fortunate in the recollection—still more so in putting the thought to a trial.
 In all human probability nothing else would have saved Will Dawson from death then.
 "Fiend!" came the hissing answer. "Do you dare to address me! Know you not that I am your lord and master—your king?"
 "I do! I am perfectly well aware of it," replied Will, mastering himself beautifully. "It is because I know it that I greet you. What would you have me do?"
 "I would have you grovel in the dust at my feet. I am a devil—I am satan himself. Bound in chains for a thousand years, I am free at last—free to kill you."
 "What good will that do you?"
 "What good?"
 "Yes."
 "Ha! ha! Why it will satisfy my thirst for blood for one thing. Ho! ho! It will give me a tender morsel to eat for another. Perhaps you don't think I mean to eat you, but I do."
 "You had better not try it."
 "Ha! Do you dare to dictate to me, fiend?"
 "No, no! It's only for your own sake I speak. You spoke of my being tender—I am not—on the contrary, I am decidedly tough."
 "I don't believe it."
 "It's true, though."
 "I should have felt of your breast bone as one would feel the breast bone of a turkey," replied the wildman, musingly. "You are right; you may be tough. I will kill you first and feel the bone afterward, though. If you prove too tough for me there are always the dogs who will be glad of a meal."
 "Now you are talking more sensibly."
 "I am always sensible."
 "Certainly—of course. One moment, though."
 "What is it?"

"Put that pistol down and I will tell you."
 "Suppose I kill you first and then put it down? Would not that be better?"
 "Of course not. How could I tell you what I've got to say then?"
 "Oh, that would make no difference."
 "What's the reason it wouldn't?"
 "Why, your spirit could tell me just as well."
 "I don't see it."
 "I do, then. Perhaps you don't know that I can see spirits and talk with them just as you can see and talk with mortals."
 "Is that so?"
 "It is."
 "What has that to do with it?"
 "Why, your spirit can tell me."
 "There you're wrong."
 "Why?"
 "Because as soon as I'm a spirit I shall leave this place. I swear I'll go right through the wall or vanish up chimney. Anyhow, I'll not tell you a thing."
 "Well, if that's the case, I'd better listen to you first," said the wildman, meditatively.
 "Wait, though, till I pour some more whisky into this pan. Other folks drink whisky, and it burns the liver out of them. I burn the whisky instead of letting it burn me, and yet people call me mad! Ha! Ha!"
 Still clutching the revolver, he took up a demijohn from the floor and tipped it over the pan.
 "Hold on! Hold on! You'll blow yourself to perdition!" cried Will, involuntarily.
 A wild laugh broke from the maniac.
 "Perdition!" he cried, with intense sarcasm.
 "Perdition. My misguided young friend, can a man blow himself where he already is? No! Tons of dynamite wouldn't do it. Why, I've been in perdition for ages—since the time of the post-silurian geological period—about three million, four hundred and forty-four thousand years, nine months, six days, three hours, ten minutes and eighteen seconds. Is that explicit enough?"
 Will made no answer, but just stared, expecting to hear the explosion every instant.
 It did not come, however, and he soon saw that he had been unnecessarily alarmed, for on the side of the blazing pan he now perceived a sort of funnel.
 Evidently, there was a certain amount of method in the wild man's madness, for he poured and poured, until the spirit in the pan was blazing furiously, but nothing happened to the demijohn, and he presently stood it down.
 "You see!" exclaimed the wildman triumphantly, "it is a philosophical impossibility for me to be blown to perdition. I hope you are satisfied now."
 "Perfectly," answered Will, who was cudgeling his brains to know how to get hold of the revolver. "I was wrong—you were right."
 "What were you going to tell me?"
 "Something of the deepest importance."
 "Tell it."
 "I can't while you hold that pistol."
 "What difference does that make?"
 "It makes me nervous—that's all."
 "Pish! Pshaw! Nervous! Go dressed as I do and you'll soon get over your nervousness."
 "I should freeze!"
 "What matter? It would counteract the fires of hell—of course you've had a dip into the burning lake?"
 "Well, not yet."
 "Indeed? Your case must be attended to then. I can't see why my myrmidons have neglected it so long. Let me see—let me see—to-morrow afternoon at half past thirteen o'clock I think would be a good time. I will speak to my head assistant and see that you have a bath."
 "Thank you—please don't trouble yourself."
 "Oh, but I insist."
 "Never mind, never mind. Is this your house?"
 "Yes, yes! But look here, you can't turn me off that way. You said you had something to tell me—tell it, for I want to kill you and cook you for breakfast—it's time I was getting breakfast too."
 "What in the name of sense shall I say to him to make him give up that pistol?" thought Will, trembling as he saw the weapon leveled at him again.
 He felt that something must be done.
 "If you've got anything to say—say it!" shrieked the wildman, whose excitement was evidently increasing. "My time is valuable; as Satan you can understand that I have all the internal affairs of hell to regulate. Speak!"
 "What I was going to say was to warn you about firing that revolver," said Will, slowly.
 "What do you mean, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you have got my revolver."
 "Well, I know that, I guess—what then?"
 "Oh, nothing—only it's a magic pistol."
 "I am the father of magic."
 "No matter. You don't understand that pistol."
 "No? What will it do?"
 "Why, the bullets in it are charmed. If you were to shoot me, I should instantly change into a tiger and devour you."
 "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Is that a fact?" shrieked the madman. "Just what I've been looking for! I'll try it and see if you've lied, young man!"
 "Bang!" went the revolver before Will could make a move, so suddenly had it been leveled at his head.
 Scarce had the echoes died away than the door flew open and a young girl of great beauty, with her hair all streaming down her shoulders, came bounding into the room.
 "Don't, oh, don't kill him!" she cried. "Don't let the crime of murder rest upon you."
 Suddenly her eyes moved in the direction of the table.
 What she had not seen before she saw now.
 It was Will Dawson lying half across the chair, half on the floor.
 "Oh, God!" she screamed. "Oh, God! you have done it already. I am too late, too late!"

CHAPTER XV.

BOB AND CHARLIE SURPRISED.

WITH one sharp cry upon his lips, Old King Brady vanished through the trap, and all was still.
 Colonel Ricker, with his hand on the string which controlled the pitfall, stood attentively listening.
 Evidently he expected the cry to be repeated, but it was not.
 "He's gone!" he murmured. "The underground river has swept him away by this time. Let me see, that makes the fifth who has gone down there this year. Ha, ha! Shall I ever forget the last government spy who went down? We were just having a social glass of moonshine together, when— Ha! what was that? Can it be possible that there has been a slip after all?"
 Coming out from the trap-door it seemed to him that he had heard a distinct groan.
 Fastening the string around a nail in such a manner that the trap-door was held open, he advanced to the opening and peered down.
 It was too dark to distinguish anything, however.
 Far below the murmuring of water could be heard.
 It was what in this Western lime-stone region is known as a "sink."
 The river was a small affair, a branch of the St. Francois, which, pouring into a narrow ravine a few miles back, lost itself in the bowels of the earth apparently.
 Few knew that it rose again on the edge of the Black Mingo swamp.
 It was the same stream, in fact, along which Will Dawson propelled his dug-out after leaving the hut.
 "It's too dark to make it out," muttered the moonshiner. "I must get a lantern and have a look. It may be that Cale Gunion or some other fool has left the ladder in place, and— Hello, who's there?"
 Some one was rapping on the door.
 "It's only me, kun'l," replied Gunion's voice.
 "Ther mash has got ter be set some time ter-night, I s'pose. I just wanted to ask if you wuz gwine ter look after it, or wanted me to, that's all."
 "To blazes with the mash!" stormed Ricker, at the same time lowering the trap. "I s'pose I've got to attend to it or lose another batch. Come in, confound you, come in!"
 He pulled the string and the trap shot back into place.
 He then immediately opened the door and departed with the man Gunion to inspect the mash.
 Moments passed.
 Half an hour sped away.
 All was silence in the little room.
 Had death claimed Old King Brady for his own at last?
 It looked very much that way by the time Colonel Ricker got back again, for a full hour had then elapsed and the detective had made no sign.
 When the colonel did come in at last, he had a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth and walked with something of a stagger.
 Evidently the colonel had been partaking too freely of his own particular "sour mash."

"Gunion! Gunion!" he roared, striking a call bell which stood on the table and sounding it furiously.
 "O. K., cap'n, I'm right hyar!" drawled Gunion, who immediately came hurrying in.
 "Where's the Ford Boys?"
 "In ther old still house, kun'l, jist whar ye told me ter put 'em."
 "Bring 'em hyar."
 "O. K., cap'n, but say, looker here—whar's t'other one? Ye ain't—"
 "Mind your own blamed business!" roared Colonel Ricker.
 "All right—all right, major. Yer needn't get yer back up," droned the man. "I swar I didn't mean ter do no harm."
 He retreated, muttering:
 "S'pose he's let him deown ther sink. By cripes, he'll do it onct too often some day, now mark my words!"
 But as no one heard his words, it was not to be expected that any one could mark them.
 In a few moments Gunion was back again, pushing Bob and Charlie Ford before him.
 Bob was swearing like a pirate, as he entered, about something, which seemed so to anger Col. Ricker that he picked up a heavy tumbler which stood on the table, and sent it crashing into a thousand pieces against the wall, right behind Bob's head.
 "Shut up! Shut up, or I'll brain you!" he bawled. "Who's boss of this ranch, Bob Ford— you or me?"
 Bob never spoke.
 His face was as pale as death though. He seemed to be expecting a further attack.
 "Sit down!" stormed the colonel. "Gunion, you may go."
 It was no easy matter for the outlaw brothers to sit, bound as they were, but they managed to get on the edge of a long settee which extended across one end of the little room.
 Even their legs were tied—it had been only with great difficulty that they were able to walk.
 "Now then, you two listen," cried the colonel, "for we're going to come to an understanding. What brought you here?"
 "Waal, guess you orter know," drawled Bob.
 "And I do know. You thought you were going to get your clutches on Eldad Baker's buried treasure—you didn't know I was on the same lay myself?"
 "Can't help that," growled Bob. "Jest our blamed luck though. We always seem to get onto somebody else's lay. Danno how it is, nuther. Jest ez we make up our minds to shake the James Boys an' start biz on our own hook, here comes this twist. It's jest too tarnation bad."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Ricker. "Now let's be friendly. What do you say to a leetle moonshine all around?"
 "That'll suit me," said Charley, promptly.
 "Bet yer sweet existence I'm with yer, boss," chimed Bob.
 The colonel got out a bottle, and drinking himself, passed it round, talking freely all the while about the way it was made, the value of the moonshiners plant, etc.
 "Don't like this," muttered Bob. "Les he meanter do us up he w'ldn't give himself away in that style."
 Still the colonel wandered on.
 Evidently he was getting sleepy—not to say very drunk.
 Again and again he helped himself from the moonshine bottle, passing it the Fords each time. But Bob and Charlie only pretended to drink toward the last.
 They both felt that they had too much need for their wits to muddle them up with bottled moonshine.
 "Gness I'll turn in and settle your case in the morning, boys," said the colonel thickly at last. "You can just wait where yer are till I wake up. It'll do you good to take a rest! Ha! ha! ha!"
 "For Heaven's sake don't leave us hyar?" begged Bob, "my leg is almost cut through now with this rope."
 "Oh, I'll fix that."
 His way of "fixing" it was to tie the legs of the brothers to the settee in such a way that they could not move at all, seeing that their hands were already tied behind their backs.
 "Great Snakes! This is frightful!" groaned Charlie. "Can't you fix it no other way, kun'l?"
 "Ha! ha! Do you like it?"
 Colonel Ricker was at the door now.
 "Like it!" cried Bob. "Like it!"
 "Ho, hol Well, I'll give you a pill to chew on—a crumb of comfort as it were. See this?"
 "What is it?" asked Bob as the colonel held

up a leather wallet. "Oh, that thing? You took it from me."

"Exactly, and you stole it from Tit. Do you know what's in it?"

"No."

"Why, it's only the location of Eldad Baker's buried treasure, that's all. Ha, ha! How's that for high? Ho, ho, ho!"

Whereupon Colonel Ricker, laboring under the belief that he thrust the leather wallet into the loose outside pocket of his coat, passed out of the door and locked it behind him.

"Gosh!" muttered Charlie. "Did you see that, Bob?"

"You bet."

"That 'tis. I seen it tumble. The drunken fool."

He pointed toward the door.

There lay the leather wallet. The colonel was too drunk to hear it drop.

"Oh, if we could only get it. If we could only get free," groaned Charlie, struggling with his bonds in vain.

But it was no use trying.

The more they tried the tighter the cords seemed to fasten around them.

Time passed—half an hour sped by.

The Ford Boys and the leather wallet had not changed their relative positions an inch, when suddenly a strange grating sound was heard, and to the infinite amazement of Bob and Charlie a man's head was seen coming through the floor.

"Great Snakes! the detective!" gasped Bob.

There was no mistake about it, either.

It certainly was Old King Brady.

By this time his bust was visible, and the brothers saw that in one hand he held a dark lantern, while the other clutched a cocked revolver.

"Good-evening, gentlemen. So we meet again, it seems," he calmly said.

CHAPTER XVI.

WILL DAWSON FALLS IN LOVE.

THE next thing Will Dawson knew, after seeing the girl suddenly dash into the room when the wildman fired the pistol, it was broad daylight, and he was lying stretched upon a bed still dressed, with a bandage wound tight around his arm.

Over in one corner of the room the same girl sat sewing, swaying gently in a low rocker as her needle flew.

"Hello!" cried Will, starting up, "what's all this about? I didn't know—"

"Oh, you're better! I'm so glad you're better!" exclaimed the girl at the sound of his voice.

She arose immediately, came over to the bed and stood by the young detective's side.

Will sat bolt upright.

Brave where men were concerned, he always found himself a perfect coward with women—especially pretty ones.

The little lady before him was both petite and pretty, but looked very delicate, like one just recovering from a fit of illness.

Never for an instant did the detective doubt that she was the girl whom he had seen seized by the wildman. Yet how coolly she seemed to take the situation. It was just as though she had always lived in that house.

Now all these reflections flashed over Will Dawson's mind in an instant—in fact, while he was stammering an answer to the girl's first words.

"Have I—have I been sick? Is it long since I was shot?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Only a few hours. Oh, I was so afraid you were going to die."

"Die! Why I haven't the faintest idea of dying. Where was I hit? What ails me anyhow? I just remember seeing you come rushing in and then—"

Will paused abruptly.

"Why, I'm talking to you as though I had known you all my life, miss! Really, you must pardon me—I—I—"

The girl raised her hand with an imperious gesture.

"Really, you must not excite yourself," she said. "I know something about such matters. If you want your arm to heal you must keep quiet."

"Where—where is he? Where is the wildman?" stammered Will.

"I don't know. Still you need not fear him. He is quite another person now."

"Indeed! Has he regained his reason?"

"Temporarily yes—it would seem so. Oh, don't ask me to explain it. All this is as mysterious to me as to you. I am going on with

my sewing now, and you had better lie down again and try and get more sleep."

She returned to her chair and resumed her needle; but for Will to sleep with so much of mystery all about him was quite out of the question, of course. He just sat there on the edge of the bed looking at her, wondering what it all meant.

"Aren't you going to lie down?" asked the girl, after a moment.

"No, I can't do it. I must talk. I'm sure I ain't badly hurt. Tell me, first of all, is there a bullet in my arm?"

"There was, but there ain't now."

"Ah! Then some one has extracted it?"

"Yes. He took it out—the man you call the wildman. He was sane in one moment after you fainted away."

"Oh! Then I am not seriously wounded?"

"Oh, no."

"But why have I remained unconscious so long? All this must have happened hours ago, or is it days?"

"Oh, it is only a little while—a few hours. You roused up once—you have forgotten—then he gave you something to make you sleep."

"Yes, yes! I remember. I took something out of a glass—I thought it was a dream."

"No; it was true. I wish, though, you would lie down. I feel afraid you are exerting yourself too much."

"I can't. I am too much worried. There are some things I feel that I must know."

"Can I help you?"

"You can answer my questions. First I want to ask you your name. It is Sadie Baker, is it not?"

"It is."

"You are the niece of Mr. Hezekiah Baker, of St. Louis?"

"I am."

"Aren't you the young lady who was seized by the wildman as you were going along the road leading from Mr. Titterington's early yesterday morning?"

"I am."

It was amazing to Will how quietly she replied. He found himself so perplexed by her manner that he hardly knew what to say.

"You were most awfully frightened then," he ventured, "but now you seem to take it all very coolly."

"That is true. I *was* frightened, and very naturally, but I am not now."

"Have you been with the wildman ever since?"

"Ever since."

"And you are no longer afraid of him?"

"No."

"May I ask why?"

"I had rather not tell you, sir, though I am sorry to refuse."

"And I am sorry to be so persistent, but—"

"What is it?"

"You haven't shown any curiosity to know who I am yet."

"I am not of a curious nature."

"Yet you ought to know."

"I have no objection to knowing."

"My name is Dawson—Will Dawson. I am a St. Louis detective. I was employed by your uncle to come down into this part of the State and look for you."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Tears came to the girl's eyes.

"Poor uncle!" she murmured, "how dreadfully worried he must be about me. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"If you do the right thing, you will escape from this place with me and return to him at once."

"No, no! I can't do that."

"What?"

Will's amazement was expressed in that single word.

"I cannot do it. Yesterday I would have hailed you as my savior, Mr. Dawson, and have been ready to go anywhere with you. To-day it is different. I cannot go."

"But I don't understand—"

"I know you don't, and I can't explain."

"You don't mean to say that you propose to stay here with this murderous lunatic?"

"I do. I mean just that. You have a right to know the reason why I have not communicated with my uncle, though, and you shall know it. I was entrapped by my cousin, Jerome Ricker. He wanted to marry me. When I found out what it meant, it threw me into a fever, and for weeks—ah, we can talk no more. He is coming, please do be careful what you say."

Mystery seemed crowding in upon mystery.

Footsteps were heard outside, and as Will

paused to listen, he became conscious of several more mysterious things which he had not observed till now.

First, the room in which they were had no window, light coming in by a skylight over the bed. Next, and what seemed more singular, the walls were hung all around with heavy curtains, and there was no door.

"A secret room," thought Will. "This is where they were when I searched the house. What can it all mean?"

He was still staring about when the curtains on the opposite side of the room were suddenly thrown aside, and a man stood before them.

It was the wildman.

Of course Will was scarcely surprised to see him, but he was very much surprised to find that he was fully dressed, and to see that to all appearance he was perfectly sane. Yet he need not have been, for certainly the girl's words had led him to expect just that.

Will was on his feet in an instant, surprised again, and very much so, to see Sadie spring up and throw her arms about the wildman's neck.

The man embraced her tenderly, but did not speak until she had resumed her seat, then turning to the astonished Will—

"How do you feel now, young man?" he asked in singularly mild tones.

"Oh, I am all right. I'm more puzzled than hurt."

"I shot you, but I'm very, very sorry for it. Can you pardon one who is mad for his insane freaks?"

"We will say no more about it."

"You are most generous. May I ask who you are and what brought you to this house?"

"I am a St. Louis detective. My name is Will Dawson. I'm in this part of the country in the employ of Mr. Hezekiah Baker. Part of my errand was to find this young lady here."

"Hezekiah Baker! My God, you don't mean it!" cried the wildman, pressing his hands to his head in a dazed sort of way.

"It is a fact."

The wildman turned suddenly upon Sadie.

"You had better go with him," he said.

"You had better go."

"No, no!" she replied. "No, I will not go. I remain here."

"But—"

"It is useless to urge me. I will not go."

"May I inquire what this all means?" asked Will. "This sudden change of the situation has mystified me. I—"

"Stop!" cried Sadie. "Do not tell him. We will work this matter out our own way."

But the wildman seemed to hesitate.

"It would be better to take him into our confidence, my dear," he said, with singular mildness.

"No! I say no."

"But at any moment I am liable to be seized again. Think of the danger?"

"No, no, no!" cried Sadie. "We will keep our troubles to ourselves. When we can return right we will go, and not before. Mr. Dawson, you may go back to St. Louis and tell my dear uncle that you saw me alive and well. Tell him that a few days at the latest will see me home again. Tell him— But no; you need tell him only that."

"I doubt the wisdom of your plan, my dear," said the wildman. "I do, indeed."

"But I don't," cried Sadie. "That is the way I want it arranged."

No more was said.

Deeply mystified, Will dropped back upon the bed, and just sat there wondering what would come next.

Meanwhile Sadie and the wildman retired to the most remote corner of the room, and for several moments stood conversing in whispers.

"Don't tell him. Let me have the good news to break myself," Will caught from the girl's lips.

"Very well, just as you say, my dear," was the reply.

They separated then, and the wildman, coming up to the bed, requested and obtained permission to examine the young detective's wound.

"It is but a slight affair, a mere scratch," he said. "I doubt it's giving you the slightest trouble. You needed sleep more than anything. I saw that and I gave it to you. It has done its work."

As he spoke Will was studying the man.

His was a strange face, and the thick black beard gave him a decidedly distinguished appearance. But yet it was a sad face. That its possessor had known much suffering was easy to see.

"That's all right, my friend," said the man, rising, after he had restored the bandages. "We

will now have breakfast, such as it is. Sadie, my dear, did you give Mr. Dawson his revolver?"

"Not yet."

"Do it then."

Sadie drew the weapon from some concealment about her dress and handed it to Will.

How beautiful she was!

From the first Will had been smitten with her.

With each moment the feeling seemed to grow in intensity until now, as she approached him, he felt seized with an intense longing to fold her in his arms.

"What ails me? Am I going mad, too?" he thought. "Is it catching! Is there something peculiar about the atmosphere of this place?"

Now Will, though he had passed through many strange experiences in his brief career, had never encountered anything like this before.

Had it been otherwise he would have understood his feelings better.

Mad he was, if madness you choose to call it.

It was simply the old, old story.

A case of love at first sight and nothing more.

"Keep that thing out of my way, young man," said the wildman, as he took the revolver. "I am a dangerous character—very. Harmless as I appear to you now, I am liable to be as I was when you first saw me at any moment. We will now breakfast. I can't promise you much, but it will satisfy hunger. After that you shall be shown how to get out of the Black Mingo swamp, and my advice to you is to return to St. Louis at once."

"Is this the famous Black Mingo swamp?" asked Will. "I have often heard of it."

"We are right on the edge of it. For miles beyond this house it extends as an impenetrable morass. Few know its windings. I am one of them. I——"

He paused and pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I must stop! It makes me mad to think of all I have passed through," he muttered. "Come."

He led the way to the curtain at the point where he had appeared so suddenly, and pushing it aside revealed a narrow staircase down which Will and Sadie followed him.

It was dark here, but the wildman struck a match and lighted them down.

At the end of the stair-case he ran his hand over the wall, searching apparently for some secret spring.

Presently he found it, and a door flew open.

Now Will was ushered into the dining-room, and when the door was closed again no trace of it could be seen—there was only an unbroken expanse of wall.

"You wonder at all these things," said the wildman. "You wonder at this house being here at all—at the secrets it contains, yet there is really no mystery about it."

"I confess I do wonder," said Will. "It seems such a strange place for so handsome a house."

"While we eat I will tell you its history," replied the wildman. "It is after all but very brief."

The table was already spread, but the meal was indeed frugal.

There was coffee, bacon, and Indian cakes badly baked, nothing more.

"You would never guess I was a rich man to see this table," said the wildman, "yet, my friend, I am very rich. If I could only keep my head and—but I must not think about it now. Things are going to be better, Sadie. You needn't worry, child, I ain't going to talk about it. Now it's all right, but, oh, great God, do take care of yourself when my next attack comes."

"You need have no fear—I will," laughed the girl. "We won't think of it. Perhaps there may never be another. You have got me to take care of you now, you know."

"Yes, yes; but——"

"Don't say another word. Tell us about the house."

"Oh, ay—the house. Well, as I was saying, there ain't much to be told. This house was built by a man madder than I am, in the eyes of the world, at least, Colonel Ricker's father, your uncle, child."

Sadie opened her eyes very wide.

"You don't mean it. Was this Uncle Henry's house?" she exclaimed.

"It was. Now listen. Henry Ricker was a very learned man—a chemist. He made several important discoveries, and grew very rich."

"At last his health gave way under too great a pressure of work, and he was advised to give up business. At that time he was engaged in working up a process to make paper out of wood

fiber; certain kinds of wood seemed particularly adapted to his purpose, and they grew in this immediate vicinity, on land which he had owned for many years."

"They make that kind of paper now!" exclaimed Will.

"Do they? Well, I know nothing about it. Then every one considered Ricker a lunatic, I among the rest."

"I was sure of it when he went to work and built this costly mansion right in the swamp, furnishing it in the most expensive fashion, and taking up his residence here. Why, I was so sure that he was crazy that I seriously contemplated applying to the courts to have a guardian appointed over him. I little dreamed of the many weary hours I was destined to pass in the house myself."

He paused and appeared to be lost in thought.

"Who is he?" thought Will. "What is the deep cloud of mystery which overshadows this man?"

"About the beginning of the war, Ricker died," continued the wildman, after a moment, "and since then the place has remained just as he left it, and has gradually been dropping into decay. The secret room in which you found yourself, Mr. Dawson, was his chemical laboratory. I cleared it out for my own use, so that I might not be captured by the thugs who prowled about the swamp here while I am in my insane states. They would have raked and burned this house long ago, were it not that they believe it haunted, and—how hot this room is! I'm all on fire. Sadie, why do you look at me so strangely? Do I look sick? By heaven, I feel so! Air! Air! Give me air! I must have air!"

A strange wild look had come over his face all of a sudden.

Before Will could say a word, he leaped up from the table and made a bolt through the door.

"Oh, he's going mad again!" screamed Sadie.

"I'll go! I'll try what I can do!" answered Will, springing up.

"No, no! Don't! He may harm you again!"

"I'm not afraid."

"But you mustn't. You really mustn't. He made me promise that he should not be interfered with."

Will was terribly puzzled.

While he was wondering what he had better do, the door suddenly flew open, and in walked the wildman, naked, save at the waist.

His eyes flashed with that same insane light, his jaws were working convulsively.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!" he shouted; "I am Croesus, the richest man in the world! Come with me, my friends, and I will show you my gold."

"Father! Oh, father!" cried Sadie, springing toward him.

"Father!" breathed Will. "If he is her father, then this man is none other than Eldad Baker, the long missing mine owner. Can this be true?"

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

LEAVING Will Dawson to ponder on the problem of the wild man, let us now return to Old King Brady, whose sudden appearance in the presence of the Ford Boys had caused those young rascals so much surprise.

And the surprise was greater than we have stated, for Colonel Ricker had taken pains to inform Bob and Charlie that he had effectually disposed of the detective, though *how* he did not state.

"Great snakes! Is it you, boss?" exclaimed Bob in answer to the detective's polite salutation.

"Hush!" breathed Old King Brady warningly.

"Are we alone?"

"Thar hain't no one about, but you'n me, an' Charlie—no."

"That scoundrel has gone then?"

"Yas. Say, put up the shootin' iron, will yer? I kin use it as well as the next, but I'll be gosh blamed ef I like to look at it any more'n the next one!"

Old King Brady lowered the revolver and stepped out upon the floor.

Not a hair seemed ruffled.

Evidently the brave old detective could chronicle another of his marvelous escapes.

"For gracious sakes, how did you come hyar anyhow!" exclaimed Charlie. "He told me you wuz dead."

"Yon mean Colonel Ricker?"

"Yes."

"He ain't the first man who has thought me dead when I wasn't."

"Say, jest cut these ere ropes and we'll talk erbout it," said Bob. "They hurt my legs most mightily. Ef you hain't got a knife, I kin lend ye one, boss."

Old King Brady smiled.

"A cool request, my friend. When a man is forced to be shut up in a room with a couple of chained tigers he would be a fool to unchain them—don't you think so?"

"Yer mighty complimentary."

"You understand me."

"Say, boss——"

"Stop!" said Old King Brady sternly. "You and I have nothing in common, my friends. Whether I help you or not, depends upon yourselves, and shall be decided in a moment. Meanwhile I'll take charge of this."

He stooped and picked up the leather wallet, smiling at the malignant scowl which came over Bob Ford's face.

"Say, boss, that's mine," whined Bob. "He stole it from me, and dropped it going out. Give it to a feller, won't yer now—come."

"Not much."

"But it's mine, I tell yer."

"And you will understand that I know exactly what it is and whose it is when I tell you that I heard every word that passed between you and Colonel Ricker since you first entered the room."

"The deuce!" cried Charlie. "Bcb, we're dished."

Meanwhile Old King Brady was examining the wallet. Seemingly satisfied with what he found he stowed it away with a smile, and turned to the Ford Boys, who sat there helplessly regarding him, wondering what he was going to do.

"Well, I suppose you know who I am?"

"You bet," returned Bob.

"What have you got to say about it?"

"Nawthin'. Would like to know, though, how you escaped. His nibs told us he cracked you over the head. Seems he lied."

"That part was a lie certainly, for he never laid hands on me. What he did do was to pull this trap-door and drop me down in the hole below here."

"The deuce! How'd you manage?" exclaimed Charlie.

"Managed to get hold one of the rounds of a ladder that I guess he didn't know was there."

"Well, yer a lucky one."

"Yes."

"You seem to take it pretty tarnation cool."

"There's nothing to fret about now—it's all over. Beside, I've got what I wanted, and am going to get out."

"Take us with yer, boss, take us with yer. He'll kill us sure if we're left here."

"And you'll kill me the first chance that comes, if I take you along."

"We won't, I swear we won't. By Heaven, I'll stick to you as I would to my own brother, Mr. Brady, if you'll only help us out of this snap, won't we, Charlie?"

"You kin jest bet yer sweet life we will," Charlie growled.

Old King Brady appeared to meditate.

He had escaped once, and by little short of a miracle. Should he risk his life again by setting these fellows free?

At first he resolved that he would not—that he would leave them to meet the fate they so richly deserved for their many criminal acts.

Yet while he looked at them it did seem hard to abandon them, they were so young and seemed such likely-looking young men.

He who hesitates is lost, they say, and it came near being so with Old King Brady for his folly in releasing those two treacherous Missourians that night.

"Look here, boys," he said; "swear by your mother that if I cut those cords you'll not turn on me—swear it, or I'm off and leave you as you are."

And they swore to be true to Old King Brady—swore in precisely the way the detective put it to them.

Let us now see how well a Missouri outlaw can keep his oath.

They understood one another perfectly, the old detective and the Ford Boys.

Before Old King Brady cut the cords he had made Bob confess the whole story and promise to leave southern Missouri at once, in case they succeeded in escaping from the clutches of Colonel Rickers and his gang alive.

But though soft-hearted, Old King Brady was not quite a fool.

He made a thorough search of the persons of the two brothers before releasing them.

They were entirely unarmed, however.

That Colonel Ricker had taken care of before this.

Then Old King Brady's knife did its work and they were free.

"I won't never forget this 'ere as long as ever I live," whispered Bob, as he shook the detective's hand warmly.

"Nor me neither," added Charlie, taking his turn.

"See that you don't," replied Old King Brady, simply. "Now then, boys, this is only the first step; what we are after is to escape."

"Bet yer life!" said Charlie.

"What do you propose?" asked Bob.

"To go down into the sink, as you call it. There's a stream running through there, and on the stream is a boat."

"Yer don't say."

"It's a fact."

"More than singular," answered the detective. "For my part, I don't understand it. It seems too good to be true."

"Reckon we hain't out of the woods yet," said Charlie. "What's thet light on ahead thar?"

"Reflection of Mr. Brady's lantern," answered his brother.

But when Old King Brady put the lantern out of the way there the light remained just the same.

"There's some sort of fire there," said the detective. "We must be very careful not to make any more noise with the oars than we can possibly avoid."

They kept on.

For a time the light continued to grow brighter, until at last it suddenly vanished.

"Holy smokes!" cried Charlie, for the whole thing had been done in a minute.

"Help! Save me! Help!" the fellow was roaring, when Old King Brady clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Comel None of that!" he breathed. "Hold your jaw, my man!"

"Shoot again!" hissed Bob.

"Jab a knife into his heart," echoed Charlie.

"Here, here! Stop your noise," cried Old King Brady. "I'm not a butcher. I'll take care of this man in my own way."

He thrust a handkerchief into the fellow's mouth, and lashed his hands behind him.

"Stop the boat, boys!" he said.

Bob and Charlie shipped their oars, and ran the boat against a rocky projection of the bank. Out came Old King Brady's lantern.



Suddenly it had come. The sharp report of a pistol had rung out, coming from behind the naked form of the wild-man, who excitedly pressed his hand to his head as Colonel Ricker reeled backward.

"Say, Charlie, thet thar must be Nigger crit. Don't you think so?" said Bob.

"Blest if I know, brother."

"It don't make any difference. It goes somewhere, and I'm going to try my chances on it," said Old King Brady. "So, boys, if you are going, you had better come on."

"Oh, we'll go," said Bob. "Open the trap and lead the way, boss."

Old King Brady opened the trap, but he made Bob go first, following himself, and leaving Charlie to bring up the rear.

The ladder, which proved to be a decidedly long one, shook most ominously as they descended, but in due time all reached the bottom in safety.

Now Old King Brady's lantern came into play, and showed them all the wonders of a Western cavern—wonders too often described to make it necessary to go into details here.

It showed them also a narrow stream running swiftly over its limestone bed upon which a small row-boat floated, being fastened to a stake by a bit of rope.

"Get in, boys!" said the detective; "here we have oars and everything. All we've got to do now is to make a start."

The start was made in a moment.

Old King Brady let the brothers do the pulling, seating himself in the stern where he could keep a sharp eye on them as they advanced.

"Mighty singular there's no guard here, hain't it?" said Bob as they moved down the underground stream.

"Gone, by thunder!" exclaimed Bob.

And so it had, but how or where they could not tell.

On they kept in the darkness, Old King Brady not daring to use his lantern.

Fully fifteen minutes passed.

Now the cave was growing narrower.

Matters were rapidly approaching a climax, Old King Brady thought, and he was right.

"Hush!" breathed Bob as the light suddenly shot up again right ahead of them. "Hush! There's some one thar. Get yer gun ready for massy sake, boss—do."

Too late for caution now.

Somebody ought to have seen and spoken before.

There, right ahead of the boat, stood a big, heavily bearded man, wearing high topped Missouri boots, with a rifle at his shoulder leveled directly at Charlie Ford.

"Hold on thar, gents, an' give us ther pass-word!" he called.

"Crack, crack!"

Aiming at the fellow's right arm, Old King Brady fired twice in quick succession, and for a wonder—for the old detective was anything but a crack shot—hit the mark.

"Great God! I'm killed!" yelled the man.

His rifle fell and he pitched after it.

It was strange, but luck would have it so.

At the moment of his fall Bob had worked the boat right in front of him, and man and rifle came tumbling at the detective's feet.

So shading it that it would throw no light ahead, he turned it on the wounded outlaw.

"Huh! You've only winged him," grunted Bob. "Shot went clean through his right arm."

"Stop! This man is disguised!" said the detective.

He seized the heavy beard which covered the fellow's face, and giving it a pull, it came off in his hand, revealing the features of a mere boy, instead of a man of forty, as he had looked before!

"Well, well!" cried Charlie. "Sam Davidger! I know you."

"And I ruther reckon I know you, Charlie Ford. For God sake don't let him kill me!" cried the man.

"Peace! You are in no danger of death from my hands, if you will only do as I direct," said Old King Brady, commandingly.

"Anything, gentlemen, anything!"

"Who are you?"

"Charlie has hit it."

"No, no! I mean what are you doing here?"

"I guard the river entrance to the cave—that's all."

"But why are you disguised?"

"Thet's ther rule. We always go on guard in disguise, so if we ketch any of the boys playing shennanagan and shoot 'em, their pardners needn't have it in for us—see?"

"A bright idea."

"It's the knut's, boss. He's as bright ez they make 'em, you kin bet."

"Is it far to the entrance from here?"

"'Bout quarter of a mile."

"And the way?"

"Straight ahead," groaned the man. "Oh, take me with you, for goodness sake. They'll kill me, sure; they don't want no sich chickens round hyar. Whatever brung ye hyar, gents, all I ax is to take me along."

"Impossible, my friend," said the detective. "It can't be done."

The wounded moonshiner groaned.

"What is the password?" asked the detective.

"It's sour mash! Take me—please take me."

"Shall we venture?" asked the detective, addressing the Ford Boys.

"Suit yerself, cap," said Bob, shrugging his shoulders. "We know the cuss, but he ain't no partickeler friend of our'n."

"I'll tell you something if you'll let me stay," groaned Davidger.

"So be it. We'll drop you outside the cave. Out with what you've got to say."

"It's only this," replied the man, "that we all wear false beards down hyar. On ahead there's a gang of six what you've got to pass. No man without a beard will ever get by alive."

"What's to be done?"

"You'll find one more in my pocket."

"That's all right," said Old King Brady; "you two boys can put on these beards, I have one of my own."

And as the boat moved on down that underground stream, the appearance of its passengers changed.

Where before all had been clean shaved, now all were heavily bearded.

But their troubles were not over yet.

"There's the light again!" said Old King Brady after a little.

"That's the outer station," groaned the wounded moonshiner. "You've got to face it now."

Old King Brady picked up the rifle and cocked it.

"Steady, boys, steady!" he whispered. "The sooner it's over, the better for all concerned."

In silence the Ford Boys pulled on.

"Who goes there?" called a voice coming suddenly out of the darkness, for the light had been extinguished again.

Upon the bank the forms of two men, armed with rifles, had suddenly loomed up before them.

"Friends," answered Old King Brady.

"The password, friends."

"Sour mash!" answered the detective, in the same firm tone.

The rifles were lowered.

"Oh, boys, that's all right," said one of the men on the bank. "Whar ye bound."

"Oh, we're bound down the river a piece," answered Old King Brady.

"Whar's ther kun'l? Has he got back yet?"

"Got back to-night, I believe," replied Old King Brady, as the brothers pulled away.

It would have been all right but for an unlucky happening which at that moment occurred.

It was the light suddenly looming up again.

It proceeded from a lantern carried in the hand of a man who now appeared coming out of a small shed which stood on the bank.

"Howdy, boys!" he called. "Got any ter-backer erbout ye?"

As he spoke the man flashed the lantern into the boat, and caught sight of the wounded moonshiner, upon whose white, upturned face the light struck.

"Sam!" he exclaimed. "Great snakes! what's the matter?"

It was too much for the fellow.

For the moment he forgot his position.

"Help, Bill! They're carrying me off!" he yelled.

"Treachery!" shouted the man on the bank, dropping the lantern.

"Pull, boys, pull!" yelled Old King Brady.

He turned and fired as the boat shot down the underground stream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MADMAN'S GOLD.

THE sudden change of situation in the old Ricker mansion was so startling to Will Dawson that for a few moments he knew not what to do or say.

The wildman stood before the table raving frightfully.

Even Sadie, strong as she had appeared hitherto gave way under the strain and burst into a flood of tears.

"Don't do that! Don't do that!" said Will.

"You really mustn't, you know. Let me talk—perhaps I can quiet him down."

"Oh, do! Do, do something," answered Sadie. "I promised I wouldn't interfere, but I must; we can never leave him so."

"Is he really your father?"

"Yes, yes. He made himself known to me this morning—there's no doubt about it at all."

"And he has been mad all these years! Wandering about the woods and swamp in this frightful condition! Dear me! I don't wonder you take it hard."

Meanwhile the unfortunate Mr. Baker was ranting away dreadfully.

He seemed to know that Sadie was his daughter still, and to be well disposed toward her, too. Neither did he display the animosity toward Will that he had done on their first encounter.

The fact was, there was really less danger than either imagined, as it was only when he got possession of fire-arms that Mr. Baker was dangerous at all.

"Hal! hal! hal! Ho! ho! ho! You're a pretty pair! A lovely pair! A sweet pair!" he shouted. "I am glad you have come—so glad! It was lonely here with no one to talk to. You shall get married, you two, and live here always. I'll make you rich—rich—rich! Perhaps you don't know that I'm the richest man in the world."

"Of course we know it, sir," replied Will pacifyingly. "We know all about it. Sit down now and finish your breakfast, and we'll talk it over quietly."

"Breakfast! I want no breakfast—I am an immortal spirit. Spirits don't eat."

"Don't they? I do. I'm a spirit—don't you know you told me so this morning?"

"That's true. And do you eat?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, if that's the case, I believe I'll eat something myself."

He dropped into his old place at the table, and began munching a piece of corn bread like a dog.

And as he ate the expression of his face grew milder, though none the less insane.

"Children," he said at last, "do you think I'm crazy?"

"Certainly not," replied Will.

"Of course not," added Sadie. "Don't think of it, father—it's all right."

"No," replied the lunatic, "it ain't all right—it's all wrong—entirely wrong. The world is upside down and has been so for years."

"Of course you know," said Will determined, whatever happened, not to contradict him.

"Of course I do."

"Certainly."

"No matter, I'm going to straighten things out."

"I'm sure I wish you would."

"I shall. You'll see."

"I'm ready for anything you say that'll make things better."

"Very good. Then marry my daughter and be rich."

It was an embarrassing situation.

Sadie was blushing rosy red, and as for Will, he scarcely dared to look at her.

Mad though Mr. Baker undoubtedly was, it seemed very singular that his madness should happen to run right in the vein which touched Will on his tenderest spot.

He could hardly imagine anything that would suit him better than to marry Sadie and be rich.

Now for a few moments Mr. Baker remained silent.

There seemed to be a change going on within him. His face assumed a different aspect. Mad he still was undoubtedly, but it was not the same state he had been in when he shot at Will.

Presently his eyes ceased to roll, and fixed themselves on Will Dawson's face.

"Young man?" he said, slowly.

"Yes, sir."

"Listen."

"Certainly, sir."

"You don't know me as I know myself."

"Don't worry about me, sir. I—"

"Peace. Let me speak while I can. This fit is wearing itself out already. Ah! it may be almost gone now, and then—"

"What is it?"

"Stop! stop! understand me. Even when I am mad I know something of my condition. I know I'm mad and that's more than some men do."

"Probably you are not as mad as you think yourself, Mr. Baker."

"I am just as mad as I think myself, and the strangest part of it is I can remember things when these fits are on me that I can't when I'm sane."

"Certainly he's not mad now," thought Will, but Mr. Baker went right on talking, and he found himself compelled to listen to his next words.

"Gold, gold, gold!" he shrieked suddenly.

"I remember! I remember! I remember where I hid my gold."

He sprang from the table as he uttered the last words and began gesticulating furiously.

"Come!" he shouted, "come with me! Gold! gold! gold!"

Then, without stopping even to see if he was followed, he made one wild dash through the door and disappeared.

"Oh, my father! My poor father!" wailed Sadie. "To think that after believing him dead for years I should find him thus."

"Don't—please don't. Let us think!" said Will. "Shall I follow him?"

"Where's the use? He tells me that sometimes, when these fits are on him, he wanders round the woods for weeks at a time."

"What does he mean by shouting out about gold? I suppose of course though it is only a part of his insane delusions. Your uncle told me, I remember, that when he first went off his head, he fancied he was the richest man on earth."

Sadie shook her head doubtfully.

"I don't know," she said, "that was the talk to be sure, but I've got an idea from some remarks he dropped to me that there is more in it than you think."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Then he was not crazy all the time since you met him, until just now?"

"Oh, no, no! He was dreadful when he first seized me in the road, and I was scared almost to death."

"Pretty soon, though, he suddenly became as sane as you are, and then he suddenly recognized me, and told me who he was. Oh, it was dreadful—all dreadful! Don't ask me to talk about it, for I can't."

"But about the gold—do you really mean—"

"I mean, Mr. Dawson, that I firmly believe that father has some gold hidden somewhere about here."

Will was on his feet in an instant.

"And I know that you are right!" he exclaimed.

He had restrained himself thus far with difficulty, feeling that as a detective in Mr. Hezekiah Baker's employ, he was bound to draw out all the information he could.

Then he just told Sadie all, and how, in addition to the anxiety her uncle felt about her own safety, he had sent him to look out for this very gold.

Sadie listened with intense interest.

"It only confirmed my suspicions!" she said.

"Uncle is right. Father has certainly buried a treasure somewhere, though what the value may be, of course I cannot say."

At this point they were interrupted by the sudden return of the wild man who came dashing in.

"Fools!" he shouted. "Fools, and blind! Why come ye not where fortune and fame await ye! Quick! Hasten, before it's too late."

"Will you show us where you have hidden your gold?" asked Will quickly.

Mr. Baker's eyes glittered.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" he exclaimed. "To you I will show the spot—to you and Sadie alone. God has sent you to me to deliver me out of this pit. It is God's work! Gold is a curse—it has been a curse to me. Take it from me that I may rest in peace and cease wandering to and fro over the face of the earth."

He still kept raving on, but Will no longer listened.

"Get your hat and we will go with him, Sadie," he said hastily. "We must take him while he is in the mood."

Sadie ran off to prepare herself.

With great difficulty Will managed to keep Mr. Baker quiet until she was ready.

At last a start was made.

"Where are we going?" asked Will, as soon as they were outside.

It was evident that Mr. Baker was trying to control himself and talk sensibly, but it was hard work.

"We are going to the palace of the royal chipmunk!" he said. "Its location is a profound secret known only to the devil—I believe I told you I was the devil, didn't I? Ha—ha—ha! I am. Ain't it odd, when you come to think of it? I've left my horns at home, and as for my tail and hoofs, I went to a tailor the other day and had them snipped off—that was when I heard Sadie was coming. You see I was afraid of frightening the poor child."

"How do we go, father?" asked Sadie.

"Let me talk to him," she whispered to Will.

"I'm sure I can do better than you."

"We go in the royal barge, child—same as we came," cried Mr. Baker.

"The boat?" asked Sadie.

"Of course—of course. You were there with me once before you know."

"Oh! you mean the hut!"

"Hut! Don't thou call it a hut! Child, thou art mad—not I!"

"It's a hut down the creek a mile or two," whispered Sadie to Will.

"I have been there, I know."

"We stopped on our way up. I didn't know where we were going, and when we landed here he seized me in his arms and carried me ashore. Oh, I tell you it scared me almost out of my wits."

"I heard you scream."

"You!"

"I was right behind you."

"So you must have been of course, though I didn't think of it. But we mustn't talk any more for here we are at the boat."

They had reached the banks of the stream now, Mr. Baker having gone bounding on ahead of them.

He leaped into the dug-out, and seemed to be making ready to cast off.

"Get in! Get in, my children!" he shouted. "The tide must be taken at its flood if we would win."

"Oh, can't we make him get his clothes?" asked Sadie. "He certainly will catch his death."

"I don't think," replied Will, "that there can be the slightest danger of that, he is so well used to it. Still it would be ever so much better if he would dress himself. I'll try."

He did try, but it was of no use.

Mr. Baker would not even listen to him.

"Get in! Get in!" he shouted. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at its flood leads on to fortune—at least so says my old friend Billy Shakespeare. Come on! Come on!"

"It's no use," said Will. "We had better humor him," and humor him they did accordingly.

In a few minutes all three were seated in the dug-out, moving against the current of the stream.

Mr. Baker sat in the stern and did the paddling. He insisted upon it, and as it seemed to keep him quiet, Will did not attempt to interfere.

He was satisfied that at last he was in a fair way to accomplish his mission, jubilant at having so entirely given the Ford Boys the slip, and more than happy in the presence of Sadie—in fact, he had even forgotten his wound.

It was a beautiful morning, too, and the birds sang in the forest more sweetly it seemed to Will than he had ever heard them sing before.

By and by Mr. Baker stopped talking entirely, and confined himself to his paddling.

The hour which followed seemed to the young detective the sweetest of his life, for it was entirely spent in conversation with Sadie.

It seemed also as though he had always known the girl by the time a start from Mr. Baker suddenly caused him to look up.

"There it is! There it is!" he said. "There is the royal residence, my friends."

Will looked ahead.

Around a bend in the creek the hut had just come in sight.

"That's the place I was at," he exclaimed.

"Ah! Then you know it," replied Mr. Baker.

"Were you well received by my myrmidons? If not, then shall they, each and every one, lose their heads."

"Oh, they received me like a prince of the blood," laughed Will.

"As you will be when you marry the princess, as you shall—as you certainly shall."

"It's hard for you to have him keep harping on that string," said Will, gently.

Sadie made no reply, but turned her head away.

Involuntarily the young detective's arm stole about her waist.

"For my part I shouldn't care if were true," he whispered.

What Sadie thought, or what reply she might have made it is difficult to say, for at the same moment, Mr. Baker, with a dexterous twist of his paddle drove the boat into the little cove from which Will had set out the day before.

"Here, we are!" he shouted. "Ha! ha! Here we are! Get ashore children—get ashore!"

He leaped out of the boat himself with a suddenness which almost swamped it, and dashing off among the trees disappeared.

"Thunder!" cried Will, grabbing a root and steadying the boat. "That's too bad, Sadie—are you all wet?"

"Oh no—only a little about the feet. It's of no consequence."

"Let me help you," said Will, leaping ashore himself and extending a hand.

"It's horribly swampy around here, ain't it?" said Sadie.

"Yes, indeed. There you are. Plant your foot on that hummock—so. Now you're all right, and it will be dry ground straight to the hut."

They walked on to the hut together looking for the wildman, but could see nothing of him.

"Where do you suppose he has gone to?" asked Sadie uneasily.

"I'm sure I can't tell. He has seemed to be sort of half rational all through this attack. I'm sure he's able to take care of himself."

Everything inside the hut appeared unchanged since Will's previous visit, except that the remains of the eatables had disappeared from the table.

"Wildcats," was the thought that crossed the young detective's mind, but he did not pursue it, for at that moment the *wildman* appeared at the door.

He had his hand pressed against his head, and looked very much confused.

The insane light had gone out of his eyes, though, and there was an altogether different expression upon his face.

"What am I here for?" he muttered, "what am I here for? Sadie, what does all this mean?"

"Oh, father, you are yourself again!" cried Sadie, springing toward him and flinging her arms about his neck.

"Yes, child, yes. Mr. Dawson, how came I here? Will you be good enough to explain?"

"We all came in the boat together, sir. You were going to show us where you buried your gold."

A look of intense despair came over the face of Mr. Baker as Will spoke these words.

"It's no use—no use," he murmured. "I shall never get rid of it. As long as I live that accursed gold will hang like a millstone about my neck."

"Well, it needn't hang very long, sir, if you'll show me where it is," said Will. "I may as well tell you frankly, now that you are in shape to hear it, that your brother sent me down here principally to find this gold."

Instead of being surprised at this, as Will had expected he would be, Mr. Baker seemed to take it very coolly.

"I know—I know," he said. "I sent him a dispatch recently requesting him to do this."

"Ah! It was you who sent the dispatch, then?"

"Yes. In one of my lucid intervals I did it."

"Then it's all right. All you have to do is to trust in me, show me where the gold is, and —"

"Softly, young man, softly. Not quite so fast," interrupted Mr. Baker. "Your plan is all right, except for one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why, it is just this," said Mr. Baker, sadly. "When I am insane, I know where I hid the gold, for I hid it when insane, but when I am myself I can remember nothing about it."

"Thunder!" cried Will, his face falling. "Then we've had our journey for nothing."

"For nothing as far as the gold is concerned. I know no more where I put it than a child unborn."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE MOONSHINERS' CAVE.

"PULL, boys, pull!" cried Old King Brady, as the boat containing the outlaws and the detective shot down the underground stream.

"Yer kin bet yer sweet life we'll pull!" replied Charlie Ford.

Bob did not speak, but he showed what he could do by the skillful manner in which he handled his oar.

Meanwhile there was a great commotion behind them.

Whether or no Old King Brady's shots had been successful they could not determine, but they could see that quite a number of men had now gathered about the shed.

Shots came slinging after them too, but none took effect fortunately.

There were also loud shouts ordering them to stop, which of course the detective did not heed.

"Pitch that son of a sea-cook overboard!" snarled Bob, alluding to Davidger, who immediately began piteously begging that his life might be spared.

"Positively you don't deserve it after what you have done," said the detective, "but I am opposed to violence on principle. What made you do it, anyhow? Didn't you know you were entirely in my power? That I could take your life in an instant? Speak."

"I—I did it without thinking," whined the moonshiner.

"A strange excuse—yet I believe you. I believe that it was involuntary on your part."

"It was indeed. Oh, spare me! Spare me!" pleaded the poor wretch. "They'll kill me anyhow if you don't. Spare my life and take me with you if you have any mercy in your heart."

"We'll see about it. Depends upon yourself," replied Old King Brady, gruffly.

"Hello! They're getting into a boat and coming after us!" cried Charlie, whose eyes were fixed on the light behind.

Old King Brady looked around.

The firing had ceased by this time and he could see the moonshiners moving about excitedly.

A boat had been run out of the shed and a moment later it was launched.

Old King Brady saw six men enter it.

In a moment more the moonshiners were in full pursuit.

"They are all after us," he said coolly. "I expect we shall have to fight for our lives before we get through."

"Say, Sam, how much farther is it out of this hole?" demanded Bob.

"Only a little way now," was the reply of the moonshiner.

"And then?"

"Then you are in Nigger creek, which runs into the Black Mingo swamp."

"We'll pull for all we are worth!" said Old King Brady. "If either of you are tired I will take a hand."

"We'll keep a rowin'—'twould take time to shift," growled Bob. "Are you goin' ter chuck this feller overboard or not?"

"No. I don't propose to do it. We'll dispose of him later on."

Bob growled out something which the detective could not understand.

It was evident that he was out of temper about it, but then Bob's temper was none of the best.

"What a botch we've made of it," he whispered to Charlie; "but if we can only keep ahead it's coming out all right."

"Bet yer life," breathed Charlie. "Black Mingo swamp—eh, Bob?"

"That's what I thought all along," replied Bob in the same low tone. "Never had a doubt about that thar wildman being El. Baker. He hangs around the swamp the best of his time, and it stands to reason it's because thar's whar he's got the gold buried—see?"

This conversation Old King Brady did not hear.

They now pushed on steadily.

If they did not gain on their pursuers, they certainly did not lose any of the headway they already had.

At last all of a sudden the boat emerged from the cave, and they found themselves under the starlit sky, shooting along between two rocky bluffs twenty feet or more in height.

"Good!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "This is better. Now we can form some idea of what we are about."

"And now's a good time to get rid of this 'ere cuss," snarled Bob. "He makes the boat so much the heavier, and I insist he shall go."

"It don't make any difference what you insist, my friend," said Old King Brady. "I have preserved this man's life for a purpose. It is for him to decide now whether he remains with us or not."

"Oh, I'll do anything you say, anything, gentlemen," whined the moonshiner. "Only tell me what you want."

"You shall tell us how to escape from your friends—that's all."

"It's easy enough," said the man.

"Explain."

"In the long run they'll overhail you."

"I understand that."

"The only way is to give them the slip."

"Perhaps you'll tell us how to do it?"

"I will."

"Tell it then."

"A little way ahead here you can do it as easy as rolling off a log, for I know a place into which you can run the boat and be safe. Once they pass you it will be all right, for all you've got to do is to wait till they give it up and return, providing you want to keep on by the creek; or if you don't want to do that you can just light right out."

"He's lyin'!" cried Bob. "Don't you believe a word he says, knn'l."

"I'm telling you the honest truth—I swear I am," protested the moonshiner solemnly. "You may believe me or not, but it's so."

"I believe you, my friend," replied Old King

Brady quietly. "All you've got to do is to show us the way. I'm bossing this job."

Bob and Charlie lapsed into a sullen silence. They say plainly that it was no use.

"Keep right ahead," said Davidger, brightening up. "It ain't far, if we can only make it before they come in sight. I assure you; gentlemen, there will be nothing to fear—"

"Pull! pull!" shouted Old King Brady, and pull they did.

In a few minutes the creek took a bend and shortly after that Davidger called out that they had reached the spot.

"Turn in here to the left," he said, "and pull about twenty feet."

The boat shot into the mouth of the narrow gulley, the Ford Boys pulling the required distance and then coming to a halt.

"There!" exclaimed the moonshiner, triumphantly; "now no one knows that this place exists but me. All you've got to do is to draw the boat up into that hole and wait."

He pointed to a small opening in the bank on the left, a hole scooped out of the bank about twenty feet in length and not very deep, a few feet up from the bed of the creek.

Bob and Charlie drove the boat in shore and and sprang out.

Old King Brady followed with the rifle and between them they lifted the man Davidger out.

He was not as badly wounded as Old King Brady had supposed, and once upon his feet declared himself able to stand.

They then dragged the boat up into the little cove without much difficulty and paused for breath.

"Now then, we must go over to the top of the bluff and watch for them," said the detective.

"We'll all go but Davidger. He can remain here and watch the boat."

"And make off with it," growled Bob. "I believe he's only shamming."

"No matter what you believe. You'll do as I tell you," said the detective. "We're going up the bank now—get ahead."

Snkily Bob and Charlie obeyed.

The detective following, all three climbed the bluff and hurried to the point where it overhung the creek.

It was but a short distance.

When they reached it all was so still that Old King Brady found himself almost ready to believe that the moonshiners had given it up and turned back.

It was not so, however.

In a few moments the sound of oars was heard, and presently the boat shot past them.

Lying flat upon the bluff and peering down, Old King Brady and the Ford Boys could not only see but hear all that was being said.

Evidently the moonshiners believed that they were still ahead of them, for not a word was said about the gulley, and the boat went shooting straight past the entrance.

After a few moments it went out of sight around another turn in the creek, and all was still.

"Thar!" exclaimed Bob, "that settles it. Old man, you wuz right after all."

"I usually am," replied Old King Brady, coolly. "Now we must hold a council of war, and decide what is to be done."

Bob looked at his brother, but neither of them spoke.

"What are your plans, gentlemen?" asked the detective. "You shall have the floor first."

"Wall, I wanten get out of this gosh blamed country—that's all I care about," said Bob.

"Me too," added Charlie. "I don't care a rap whar we go."

"We'll wait until daylight, and then separate," said the detective. "Meanwhile we'll stop here a while, and see if they come back."

"S'pose you mean ter go on into the swamp a-gold huntin'," said Bob, with a touch of sarcasm in his tones. "Don't s'pose, though, you'll invite us to go along."

"My plans don't concern you, gentlemen," answered the detective, "it makes no difference what they are."

"Oh, I understand well enough," snarled Charlie. "You've enchred us—thet's all thar is erbout it. Wall, it can't be helped. I shan't growl."

For a long time they remained there on the edge of the bluff talking about other matters.

By mutual consent the subject of the gold was dropped.

At length morning dawned in the east, and just about the same time the plash of oars was heard again, and presently the boat shot round the bend and passed them, on its way back to the cave.

"Say, thar's only five fellers thar," whispered

Bob. "I'll swar there wuz six when they went up."

"There were six. I know it," answered Old King Brady.

"Whar's the other one then?"

"Don't know. You'll have to ask some one else."

But the boat went straight by, and presently was out of sight.

"Wal, by gosh, I wonder whar t'other one is!" exclaimed Bob. "It bothers me, d'ye know."

"Come," said the detective, "Charlie and I will go back to the boat and see how things are there. You shall remain here on watch."

"O. K. Just as you say we've got to do, I s'pose," said Bob.

And they started, leaving Bob on the bluff alone.

When they reached the boat, however, there was nothing to be learned.

Davidger had neither seen nor heard a soul.

"What do you think about it?" asked Old King Brady. "How is it about that other man?"

"I'm sure I don't know what to think," replied Davidger, wearily. "It seems to me though pretty likely that he's been set on shore to look for our trail if he kin find it. Thar'll be trouble if we hang round hyar, you kin bet, an' they won't show me no more mercy nor they will you."

"We'll get back to Bob," said the detective. "If he has seen no one, we will make a start of some kind. I can see no particular reason for hanging round here now."

Accompanied by Charlie, Old King Brady now hurried back over the bluff, but before they had gone far, both were startled by a sudden shout.

It was Bob Ford.

"Charlie! Charlie!" he screamed. "Mr Brady! Help!"

"By gravy, he's got Bob!" roared Charlie, springing on ahead, all unarmed as he was, to the rescue of his brother.

"Here, take this!" shouted Old King Brady, flinging a knife after him.

Charlie caught the knife dexterously, and dashed away, followed by the detective, who, owing to his hard ride and all he had passed through, was not exactly in running shape.

But the case was urgent.

It required no telescope for Old King Brady to see what was going on.

There, at the very edge of the bluff, was Bob Ford, struggling with a rough-looking, heavily-bearded fellow, who was trying to finish him with a long, keen-bladed knife.

"Charlie! Charlie! help!" Bob was shouting.

He had caught the fellow by the waist and back, but there seemed but little chance that Charlie could reach him in time to afford any substantial help, for Bob had one foot over the edge of the bluff already, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could prevent the moonshiner from burying the knife in his heart.

"Save me! save me! Shoot him, Mr. Brady!" yelled Bob. "Never mind the chance against me!"

Crack! crack!

Twice Old King Brady fired.

He had resolved to chance it even before Bob's appeal was made.

And once again the old detective made a shot to be proud of.

It took the moonshiner square in the back, the sting of the bullet giving Bob just the advantage he needed to save him from instant death.

With a dexterous twist of his left leg he managed to throw the fellow backward and secure a footing for himself.

The next Old King Brady saw the moonshiner was down and Bob over him.

By this time Charlie was up, and both went at it.

Then, as Old King Brady pressed on, he saw the moonshiner kicked over the edge of the bluff, and the Ford Boys, panting under their exertions, stood waiting his approach.

Notwithstanding his own part in it, which certainly could not have been helped, the brutality of the exhibition made the detective fairly sick.

"Did you kill him or did I?" he gasped, for death was always a tragedy to him, no matter under what circumstances it occurred.

"Wall, I don't know and I don't keer," panted Bob. "He'd dead anyhow, and this much I do know, he's dead an' I hain't—thet's enough."

"You'd have ben dead ef it hadn't ben fer Mr. Brady, though," protested Charlie. "Thar hain't no mistake about that."

"Wall, I don't say there is, do I?"

"Are you hurt at all?" asked the detective, kindly.

"No, not a blame bit."

"How did the fellow come to get you foul?"

"Blest ef I kin tell you; he was onto me afore I know'd it."

"He must have been one of them in the boat, the missing one, I suppose," mused the detective, walking to the bluff and leaning over to look down, thinking probably he might be able to see what had become of the moonshiner.

Fatal move!

Never to trust a Missourian was one of Old King Brady's mottoes ever after that.

The very instant his back was turned Bob and Charlie rushed upon him, as though by common thought, and would have buried their knives in his body had not the earth at the edge of the bluff suddenly caved, sending the detective whirling down into the stream below.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SEARCH FOR THE GOLD.

FURTHER down the creek at the lonely hut morning had now pretty well advanced, and Will Dawson, with Mr. Baker and Sadie, sat discussing the singular situation in which they found themselves.

"And you say you cannot remember where you buried the gold?" asked Will, for the third or fourth time.

"I have no more idea than you have, Mr. Dawson," said Mr. Baker, sadly. "I have always, in my sane moments, believed it to be somewhere in the neighborhood of this hut, if not in the hut itself, but I cannot tell."

"And when you have one of your fits on you know all about it?"

"That is what I have been told by others. Of course I remember nothing of what happens then."

"Ah! Then I am not the first person you have tried to tell the secret to."

"I have reason to believe that you are not, still I cannot speak positively, for really I don't know."

"Did you know when you sent that telegram to your brother?" asked Will.

"I know nothing at all about any telegram. You say I sent it—perhaps I did. I only know that I hope most sincerely that the gold, if he ever gets it, may not prove the curse to poor Hezekiah it has to me."

"Did you really have so much as uncle believes?" asked Sadie, rather skeptically. "Might it not be all a part of your insane vagaries, father?"

"The gold really exists somewhere," said Mr. Baker with great impressiveness. "Make no mistake about that. Oh, dear me, I wish you had made me bring my clothes."

"You wouldn't do it, though we tried our best to make you," replied Sadie. "Are you cold, father? It seems as though you must be."

"No, child, no. I am used to going this way. It is not that, only—but there is no use talking about it. Whatever we're going to do about this business we had better set about doing at once."

"But what do you suggest?" asked Will.

"I have nothing to suggest. I have tried it all myself again and again. Perhaps you can find the money. I can't, I know that."

"Then I don't suppose there's any use trying till the next freak comes on," said Will. "Probably we had better go back to the house and wait."

"Suppose," suggested Mr. Baker, "that we make one grand search of the hut before deciding. As long as we are here, don't you think that would be best?"

"I'm sure I've got no objection to offer," said Will. "How shall we begin?"

"Let us go at it systematically, taking the sides in sections and then the floor."

"But there can't be any cellar under here—it's all swamp."

"That's the way I always reasoned, and I own I could never discover anything."

"The floor seems to be awful solid though," said Sadie, who was walking about.

"It's unusually thick and solid for a hut like this," replied her father. "That's one thing which has always puzzled me."

"Who built the hut?" asked Will.

"It was built many years ago by an eccentric character known as Sile Marsh," replied Mr. Baker. "He has been dead so long that every one about this region has forgotten him. He was a naturalist, I believe, and really a very learned man, at least—What noise was that? Did you hear?"

"Sounded to me as though it came from underground."

"But that's impossible."

"It sounded so to me, anyway."

"It sounded to me like rats gnawing on the underside of the floor," suggested Sadie.

"Musk-rats perhaps. The swamp is full of them," replied Mr. Baker, and there the matter ended, for the strange sound was not heard again.

Now all three went to work to search the hut, but without much encouragement.

After an hour's good hard work they found themselves pretty well tired out, but certainly no wiser than before.

Every partition of the walls were thoroughly examined.

The floors were divided into sections and gone over inch by inch.

To see the naked wildman, Will and Sadie all crawling about on the floor together, one might have been excused for thinking them all mad.

Nothing came of it all though, except that by noon all hands were tremendously hungry, with not a thing in the hut to eat.

"There were victuals here when I stopped in yesterday," said Will. "I don't understand what became of them."

"I've no doubt that I left them here, but I have no recollection of taking them away," replied Mr. Baker. "We will have to get back to the house—there is no help for it, and we may as well go now."

"Hold on!" cried Will, suddenly. "I've got an idea."

"What is it?" asked Sadie.

"Mr. Baker, when you first left the boat, why did you hurry away into the thicket off there behind the hut?"

"Really, my boy, I don't know."

"But you did."

"I don't know anything more about it than you do. If you say I did, why I suppose I did—I cannot say myself."

"Don't you remember where you were when you came to your senses?"

"Ah, yes. I was standing near the big white rock."

"Let us go there," said Will, "and I'll explain what I mean."

Mr. Baker leading the way they all turned to the white rock, which proved to be a loose limestone boulder, situated perhaps a hundred yards back of the hut, and just beyond the limit of the Black Mingo swamp, at a place where two little hills rose above the general level.

"It was right here," said Mr. Baker.

"The first thing you knew then you found yourself here?" interrogated Will.

"Yes."

"May I ask what you were doing when your senses returned to you?"

"Well, that's the funny part of it," replied Mr. Baker. "I was lying flat on that rock, face down, with my hands stretched out."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes."

"And the last you remember before that?"

"I was eating breakfast with you and Sadie at the house."

"Strange," murmured Will, "but it bears out my idea fully."

"What is your idea?"

"That you didn't come here for nothing. I believe the secret of the buried gold lies here about this stone."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Sadie, seized with the idea. "I'm sure it's so. What else made you leave us so suddenly, father, and come rushing in here?"

"I'm sure I don't know—I'm sure I don't know," muttered Mr. Baker, pressing his hand against his head and looking from Sadie to Will in that dazed way which he so often showed.

"I'm sure I don't know what made me do it. I—ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! ha!—they ain't captured my secret yet, and they never will. Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Off again, by thunder," breathed Will, seizing Sadie's arm. "Now don't you say one word."

"They shan't—they shan't have it," the lunatic continued, looking furtively this way and that. "I'm bound they shan't have it—they never shall. What is going to support me in my old age if I give it up?"

Strangely enough, he didn't seem to see Will and Sadie—never once looked their way.

"Now is our time! Slip behind this tree!" whispered Will. "Let's see what he's going to do."

They stole behind the tree and watched.

Though it scarcely concealed them, the wildman did not appear to catch a glimpse of them, and after a few eccentric movements, he approached the great white rock and threw himself flat upon it, just as he claimed to have done before.

"What is he doing?" whispered Sadie.

"Watch! Watch!" breathed Will. "We'll see something in a moment, or I am away off the mark."

What they saw was the stone slowly begin to move, with Mr. Baker upon it.

His feet rested on the ground; he seemed to be pulling it around, exerting the full strength of his arms.

"Look, look!" cried Will, suddenly.

"Oh, Heaven protect him!" screamed Sadie, starting back.

Beneath the stone—beneath where it had been, rather—appeared now a human arm, raised, the hand holding a cocked revolver, aimed straight at the wildman's head.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FORD BOYS AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP.

"THAR! Now you've gone an' done it, yer blamed fool!" cried Charlie Ford. "Holy jump—in' woodchucks! Why didn't yer hold on ter him long enough to get them ere papers away?"

"Gosh! I never onct thought of it!" gasped Bob in dismay. "Yer see, Charlie, I wuz seized with the idea of doin' him up about like one gets seized with the measles. All to onct."

"Same hyar, by time! Come on me all kinder suddint like. Charlie Ford, you've got the bulge on that there old man, an' now's yer time to knife him."

"Ya'as, that's the way I felt."

"Gosh! it's lucky we had the knives ter do it with."

"Haw, haw, haw! The fool give you the knife himself."

"So he did! Big joke, ain't it?" laughed Charlie. "Guess he wishes he'd never set us free that time, eh, Bob? Haw! haw! haw! Ho! ho! ho!"

And these genial jokers laughed together, enjoying themselves amazingly at Old King Brady's expense.

It was not the first time, though, that the old detective's kindness of heart had been repaid by treachery and black ingratitude, and it is not likely that it will be the last.

"But say, we'd orter be kicked fer not gettin' the papers all the same," said Bob, sobering up.

Charlie bent over the bluff and looked down.

"Thar's the detective!" he said, "but I can't see t'other one. Guess he dropped in ther crik, brother."

"Glory, hallelujah! Yer don't say so?"

With one accord they ran along the bluff to a place where the descent was less precipitous, and scrambling down made the best of their way to where Old King Brady lay.

"He's dead, sure's a gun," said Bob.

Charlie thought so too, and indeed it looked so.

With white, upturned face the detective lay beside the stream.

There was a severe cut in his head that had bled freely, and beside that there was blood on his coat at the side and back.

"That's whar I stuck him," said Charlie, pointing to the place in a self-satisfied way.

"Oh, you bet he's dead. Thar hain't no sort of doubt erbout that."

Bob did not stop to reply, but immediately bent over the detective and possessed himself of the wallet. The rifle he already had, and when he straightened up he began to feel that he had come out top of the heap.

The original papers which the detective had obtained from Mr. Trott at Douiphan he did not find.

"Say, let's hev a look at that ar' before it gets out of our hands again," said Charlie.

For some few moments the brothers stood there studying the map and description of the location of the buried treasure.

Certainly Mr. Eldad Baker must have had one of his insane freaks on him when he prepared the documents.

Yet they were complete in every particular. Many were the exclamations of wonder which escaped the Ford Boys as they began to comprehend the truth.

"Jewilky crips!" cried Charlie. "We've hit it at last, old man. Hyar's ther hull biz in a clam shell. Black Mingo swamp, huh? Well, I mighter knowed it. Sile Marsh's hut must be hyar on ther plan, an' this hyar's the white rock. Jerusalem crickets! It sez in this hyar dockymnt that thar's more'n two hundred thousand dollars buried! Ef we kin only git our paws onto it! Holy Gee!"

So it will be seen that, as matters stood, the Ford Boys knew more about the buried treasure than did the poor insane wretch who had buried it.

"Well, all there is about it, we're goin' fer that ar' hoodle," cried Bob, "an' we're goin' no v."

"Hain't we better dump him into the river first?" said Charlie.

"What's ther use? He's dead, an' we'll only get our hands all bloody. I tell you what let's do. Let's go back and do up Sam Davidger, an' get that ar' boat. Arter that's 'tended to, thar won't no one on this yeth hev' ther secret but you an' me, Charlie, an' thet's jest what we quit Jess James an' his gang for, I reckon. It hain't turned out so all fired bad arter all."

They ascended the bluff now, and walked slowly back to the cave, talking as they went.

"We need a rest, an' we'll take it 'fore we go up ther swamp," said Bob. "Cross kentry hyar about three mile or three an' a half, thar orter be a farm-heouse, if I know anything erbout ther lay of ther land. We'll put up thar till some time toward night, an' then strike through to this 'ere hut. Arter that we'll hev things pretty much all our own way, I guess."

But when in this world even the shrewdest of us get the idea that we are going to have things all our own way that is usually just the time we don't get them so.

It began right now with the Ford Boys, for when they reached the hole in the bank they found, to their intense surprise, that not only was Davidger missing, but the boat as well.

Bob was furious in his rage, and as for Charlie, he was pretty nearly as bad.

"Jest ez I told that blarsted detective!" he exclaimed. "Ther feller was only shammin' arter all. He orter hev been put out of ther way at ther start."

Strange inconsistency!

Neither of these desperate fellows stopped to reflect that but for Davidger they themselves would have been lying at the bottom of the creek, victims of the moonshiners' bullets.

But there was nothing particularly consistent about the Fords anyhow except in their devotion to their own interests, so what can we expect?

Back to the bluff was the next move.

The idea was to see if the boat was anywhere on the creek.

But not only could they discover no trace of the boat, but to their added disgust the body of the old detective had disappeared.

A dreadful suspicion seized them.

"By time, I don't believe he was dead after all, Charlie," cried Bob. "It's jest as I told yer, but you never will take my advice. We'd orter chucked him into the crik while we had the chance."

It was too late to think about it now, however.

Congratulating themselves with the thought that in any event they alone possessed the key to the situation, the brothers now struck back over the bluffs, and in due time reached the farmhouse where they sought and obtained permission to sleep in the barn, representing themselves as hunters tired out with a long tramp.

By sundown they were up and off again, armed with full directions how to find Sile Marsh's hut from the farmer, and with a bag of provisions sufficient to last them for at least two days.

"Look eout fer ther wildman, gents," cautioned the farmer as they departed. "He's most allis hanging round ther swamp thar, an' it may go hard with you ef he happens to ketch you foul."

"Who is this wildman?" asked Charlie.

"Blest ef I can tell yer," was the reply. "Nobody round these hyar parts could ever find out."

"Wal, ther country will be rid of him ef ever we run foul of him, that's all I've got to say," retorted Bob, as they left.

So explicit had been the directions given by the farmer that the outlaw brothers reached the hut somewhere about midnight, without having encountered any serious difficulty on the way.

The place was utterly deserted and presented a far different appearance from what it did when Will Dawson, Sadie and Mr. Baker saw it next morning.

Bob had taken the precaution to bring a lantern, and after a brief survey of the interior, the brothers, being thoroughly tired out, flung themselves down, and slept until morning dawned.

They were up with the sun, and after having consumed the remainder of the provisions which the wildman had left, Bob spread out the papers from the leather wallet, and began studying them again.

"Now it sez hyar, Charlie," he said, "ther under this hyar hut is a stone vault built right in ther mud, and that ther entrance is through an opening underneath a white rock back here in ther swamp."

"Then what we want is to find the white rock, I s'pose," said Charlie.

"That's it."
 "Come on, then."
 They left the hut, and, following the direction laid down on the plan, were soon at the rock.
 "That's what's ther matter," said Bob. "This hyar is certainly ther spot."
 "An' if ther paper sez true the rock is set in a groove an' moves easy enough."
 "That's soon proved. Let's try it."
 They laid hold of the rock together.
 To their intense satisfaction it moved easily enough, revealing beneath three or four rickety, wooden steps leading down into an excavation, the side of which had been carefully stoned up.
 "O. K. so far," said Charlie. "Now, then, for ther lantern."

They lit the candle inside the lantern and descended, finding themselves at the entrance to a narrow passage, which they followed until they came to a door.

It was locked, but as it was only an ordinary wooden affair, the brothers had no trouble in bursting it in.

The instant Bob flashed the lantern inside an exclamation of intense satisfaction escaped him.

"By Judas paste! It's all true!" he shouted. "Charlie, we've reaped our reward at last!"

They had found what they sought, certainly, but when Bob came to talk about reaping, that was another thing.

Now they found themselves looking into a stone vault about the size of the hut above, over the floor of which was strewn an immense mass of glittering white quartz, every ounce fairly bristling with free gold.

Bob was perfectly wild, nor was Charlie much better.

Piece after piece was picked up and examined.

There was no mistake about it. Gold it was, but so mixed with the quartz that the value of the find could only be guessed at.

Still there was enough to make them independently rich for life—on that score no doubt could exist.

"But how the deuce are we goin' to get it away?" asked Bob.

"I tell you what it is," said Charlie. "You remember thet thar deserted house what the farmer was a tellin' us about, further down ther crick?"

"Yaas."

"S'pose we go up thar and look about, an' see if can't find a boat or something to make one out of. Then we kin jest run down hyar, load up, and pull up the crick to thet thar hole, stow it away, and come back fer the rest. When we get it all in ther hole we'll kiver it up and go for a wagon to cart the stuff over to Doniphan, or some other sea port, whar we kin get it onto ther train."

"It's ther only way I see," said Bob. "Les try it, Charlie."

They left the vault soon after, and carefully closing the entrance started down the creek, following a narrow trail, which doubtless the wild-man had made.

Scarcely had they departed, when out from the bushes stole a tall figure wearing a big hat, high boots and an old cloak thrown over his shoulders.

"Ha, ha, ha! you've saved me some time and no little trouble, my fine fellows," he muttered. "Guess I'll have a look at the treasure. After that I'll let you do the carrying for me, but when you come to look for your gold it won't be there."

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE'S many a slip betwixt cup and lip, 'tis said, and this the enemies of Old King Brady have repeatedly found out to their cost.

Of course the brave old detective was not dead—were it so this story could never have been written.

Nor was he even badly wounded—only stunned by his fall.

The truth is the knives of the treacherous Ford Boys had inflicted mere scratches; the blood which had so deceived them all came from the cut on Old King Brady's head.

In fact, a part of the time while they were bending over him the detective was not only conscious, but heard every word they said.

He was helpless, though—that he realized fully—and acting the part of wisdom, lay perfectly still until they had gone.

For many moments now Old King Brady made no move, but only listened to the sound of their retreating footsteps.

As they died away at last he rose heavily, and

staggering to the creek bathed his head and face.

The water refreshed him, and he felt relief immediately.

"It's too much," he murmured, "too much! I'm getting almost too old a man to stand it. That fall came mighty near doing me up."

He tried to pull himself together, though, in spite of the discouragement he felt.

Though the duplicate papers in the wallet were gone, he still possessed the originals. There was nothing to hinder him from going straight ahead in his work, if only he could get away from that place.

And then, as he raised his eyes and glanced up the creek, as though a kind Providence had sent it to his relief, he saw a small boat working its way slowly down the turbid stream.

There was a single man in the boat, and he seemed to be paddling with one hand only, and making pretty bad work of it at that.

It was the wounded moonshiner, Sam Davidger! Old King Brady recognized him at a glance.

"Hello! Hello!" he shouted. "My man, I'm in trouble. I want your help."

The moonshiner, who had jumped as though shot at first sight of the detective, paused in his paddling, looking not a little amazed.

"Why, what—what's the matter?" he called back. "Are you fooling me? For God sake don't fire, kun'! I'll bring back ther boat!"

"I tell you I'm in trouble. The Ford Boys tried to murder me. I stood by you when you needed help. For God sake help me, and I swear you'll not regret it. Bring the boat here."

"Ef it's true, by crips you kin count on Sam Davidger every time," was the answer, "but ef yer foolin' me— Well, no matter, only I am better new, an' I want you to understand ther Davidgers dies lightin', thet's all."

A few moments' talk after the boat touched the shore, and it pushed off again and shot down the stream.

Now there were two men instead of one in it—Old King Brady and the moonshiner.

"How far is it to the branch creek?" asked Old King Brady.

"'Bout a mile, I reckon," replied the moonshiner.

"And the village of Goldmark lies how far?"

"'Bout five miles."

"You think I'll find the marshal and his revenue officers there, you say?"

"Wal, I guess so." Leastways, they wuz two days ago. They're layin' for Colonel Ricker, an' the only thing I want you to promise is not to give us away."

"You may rely upon me, my friend."

"Wall, I think I can, elsewise I wouldn't hev give you the steer. I hain't forgot what you did fer me, boss. Guess yer willin' to own that now."

Lucky Old King Brady.

In befriending even his enemy he had cast his bread upon the waters, and now it had all come back to him without the necessity of "waiting many days."

Startled at the sight of the hand which grasped the revolver thrust up from beneath the white rock, Will Dawson and Sadie certainly were, but it was nothing on Sadie's part to the terror which seized her soul when Colonel Jerome Ricker came springing out of the pit.

As for Mr. Baker, the instant he caught sight of the hand, he had uttered a loud cry, and leaping from the rock, dashed away among the trees, shouting madly as he went.

It was all done like a flash.

Before Will could do more than to fling himself in front of Sadie, and wonder who the long-haired ruffian could be, Ricker had them covered with his revolver.

So startled had Will been that not until now that it was too late did he think of drawing his own revolver and defending himself and his precious charge.

"Sadie! You!" shouted Ricker, startled in turn.

"Oh, save me! Save me from that man!" screamed Sadie, flinging her arms around Will's neck.

By this time the gallant colonel was at her side.

"Leave this lady to me, young Step-and-fetch-it," he hissed most insultingly, at the same time thrusting his revolver into Will's face. "I am her cousin and her husband to be. Unhand her, or I'll spill your brains all over the grass."

Embarrassed as he was by the screaming girl, Will was helpless to defend himself, and in a moment it was too late.

"Touch her if you dare!" he shouted. "I will show you! I—"

Crack!

Ruthlessly Ricker fired.

Will gave a groan and sank back upon the grass, pulling Sadie with him, but before she could fully fall the colonel had her by the waist.

"So, so! Fate has thrown you into my hands again, it seems," he hissed. "You see, my pretty cousin, how utterly useless it is to attempt to escape me. My luck is proverbial—always was. I tell you, Sadie, there's no use talking. We were made for one another and there's no mistake about it. Beside, I've found your father's gold."

But Sadie was sobbing to that extent that she could not speak.

"Oh, why did you kill him? Why did you do it?" she moaned. "Do you think I could ever live with such a blood-stained wretch as you are, Jerome Ricker? Ah! let me help him—let me go."

"You shall not go—you shall stay where I can put my finger on you when you are wanted, cousin mine," declared the villain. "It's no use, Sadie, you and I are going to be married just as soon as we can get a parson to splice us; meantime I'll fix you so you can't interfere with my schemes."

He dragged her shrieking into the hut, and tying her hands temporarily with his handkerchief, proceeded to look for a rope, which he presently found, and with it made fast her arms and limbs in such a manner that escape was quite impossible.

"Oh, Jerome! What a wretch you are!" groaned the poor girl. "Is there no spark of pity in your black heart?"

"I'm looking out for No. 1, that's what's the matter," growled Ricker. "You can stay here while I go outside and see if I can find anything of that crazy father of yours, and finish up your lover if he isn't dead. By the way, who is that fellow, anyhow, Sadie? I want to know."

But poor Sadie was past reply now.

Overcome by her emotions the unfortunate girl had fainted away.

"Thunder! I hope she ain't dead!" muttered Ricker. "These women are the very deuce—always fainting just when you think you have 'em where you want 'em. We'll let her come to the best she can. She'll be all right in a moment, no doubt, and if I don't attend to that putty-faced dude out there he may get off and alarm the Ford Boys; then there'll be the mischief to pay."

He hurried from the hut, but when he reached the spot could find nothing of Will.

"Where the mischief has he gone to?" he muttered. "He can't have walked away nor—Hello, Uncle El! You back again, you old lunatic? Well, you see, I've found your golden secret at last."

It was the wild man who had suddenly appeared before him—mad no longer. The fit had passed.

"Jerome—Jerome! Can it be you, my dear sister's only son, who has done this deed?"

"Ha—ha! You ain't so mad as people think you!" sneered Ricker. "I've long suspected as much."

"Stop, Jerome!"

"Stop for what, Uncle El? Till I can get ready to rid the world of you forever?" sneered the colonel, flinging off his coat, which fell back across a stump. "For I'm going to do it, old man—I'm going to do it. Your gold is mine, and there's going to be no mistake on that score either. I want you to understand that—Oh! My God! I'm shot! I'm dead!"

Suddenly it had come. The sharp report of a pistol had rung out, coming from behind the naked form of the wildman, who excitedly pressed his hand to his head as Colonel Ricker reeled backward.

Had he looked behind him he would have seen Bob and Charlie Ford.

Bob was foremost, and grasped a smoking revolver in his right hand.

"Jerome! Jerome! Where's Sadie?" shouted Mr. Baker. "Speak, man! What have you done with my little girl?"

"She—she's in the hut!" gasped Colonel Ricker, who lay writhing upon the ground. "She's all right—oh, uncle! Uncle! Help me! Save me! Oh, God! I'm gone! The gold! not for me though! The gold!"

He never spoke again.

Foaming and writhing, clutching at the grass with his twisting fingers the villain breathed his last.

"Oh, Heaven! Will the curse of that gold never be raised?" groaned Mr. Baker, staggering to his feet.

"Wal, I guess me'n brother 'll take our chances with the cuss," came the sneering voice of Bob Ford behind him. "Hello, old man!"

Should think you'd find it kinder chilly 'bout the legs! Hal! Ha! You're jest the feller we want to help us get away with that gold."

Thus Bob Ford said as he stood covering Mr. Baker with the revolver.

"Here's another!" yelled Charlie, coming out of the thicket dragging Will Dawson half dead with weakness and pain.

"And that thar gal's in the hut!" roared Bob. "By Judas, we've got a bonanza all around. Say, Charlie, old Titterington must have given Ricker the steer."

"Bet yer life! What shall we do with these fellows, Bob?"

"Shoot 'em," said Bob promptly. "Let's shoot 'em and make a clean sweep. What we want is the gal and the gold. We hain't no earthly use for nothin' else."

"O. K. It's a go!" answered Charlie, raising his rifle threateningly above Will's head.

"Shoot your man first, Bob, and lend me your revolver and I'll do this duck up brown."

"Oh, God, confound the machinations of these wicked men," groaned Mr. Baker solemnly. "Courage, my young friend, there is a better world than this."

"Hold your jaw and quit preaching. Your time has come," snarled Charlie when the wildman suddenly tore himself free with a great cry.

"Help, help! Here, here, friends! Help!" he shouted.

"Judas paste, Bob, look there!" yelled Charlie, in the same breath.

It was a man looking amazingly like Old King Brady, who, followed by twelve strong, able bodied fellows all armed with rifles, came suddenly in sight round the corner of the hut.

"The detective! Alive! Scoot, brother!" gasped Bob.

"Hold, you can't escape, boys!" shouted Old King Brady, dashing forward.

Crack! Crack!
It was the detective's revolver.

"Crack, crack, crack!" shots from the rifles followed.

"Crack, crack!" went Bob's revolver and Charlie's gun in turn.

But it was a miss all around, and no wonder, considering the excitement of the moment.

Away went the Ford Boys among the trees like the wind.

"After them, my men, after them!" cried Old

King Brady. "A hundred dollars to the man who brings them down!"

Before night settled down over the Black Mingo swamp, a wagon, heavily laden, emerged from its thickets on to the road in the neighborhood of Mr. Titterington's house.

As it passed that elegant rural retreat its owner came to the door and looked out, his wife, with an old clay pipe in her mouth, peering over his shoulder.

"Great grief! thar's that detective man!" she shouted, catching sight of Old King Brady on the front seat.

"An' the young feller an' the gal!" echoed her husband.

Just then Will, who sat beside the detective, caught sight of the pair.

"Hello! We've got the best of you, old man!" he shouted. "We've got the wildman's gold!"

Now we don't quote the reply of the worthy Mr. Titterington—he never made any.

At the same instant, a second wagon filled with armed men came dashing into the yard.

"The game's up, Tit!" shouted a big fellow, leaping out. "Ricker's dead, and we are on to all your secrets. Throw open your doors if you want to save your life, old man!"

And it is hardly necessary for us to add that Mr. Titterington's door went open to its widest extent.

Yes, they had got the wildman's gold, and there was the wildman himself, seated comfortably dressed, beside Sadie on the box.

Need any more than this be said?

Hardly, we think.

Old King Brady's adventures with the Ford Boys were ended. We have only to draw down the curtain and bid our readers farewell.

But Old King Brady did not catch the Ford Boys!

No.

Their time had not yet come.

Had the detective been more successful Jesse James might be terrorizing the wilds of Missouri to-day.

Bob and Charlie escaped into the fastnesses of the swamps and were seen no more.

It was the United States Marshal who accompanied Old King Brady, and the others were his officers.

No need to tell how they came there.

Sam Davidger's aid was all that Old King Brady had counted on and more.

It was the detective who led the marshal and his band into the wilderness, little dreaming how opportune would be his arrival at Sile Marsh's hut, but it was Davidger himself who gave the moonshiners away. The promise of a big reward settled that.

The train from Kittle Black a week later carried to St. Louis a precious freight.

There was Old King Brady, the detective, Will Dawson, pale and weak, but out of all danger, from his wounds, Sadie Baker, and lastly, her father, who since that day had had no renewal of his insane attacks.

Nor was this all.

A number of large and very heavy cases were in the baggage car.

No one at Kittle Black knew what they contained, but to the reader we will confidentially state that they contained the wildman's gold.

How much did it amount to?

Well, the question is a pertinent one.

A million and a half was what it finally panned out.

In the end Will and Sadie got it, for in course of a few months Will married Sadie, and shortly after that Eldad Baker died, worn out by long exposure in the malarious swamp.

Strangely enough, his insanity never returned.

It was with no small feeling of triumph that Old King Brady reported to Mr. Hezekiah Baker.

The joy of the old Chouteau avenue millionaire was indescribable when he learned the happy termination of the affair.

Of course he rewarded Old King Brady handsomely, and Will Dawson came in for his share.

In addition, the great detective was highly complimented from the authorities for his assistance in finally cleaning out the biggest gang of moonshiners which ever flourished in Southern Missouri.

With Colonel Ricker dead and buried, it is not likely that the gang will ever revive again.

The Titteringtons went to the penitentiary for illicit distilling the same day Old King Brady started back for New York.

Their term was short and soon served, but the pair will be likely to remember Old King Brady and the Ford Boys till the last hour of their life.

[THE END.]

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