

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

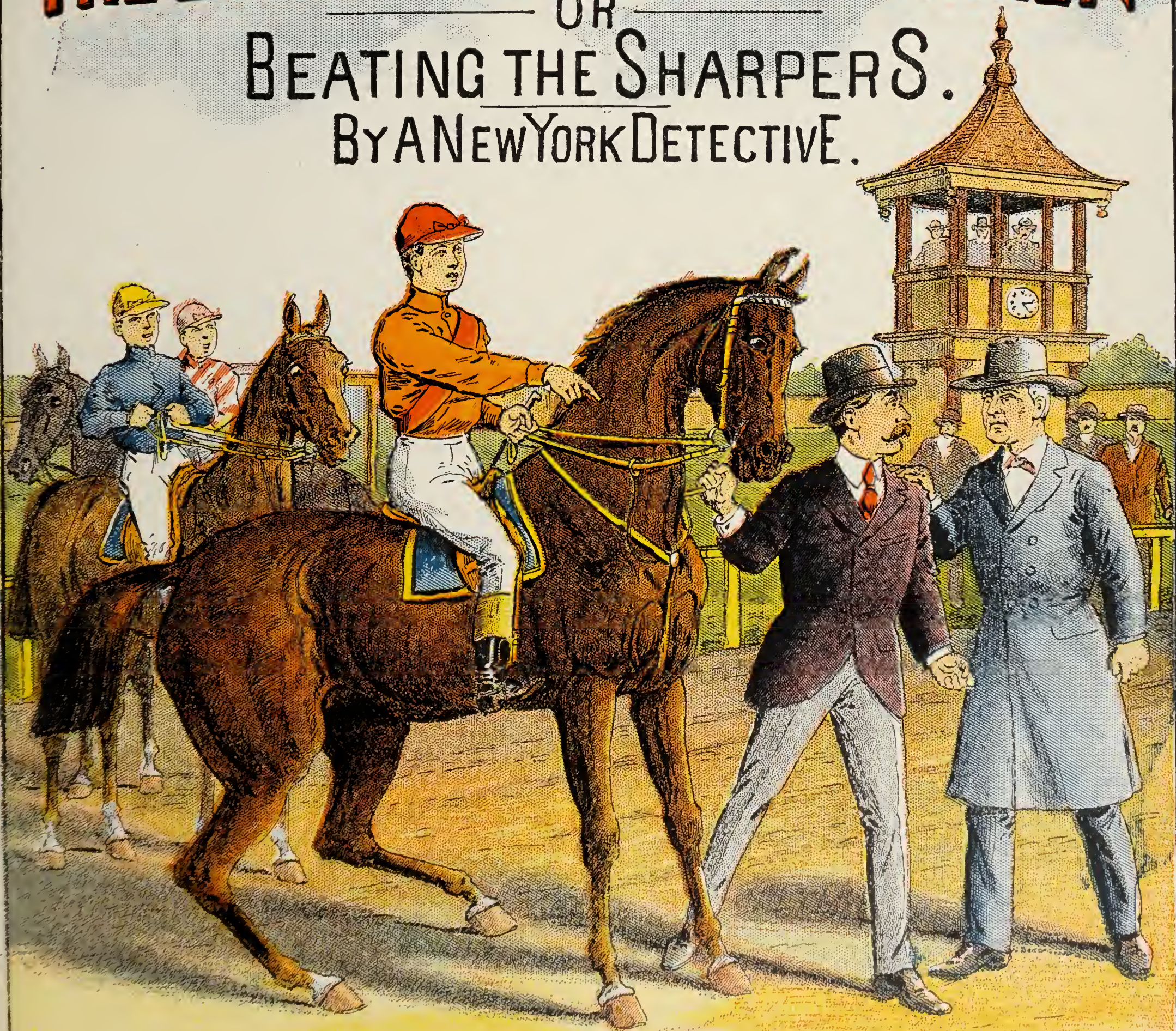
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No. 136.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 30, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS ON THE RACE TRACK; OR BEATING THE SHARPERS. BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.



Lavigne, greatly excited, grasped the bridle rein. "Arrest him!" cried Harry. Old King Brady placed a hand on his shoulder.

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The Bradys on the Race Track;

OR,

BEATING THE SHARPERS.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRACK OF THE SHARPERS.

Two men turned into University Place from Fourteenth Street, in the great city of New York, one summer morning.

They were of the sporting type, wearing diamonds and flashy clothes. One was young and slender, the other of stouter frame and florid complexion.

The ordinary passerby would have given them slight notice.

There were many hundreds of the same type to be encountered in a day's walk through the streets of the Metropolis.

But to two other men, who were a short distance behind them, they were of more than ordinary interest.

These latter were respectively a young man and an old man. But they were of a different type.

They were dressed in tightly-buttoned frock coats, and wore broad-brimmed hats.

The old man with the iron-gray hair was known far and wide as the most famous detective of the day.

His right name was James Brady, but he was known better by the cognomen of Old King Brady.

Many a case of crime he had solved, many a criminal he had tracked to his doom, and he was known and feared far and wide by that class.

His companion was a young detective named Harry Brady. Though their names were the same, they were of no near relationship.

But they were partners in their profession. Old King Brady had taken a strong liking to the younger detective, and they had fraternized.

Harry Brady had proved an apt pupil, and there were many who were disposed to adjudge him almost the equal of his older partner.

The Bradys were plainly engaged in shadowing the two flashy men.

They knew them well as a couple of the greatest gamblers in New York.

The older man was named Anton Lavigne. He was reputed as wealthy, and had a stable of race horses at Sheepsh-head Bay.

He belonged to a fast set, which was wealthy and exclusive as well. His business methods, however, were a profound secret, and in many ways he was considered the Monte Cristo of the turf.

His younger companion was known as Hugo Knapp, an erstwhile writer for a sporting paper.

Knapp was not known to be wealthy, but he toadied to Lavigne, and for that reason was popular with him.

The Bradys followed these two men down University Place for a ways.

Harry Brady's keen eyes flashed, as he said:

"Yes, that is where they are going. I told you they would back Hornet for the Sweepstakes. They are going into Delaney's to lay their wagers."

Old King Brady's inscrutable face did not change its expression.

"Very likely," he said, briefly.

"They are pretty sure of their game when they venture into such places as Tom Delaney's to lay a wager."

"You are right."

"I wish we could make sure that they are backing their own horse. Batavia is played to win."

"Which means——"

"A deal!"

"Sure! If Lavigne was not dead sure he would not back Hornet. I know his methods well. You may feel sure that he has got an inside line on Batavia."

"I believe the Belden jockey can be corrupted."

"So do I."

"Well, we are in this thing to the finish. Let us go ahead."

The two gamblers had halted before the entrance to a high building near the corner of West Twelfth Street.

They conversed a moment, looking carelessly up and down the street.

Then they suddenly passed through the doorway.

The Bradys were on the spot a moment later.

They also passed through the doorway, and found themselves in a long corridor. At the lower end was a glass door, on which was printed:

"TOM DELANEY, Commission Agent."

The Bradys sauntered along to this door.

A dull murmur came from the room beyond. Thin clouds of tobacco smoke oozed out through the cracks.

The Bradys boldly pushed the door open and entered.

They were in one of the largest pool-rooms in New York.

Tom Delaney kept his place in full operation, despite the best efforts of frenzied social reformers.

A great black-board occupied one side of the room.

Here the names of the horses and jockeys were given, together with the odds to be given.

A desk was in one corner, where the cashier and the staff of clerks hung forth. There was also a telegraph instrument.

The crowd of gamblers in the place sauntered back and forth, made memorandums, and placed their bets. On many a face was written the lines of anxiety and care.

Into this crowd of gamblers went the two sharpers, Lavigne and Knapp.

The detectives shadowed them.

They had a deep purpose in this.

The "Monte Cristo of the Turf," as Lavigne was called, was under the ban of a dark suspicion.

The chief of the Secret Service had reason to believe that he was responsible for a fearful crime of some years past.

This was the crime of murder.

Lavigne's career on the turf had been a short one.

He had been known among the rich patrons of the sport hardly five years.

Yet in that time he had won and gambled away many a fortune. He had played a high hand in the fast set of the Metropolis.

In all this career he had been dominated by a female mind.

It is said that half of the noted criminals of the country are brought to earth through the medium of a woman.

"Watch the woman and you'll get the man," is an old detective axiom. And there is logic in it.

Belle Knapp was known as the handsomest of the fast set of women who made the race tracks a rendezvous.

She was Hugo Knapp's sister, which helps to explain the friendship between him and Lavigne.

For the latter was much enamored of the bewitching Belle. He lavished money upon her.

Five years gone by, Anton Lavigne was not known in New York society.

At that time the country was fearfully shocked by the report of a brutal murder in Westchester.

Douglas Weld, a man of secluded life and habits, had been found dead in his bed, with a dagger in his breast.

Weld had always been known as a very wealthy man.

But after his death little trace of this wealth could be found. It had all vanished.

Valuable bonds and securities disappeared from safety-deposit boxes. Property had been converted into money.

Yet no trace of the money was to be found. It had completely vanished. How the old miser had accomplished this was a profound problem.

But suspicions were directed to a private secretary named Andrew Boyd. With the old man's death this secretary had dropped from sight utterly.

Detectives scoured the country for some trace of Boyd.

But in vain.

The case rested for years. One day the chief of the Secret Service gained a clew. He at once called the Bradys into his office.

"You remember the Weld murder case?" he asked.

"Yes," replied both detectives.

"Well, I have an idea I can place the murderer."

The Bradys were interested.

The chief then outlined the case, and gave his reasons for the belief that Anton Lavigne was identical with the missing secretary, Andrew Boyd.

"He is called the Monte Cristo of the turf," declared the chief. "His past life is a mystery. He came suddenly into fortune. He is our man."

Thus the Bradys were put upon the case. At once they began to shadow Lavigne.

But do their best, they could get no stable evidence against him.

They became morally certain that he was identical with Boyd. But beyond this they could not go.

Yet he was a guilty man, and must be brought to justice. They bent their best energies to this task.

They had shadowed Lavigne and his crony, Knapp, into the pool-room.

Lavigne studied the quotation of odds for a time. Then he discussed the matter with Knapp.

A few moments later he gave a clerk a heavy commission. It could not be ascertained which horse he was backing.

But it was presumably his own horse, the Hornet.

Batavia was the favorite, and was backed heavily to win.

The Bradys continued to watch the actions of the two gamblers. Suddenly a boy dressed in ill-fitting clothes, and of the type seen around stables, slipped into the room.

In a precocious way he approached Lavigne and gave him a letter.

The gambler tossed him a coin, then proceeded to read the letter. As he did so his face grew crimson.

His eyes flashed luridly, and he turned to Knapp with a deep curse.

"Read that!" he gritted. "The devil is against us!"

Knapp took the letter and glanced over it. His face grew black.

The words uttered by the two gamblers reached the ears of the Bradys.

"Curse the young scoundrel!" he gritted. "If he betrays us——"

"He will die!" said Lavigne, in a harsh tone.

"We shall be ruined!"

"Yes, unless I can get another jockey."

"Bah! You know how useless that is! There isn't another boy at Sheephead can stay the Hornet up for such a hot race."

"You're right there! Hang it, there is only one other way."

"What?"

"We must hedge."

"It is too late!"

"Not a bit of it! If I can place twenty thousand on Batavia even up, I shall come out square."

CHAPTER II.

A CLEVER SCHEME.

Knapp shrugged his shoulders.

"The favorite ought to bring that," he said, tersely.

"He will! The large sum, if put in at once, may put the price down a little."

"Well, are you going to try it?"

"I shall wait an hour or two. Perhaps we may hear from White again."

The Bradys knew well who the jockey was. Snapper White was one of the most famous of riders.

It was evident that he had been engaged to ride the Hornet.

It was also plain that he had, for some reason, seen fit to cancel the mount.

Whether this was or was not fair to Lavigne the Bradys had no means of knowing.

But they accepted the fact, and at once began to draw conclusions.

"Jockeys are scarce," said Harry. "It is going to be difficult for them to get the right sort."

"You are right," agreed Old King Brady.

"It looks as if their cake was dough."

Just then Knapp spoke up again.

"We can draw the horse!"

"Never!" declared Lavigne. "I don't believe in scratching a horse who is fit as a fiddle."

"Well, that is so; but what shall we do?"

"Why, we must find a jockey."

"I suppose so."

"I have an idea!"

"Well?"

"Of course White is a good jock. He will not be out of the race. It is likely that he has had a larger offer to ride another horse."

"Just so!"

"I'll lay even money he will have the mount on Batavia."

A curse escaped Knapp.

"That is a regular Belden trick," he said. "He thinks to beat us by getting our jockey away from us."

"Yes, but as I said before, White is not the only jockey in the world."

"Oh, that is true enough. Who else can we get?"

"I think Carson will ride for us."

"Carson?"

"Yes."

Knapp's eyes flashed.

"The best jock that ever sat in a saddle!" he said. "But how do you know you can get him?"

"I don't."

"Well—what?"

"I shall try."

"Where is he?"

"In Chicago."

"That is a good ways off, and the race is Thursday. He will just have time to get here, if you wire him."

The two gamblers looked at each other.

"What do you think of it?"

"A good plan!"

"Is it a go?"

"Yes."

The two gamblers turned to the door. The Bradys had heard all. They looked at each other comprehensively.

Then they followed Knapp and Lavigne out upon the street.

The two gamblers walked up University Place and crossed by Union Square to Broadway.

"There is a telegraph office in the Morton House," said Harry. "That is where they are evidently bound."

"Yes."

"Shall we keep close to them?"

"Not too close. We know what their message will be."

"Yes."

"They will doubtless wire Carson to come on at once."

"Sure!"

"Then I have a little plan."

Just as the two gamblers came out, after sending the message, a cab drove up to the curb.

In it sat a very beautiful and richly-dressed woman.

She beckoned to the men, and they at once responded.

While she sat in the cab, they stood on the curb and talked with her. The Bradys were interested.

Piece by piece they were picking up the case.

Here was a new thread.

"Who is she?" asked Harry.

"Possibly it is Belle Knapp, the woman who has such a powerful influence over Lavigne."

"Ah, that is the truth. I would give much to know what their conversation is about."

"Perhaps we can gather some of it. Let us try."

Very carelessly the detectives advanced along the curb in the rear of the cab.

As good luck had it, they were not noticed.

Occasional bits of the conversation were caught.

"It's a snide game on White's part," Belle was saying, excitedly. "He'll get his pay for it. He has been offered a big sum by Belden to ride Batavia."

"Well," said Lavigne, savagely, "I'll square accounts with him, all right!"

"We're going to secure Carson to ride Hornet," said Knapp.

A cry of delight escaped Belle.

"Dick Carson? He can ride White to a standstill! I am glad! If we can beat Batavia it will be the biggest game we have played yet."

"We are not sure of Carson."

"There is a chance?"

"I hope so. We have wired him, and shall expect an answer in an hour or so."

"All right! I'll come back in an hour to know the result."

"Very good. We shall get seats in the office and wait for the answer."

Belle smiled, and waved her hand in adieu.

The cab drove away.

Then Lavigne and Knapp walked into the hotel office and got seats in the window, where they could look out upon the street.

The Bradys strolled away down Broadway. They did not wish to be noticed by the gamblers.

"It's all right," said Old King Brady. "We are feeling our way finely. I am of the opinion that if we ever secure the evidence it will be through the Knapp woman."

"Probably. We must be at that race Thursday."

"Yes."

"I have a plan," said Harry, thoughtfully. "Suppose we try to fraternize with these people, under the guise of sports. If we could only win their confidence, we might get at some of their secrets."

"It will be difficult. Such people are very keen."

Suddenly Harry came to a stop.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, with sudden inspiration.

"What is the matter?"

"I have a prime idea!"

The old detective stared at Harry.

"Well, out with it!" he said.

"Let me see—as near as I can remember Carson is among the heavyweight jockeys."

"Yes. He rides at one hundred and thirty pounds. That is the weight in the big handicap. Both Batavia and the Hornet carry that."

"There you are! Now, Carson is my weight and build. Don't we look something alike? I fancy so."

The old detective stared.

"What are you driving at?"

"Just this; suppose I play the part of Carson——"

"Of Carson?"

"Yes."

"How the deuce—— Why, do you mean to ride the race?"

"Yes—myself."

Old King Brady was astounded.

"The idea is all right," he said; "but is it feasible? What are you going to do with Carson?"

Harry smiled and nodded.

"That is all right," he said. "We'll fix that. They are now waiting for an answer from Carson."

"Yes."

"Suppose he wires them that he will come. Very good! Within an hour we will wire him, in Lavigne's name, not to come. Do you see?"

"And that will stop him?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"I will make up for Carson, and run out to Buffalo to-night. Then I'll come down on the Chicago Limited Thursday morning. I'll meet them at the depot and accompany them to the track. If I don't stir up something to give us a clew during or after that race, then I am dull, that is all!"

"Good!" cried Old King Brady. "That is a great inspiration. But there is one drawback."

"What?"

"They will eventually discover the deception."

"Not for weeks, perhaps. Dick Carson rides very little now. He is training horses of his own in Chicago, and nobody down here will think it strange."

"But if the reports gets to his ears, he may be interested."

"Don't forget that there are three jockeys named Carson in this country. There is only one chance in a hundred that he will see the name in the papers, or attach any significance to it."

"Well, it is worth trying. One thing is sure: There is no gain without some risk."

"Just so!"

"The more I think of it, the better I like the plan."

"I believe in it. If I can become their jockey, then I will get into their confidence. You can aid me outside. I think we will soon get the evidence we want."

Thus the detectives laid their plans. Everything looked smooth.

After a while they went back to the Morton House.

The birds were still there.

The detectives seated themselves in another part of the room and waited and watched.

Presently a boy crossed the office and placed a message in their hands.

Both read it.

The detectives saw by the expression of their faces that Carson had agreed to come.

Just then the cab drove up, and the two men went out to carry the news to Belle Knapp.

"The game is on!" said Harry. "Now, we must do our part."

Belle and the two gamblers engaged in a long and excited conversation.

Finally she drove away, and the two gamblers returned to the hotel office. The detectives were in waiting.

They managed again to overhear a few words spoken:

"It's all right, then," said Knapp, with a chuckle. "Belle is sure that Skinny Bent can be trusted. He has free access to the Belden stable. We needn't have taken the trouble to send for Carson."

But Lavigne scowled.

"I think the Hornet can beat Batavia, with Carson up," he said.

"Perhaps so; but if we can make sure of the matter, why not do so."

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, we will look for Carson Thursday morning. Now, let's go over to Jake Flynn's and finish that game of cards."

The two sports left the hotel office.

CHAPTER III.

OLD KING BRADY TAKES THE TRAIL.

The Bradys did not try to follow them. They knew that it was not necessary.

Moreover, there was other work to do.

First they went to dinner. While thus engaged they discussed their plans fully.

Then they went to their lodgings and elaborated a few

matters of disguise. Harry procured a jockey's outfit, and also changed his personal appearance to a certain extent.

Later in the day Old King Brady sent a message to Chicago.

"To Dick Carson, Chicago Race Track:

"Need not come. Have made other plans. Yours,

"ANTON LAVIGNE."

Then Harry took an evening train to Buffalo.

"I will get aboard the Chicago Limited there," he cried.

"You may look for me on Thursday morning."

"All right."

"If anything goes wrong with our plans, make the best of it."

"I will," agreed Old King Brady. "I know that we are up against a gang of sharpers, but we will beat them."

"To be sure we will!"

When the train rolled out of the depot Old King Brady turned away, and went out upon Forty-second Street.

It was evening, and the streets of the great city were ablaze with light.

The old detective had no idea of remaining idle while Harry was absent.

There was plenty of work for him to do, as he well knew.

He was interested in the part the woman, Belle Knapp, was playing. He was determined to devote much time to her case.

But he had no knowledge of her whereabouts at the moment.

He knew that she lived at a fashionable uptown hotel. He decided to direct his steps thither.

At the Savoy the old detective made guarded inquiries, and learned that his bird was not in; but her maid was in her apartments awaiting her return.

Old King Brady seated himself in the hotel office and busily revolved several plans in his head.

"She is a woman of the world," he mused. "In the past she has met many different men. It is not unlikely that she has met the Count D'Arcos. Very likely it was at Monte Carlo."

The old detective stepped into a side room, and quickly made a few changes in his appearance.

When he emerged he wore side-whiskers, a long mustache, a wig of curling black and a monocle.

He was a foreign nobleman in accent, dress and looks.

He strolled about the office for an hour or so, when his quick eye saw a cab draw up at the entrance.

A lady stepped out.

In an instant Old King Brady knew her.

It was Belle Knapp.

He waited a reasonable length of time. Then he sent up his card:

"Count D'Arcos, Berlin, Germany."

It was not long before an answer came. A bell-boy bowed respectfully before him, and said:

"Miss Knapp will see you, sir."

The count bowed in a stately way, and followed the messenger to the door of Miss Knapp's room. It was opened by the maid, and he was ushered in.

Attired in a loose robe, Belle sat in an easy chair by a cheery grate fire. She did not rise as her visitor came forward.

"You will pardon me, count?"

"By all means, mademoiselle," said Old King Brady, with a profound bow. "I am at your service."

The woman was regarding him in a dreamy way.

"You have the advantage of me," she said. "We have never met before."

"Pardon! Is it true you have forgotten?"

"You are an utter stranger to me."

Old King Brady affected a spasm of pain.

"Ah, that is the hardest blow I ever received!" he said.

"I thought you would never forget me. I am only one of your most humble slaves."

"Bah!" exclaimed Belle, roughly. "Don't give me any such taffy as that. I am not the kind of a fly to be caught with molasses. You Germans are worse than the French, I believe."

"Austrian, mademoiselle! I protest, I am no German."

"Well, there's mighty little distinction. Can you tell me where we have met before?"

The count arched his eyebrows.

"Ah, you have forgotten!" he said, regretfully. "Too bad! You do not remember me, then? I have never forgotten you. Well, it was at Monte Carlo—you remember? No? We shall see! Rouge et noir! You place your money on the red and win. I sit by you. I tell you the winning color. You remember? No? Ah, I shall despair!"

Belle did not remember, for of course such an incident had never existed.

But this counted for little.

She was a woman surfeited with life's pleasures, heavy with conscience, and the fascinating manner of the foreign nobleman amused her.

This was enough.

She was ready to accept the chance thus offered for diversion, and at once embraced the situation.

"Then you were my friend?" she said, ingenuously. "My friends are always welcome. Be seated. Malise, a glass of champagne for the gentleman."

"Ah, I am ravished with your great hospitality, madam," said the count, effusively. "I knew you would not forget me."

The maid brought a bottle and glasses, and the count drank to the health and success of his hostess.

The conversation became lively and reminiscient.

As the wine flowed, the spirit of both seemed also to flow in harmony. The count told of matters in foreign lands, of affairs at court, in all of which Belle appeared to be interested.

"Ah," she said, with flashing gaze, "I shall return to Paris yet; but one must have money to live in that delightful centre. When I next go there, it shall be with such a fortune that I will dazzle the people. I shall be truly the American Queen of Gold."

Of course the count was delighted, effusive and beseeching, all at once. The most honeyed of flattery rolled from his tongue the while.

Artfully he tried to extract from her the anticipated source of this wealth. But just as artfully she evaded him.

"Ah, count," she said, with sudden thought, "are you above the plebeian making of money by speculation on a race horse?"

"The races!" cried the count. "Ah, madam, how shall I say it? To win on one's favorite horse is not even beneath the king. It is ennobling! It is legitimate and—shall I say it? I seek the honor."

"Well, you shall know then, my dear count, that our horse, the Hornet, will race for the great handicap on Thursday. We have backed him to win."

The count was much excited.

He protested the pleasure it would give him to back the Hornet. He was already sure that the noble horse would win.

Belle regarded him through half shut eyes, and with a peculiar smile.

She was studying this nobleman with a variety of purposes.

It was her nature to form entanglements, to entice and entrap the unwary and fleece them.

Certainly the Count D'Arcos looked prosperous. Yet there was no telling, so many of these foreign noblemen were absolutely penniless.

"Yes," she said, earnestly. "You may make a large fortune, count. It will enable you to pay off that mortgage on your castle in Austria."

The count stiffened.

"Pardon, madam," he said curtly, "I have no need of that. I cannot spend my income."

"Indeed!" said the shrewd woman, with interest. "Then, if by any chance the Hornet should fail to win——"

The count bowed profoundly.

"I have received full value," he said, gracefully. "I will have paid a pittance for the honor of backing madam's horse!"

A sombre light came into the woman's dark eyes.

She began to purr like a feline.

"So gallant of you!" she said, softly. "Do you know, I would back the Hornet for more, but I have already exhausted my immediate resources."

The count bowed again.

"That is my good fortune!" he said. "I am now given the opportunity to serve madam!"

Belle leaned forward and tapped his arm softly:

"The Hornet will surely win!" she said.

"I am sure!"

"A thousand at two to one can be easily placed."

The count's check-book at once flew out. He balanced a neat ink pencil in his hand.

"Will such a trifle be sufficient? Pray, allow me to double it?"

Belle arched her brows.

"Monsieur shall have a commission," she said.

"Which shall be the good-will of madam herself," said the detective.

"Ah, you flatterer!" declared the cunning schemer, with affected coyness. "If I was sure of your sincerity——"

"Ah, your doubt gives me pain!"

"Well, well, it shall be so! Truly, count, I am fond of you already."

The count lifted her hand and touched it with his lips.

"I know that I have a rival," he said; "but I will defeat him!"

The woman indulged in a silvery peal of laughter. The count was about to write the check, but she put her hand on his arm, and said:

"Never mind that, my dear count. I cannot use it. I prefer the long green."

"What you mean by the 'long green'?" he asked.

Again Belle laughed.

"Coin of the realm," she said. "Money—cash!"

The count stiffened.

"My check, madam——"

"Yes, I know your check is good; but I don't want the bother of cashing it. I want the money—see?"

The count replaced his check-book.

"I have not so much with me."

"Never mind! Bring or send it early to-morrow. Don't fail, for the odds may become even."

The count bowed to the floor.

"It shall be so," he said. "I am your slave. But listen." He bent forward and looked at her penetratingly. "I am the only one in your heart. Do you understand, I will have no rival."

CHAPTER IV.

A BOLD STROKE.

For a moment Belle was disposed to show resentment.

But there was something so masterful, so hypnotic in the count's gaze that she quailed before it.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Yes, you do! There is another."

"I do not care for him."

"You will swear that?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall be my queen! I will shower the wealth of our family upon you! You shall fly with me to Austria, and we shall be happy."

The woman stared at this ardent wooer in a surprised and startled manner. She was half frightened, in spite of her hardened nature.

She recognized a mind more powerful than her own, a master spirit, and she quailed before it.

"Yes," she said, weakly.

"I shall adore you!" declared the ardent count. "You are everything that is grand and beautiful. Ah, my charming, I salute you!"

He bowed low and kissed her hand. Belle was completely enthralled by the will of this strange count.

"He is a snake," continued the count, fixing his keen gaze upon her. "You know it. He is a murderer. You shall tell me all. He must be dealt with by the law. There will be no safety for us until he is on the scaffold——"

Belle's face was livid.

She stared at D'Arcos in terror.

"Are you a wizard?" she asked. "What do you know?"

"I know all," continued the count, impressively. "It is the gold of Douglas Weld. The cunning traitor, Andrew Boyd, did the fearful deed. He is the Monte Cristo of the turf."

"Sh!" he whispered. "If he was in hearing—if it should be known—your life would pay for it!"

"Fear not! I am ready for him! I will place him on the gallows, if you——"

"What?"

"Will help me."

"I?" exclaimed Belle. "You are mad! How can I help you?"

"You can give me the evidence."

She gave a stifled cry, and tried to rise; but again the count fixed his gaze upon her.

"It can be gained in no other way," he declared, impressively. "You must and shall do it. Listen. We shall be the rulers of society in Southern Europe. You are to be the Countess D'Arcos. Is not this better than to stand as you are, the accomplice of a crook and a murderer, who may throw you over at any moment?"

But a sudden startling sound caused the woman to start up in affright.

"Stop!" she said. "There must be no more said now. He is coming. I hear footsteps. If he finds you here——"

"What?"

"He will kill you!"

"You forget that I am the best pistol shot in Europe."

"No—no! You must not shoot. There must be no trouble. Here! Come quick, or all is lost! Hide here until he is gone."

Old King Brady feigned a disinclination to accede to this request. The woman had opened a closet door. The place was hung with rich dresses.

"Hide here!" she said, imploringly. "I will send him away soon, I promise you! Yes—yes, it shall be so!"

Old King Brady stepped into the closet. But he left the door open a crack. He could see and hear all that occurred in the room.

Malise, the maid of the woman, now appeared, and Belle gave her hurried orders.

Then she sank back into her chair, and save for a slight pallor was apparently as languidly at ease as ever.

The maid answered the rap at the door.

As she opened it, Lavigne walked boldly in.

There was a dark cloud on his brow. He looked at Belle keenly.

"I have waited in the office below for your infernal agent!" he said. "He has not appeared."

Belle looked up in a manner of unfeigned surprise.

"What is that?" she said. "It is not yet eleven. He comes a good ways from the race track to New York. He must soon be here."

"You have had another visitor?"

Belle gave a start.

"Yes," she admitted.

There was suspicion in Lavigne's eyes.

"Who is he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Belle laughed in a silvery way. "You are jealous. Why, he is a poor fool of a Frenchman whom I met at Monte Carlo."

"Eh?" growled Lavigne. "I don't know whether to trust you or not, Belle. Women are always false!"

"Bah! Do you think a penniless fool of a French count could entice me? Have more respect for me."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone, long since! Is this all you have to say to me? What is the chance for the winning of the race?"

"I don't know. I am growing suspicious of everybody. Nobody can be trusted. This driveling fool of a stable boy has been deceiving you."

"Skinny Bent?"

"Yes."

"Don't you believe it!" said Belle, with conviction. "He will be here, and you may be sure of it. Ah, there he is!"

The maid had appeared in the door. She made a curtsy.

"A boy waits to see you, madame," she said.

"Show him in," said Belle.

The next moment there came shuffling into the room a specimen of the race-track stable boy.

He was dressed in ill-fitting clothes, and his air was hang-dog and uncomfortable. He looked furtively at Belle and her male companion.

"Come in, Skinny Bent," said Belle, in a purring voice. "Don't be afraid, we are your friends."

"Yes, miss," said the fellow, as he shuffled nearer and sat down on the edge of a chair. "Ye sent for me, an' I cum."

"So I see! You are still working for August Belden?"

"Yes, miss."

"You take care of Batavia, do you?"

"I'se de swipes on dat hoss, miss."

"I see. You are just the boy we want. Of course, you know we own the Hornet?"

The greenish eyes of the lad twinkled.

"Reckon I does, miss!"

"You know there is a heap of money up on this race?"

"So I does."

"Hum! Well, now to business. If Batavia should happen to throw a bit of colic or indigestion that day, or perhaps feel a bit dopey, he would be apt to get a beating?"

"Yes, miss."

"Nobody would ever guess the reason. There would be a heap of money in our pockets—and incidentally in yours."

The lad's eyes gleamed.

"You bet!" he said, unctuously.

"Then it is a bargain?"

The lad's cunning gaze wandered from the face of the woman to that of the man.

"Is it straight goods?" he asked.

"Yes."

"To make it sure," said Lavigne, drawing out a roll of money, "here is a hundred dollar bill to bind it."

The lad clutched the bank-note, and said:

"You'se will let me in on a bet on yer hoss?"

"Bet all you want to on him!"

Skinny Bent turned toward the door.

"You kin bet that the Hornet wins!" he said. "Skinny is de only one dat kin fix dat. He is de closest man to Batavia, fer he sleeps wid dat hoss."

"Look here, Bent," said Lavigne, pointedly, "why are you throwing Belden down?"

"Why am I t'rowin' him down?"

"Yes."

The lad showed the greenback.

"Ain't dat de stuff?"

"Yes, but there is another reason. Swipes seldom go back on their horse. Have you had trouble with Belden?"

The boy's eyes glittered viciously.

"You'se know how it is," he said. "I wants to be a jock, and make a fortune, like the other boys; but I'se an orphan, an' I'se bound to Belden. He won't gimme a chance."

Lavigne and Belle understood this.

Orphan boys were often bound out by law to horse-owners, and employed in the stables, with the prospect of some day becoming jockeys and winning their independence and a fortune, too.

Either Bent was not qualified for a rider, or there was some personal reason for the failure of Belden to advance him.

The boy chose to regard it as an unfair bit of treatment, and all the vengefulness of his untutored nature was aroused.

"Ah, I see," said Lavigne, completely satisfied. "Well, you stick by us, Bent, and I'll see that you get some good mounts."

"Will ye?" cried the lad, eagerly. "You kin bet I'll stay by ye, if ye only mean it."

"You can depend on it."

"It's all settled then. You kin bet Batavia never will win dat race."

The next moment the door closed behind the treacherous "swipes," and Belle and Lavigne were looking comprehensively at each other.

"I think the Hornet can beat Batavia at that!" declared Lavigne.

"So do I," agreed Belle, "but it is just as well to make sure of it."

"Oh, yes, of course. Well, I shall plunge on Thursday."

"If we win——"

"We are sure to win!"

"We are not considering the field."

"Bah! What's in the field? The Duke is the best horse, and he can never head Batavia. It is a cinch!"

"I hope so. If we lose——"

"We are ruined!"

"Yes."

"You know I am called the Monte Cristo of the turf. My wealth is supposed to be unlimited; but the world does not know that I am at my last resources. All depends on this race."

"Well, we shall win. Then I advise you to quit gambling."

"Quit gambling?"

"Yes, that is your ruin."

The villain shrugged his shoulders.

"As well tell me to quit breathing!" he said. "It is my nature, my life. I could never give it up. No, I must go on just the same. If the Goddess of Fortune stays by me, then all will be well."

"If not——"

A black oath dropped from Lavigne's lips.

"There are times when I suspect you, Belle. If you were false to me——"

"What?"

"I would kill you and myself, too!"

CHAPTER V.

OLD KING BRADY PLAYS HIS HAND.

Lavigne spoke with hissing force and deadly emphasis.

His eyes burned like live coals. It could be seen that he was in earnest.

Belle Knapp was a woman of nerve; but she shivered slightly, and her face turned a trifle pale.

It was likely at that moment that she was thinking of the man in hiding behind that closet door.

What would be the consequences if his presence should become known to Lavigne?

Lavigne's faith in her was already of the wavering kind.

It was likely that it would be completely shattered. At present she desired to avoid this contingency.

So her best arts were employed to counteract this impression.

She began to subtly engage Lavigne in soft-toned conversation, and golden plans for the future.

"You know my heart's desire?" she said. "I am tired of America. Why can we not find a home in some other land, say in la belle France, where we may be happy and free, and forget the past."

She spoke coaxingly and softly, but its effect was lost upon Lavigne.

"There you are!" he cried harshly. "Always preaching about France. I'll never visit Europe. This country is good enough for me, so drop your everlasting prattle about foreign lands."

He strode toward the door.

"You are in an ill-natured mood to-day," said Belle, coldly.

"It is you who drive me to it. Woman, you don't know my straits. I am in the worst possible condition!"

"I seek to help you; but you repulse me."

"Bah! You seek to make my condition worse, by preaching of foreign travel."

"I will not mention it to you again."

She spoke significantly.

"See that you don't!" he said, ill-naturedly. "I may not see you again until race day. There is much for me to do. If that cursed count comes here again, look out! I'll shoot him!"

Slamming the door violently, Lavigne went out.

Belle laughed in a mocking, silvery way.

"Malise!" she called. When the maid appeared, she said languidly:

"Watch him. Tell me if he reaches the street."

"Yes, madame."

The maid disappeared. Belle then went to the closet door and said, in a low tone:

"Remain where you are. He might return."

"I would throttle him!" gritted the count. "Oh, but for you——"

"Bah! Don't make a fool of yourself. Wait! We will win, if you will obey me."

"I am your slave. You are my queen!" said the count, rapturously.

In a little while the maid returned.

"He has departed, madame," she said.

"Enough! You may go, Malise," said Belle, and the maid disappeared. Then the closet door opened again and the pseudo count stepped out.

He caught the woman rapturously in his arms.

"Ah, why will you bestow your love upon him?" he cried. "Faugh! He is a cur, a brute! He tramples upon you! To think that he will refuse you anything! Ah, ma chere, you shall see what I will do for you."

"All right, count," said Belle, in a practical way. "You must know that our acquaintance is brief. If you prove to me that you are what you claim——"

"Prove it? I will send my solicitors, I will show you my record of title! Oh, madam, can you doubt me?"

Belle Knapp, the shrewd woman of the world, was drifting into the net.

The pseudo count had presented a most alluring bait. His pleadings, his promises, his protestations were all of such a hypnotic character, that she was soon in the toils.

"You see he does not love you," protested the count. "Are you blind? You are but a cat's paw. He will desert you, betray you, when he tires of you. Why be deceived?"

Belle's face hardened.

"It looks that way," she admitted.

"It is so, madam. It is the truth. You must take my friendship."

"Oh, he will kill us both!"

"No!"

The count's hypnotic gaze held her.

"There is one way, and the only proper way, for us. We do not want to murder him. We will let the law do that."

"What do you mean?" asked Belle, weakly.

"You know well. He is a murderer, a word from you and he would hang. He could harm neither of us."

"That is treachery!" she said. "I never peached on a pal."

"But he would do it by you if it served his ends. Believe me, madam, he is your arch enemy."

"Yes, I think that is true."

"Pardon!" said the count, rising, "I have overtaxed you. Take rest, and time to think. I will come again. It is easy. You have but to place the matter in my hands. Give me the proof, I will see that detectives entrap him. Once he is safe behind bars, we will leave this wretched land forever."

"Can we not do so anyway?" asked Belle. "Can we not hide from him?"

"Do you ask that? He would track you to the far ends of the earth. You know well his revengeful nature. He would give his life to revenge himself upon you."

"True!" cried Belle, with sudden impulse. "You are right; but I must have time to think and to plan. Go! You must not stay here longer. It would be ruin for us both!"

"One embrace! Farewell, my own!"

The count hastened from the apartment. A few moments later he was descending the stairs to the hotel office. And on the stairs he was given a start.

He came face to face with Hugo Knapp.

The crook, however, only glanced at him idly and passed on. Old King Brady descended to the street.

He entered a cab and went at once to his lodgings.

Here he proceeded to reflect upon the incidents of the evening, and to make deductions therefrom.

The course he was pursuing seemed likely to bear fruit.

It had been an impulse to adopt the plan he was carrying out. It had succeeded far better than he had hoped.

Once dissension is fostered between a confederation of rogues, the detective is sure of his game.

There was certainly a gulf between the two schemers, Belle Knapp and Anton Lavigne.

As criminals each was essential to the other. Yet a point had been reached where friction was a certainty.

So Old King Brady could see his course plainly.

He must play Count D'Arcos to the end. He must deceive the woman until the proper time came to throw off the mask.

Then it would be an easy matter to show his hand and bag the game.

He could see that his only hope of getting evidence against Lavigne, or Andrew Boyd, was through the Knapp woman.

She was dazzled by his personality and the allurements of a foreign career. She was certainly in the net.

But the old detective was not so foolish as to be overconfident.

He knew that the time for action was not yet come. There was need of a delicate touch and a world of self-restraint to bring about the desired end.

So he decided not to visit the woman until after race day.

But the next morning he sent her flowers. Then he sat down to wait the course of events.

Nothing of note occurred until the eventful day of the race arrived. That morning Old King Brady went to the depot in his make-up of Count D'Arcos.

The Chicago express came booming in, and he saw that Lavigne and Knapp were on hand to meet Jockey Carson.

As Harry stepped down upon the platform, Lavigne rushed up to him in an effusive way.

"Ah, Carson," he cried, "I am glad to see you. I felt sure you would not disappoint us."

"I never break a contract," said the pseudo jockey.

"I know that. You are a sure winner."

"I hope so. How is the horse?"

"As fit as a fiddle!"

"Good! That is the main thing."

"How is your weight?"

"I am down to the figure, all right. I will try the scales as soon as I get to the track."

"Good! There is no allowance for overweight, you know."

"That's all right. I'll make the weight all right."

"Well, come over to the hotel and we will have a drink and something to eat."

"Excuse me," said Harry, "not until after the race."

"You must be dull, Anton," said Knapp. "Don't you see that he must hold his weight down?"

"I forgot about that," declared Lavigne, apologetically. "Well, let us go over and have a bite of something. We need not go out to the track for an hour or two."

"I prefer to go now," said Harry. "I must take a look at my mount, get acquainted with the horse, and make other arrangements. I shall not have too much time."

"Very well," agreed Lavigne. "We will go to the track at once."

"How do you go?"

"By rail from Long Island City."

Harry at this moment caught sight of Old King Brady. A significant look passed between them.

For he knew the old detective in spite of his disguise.

Just then Lavigne looked up and saw the pseudo Count D'Arcos.

As a matter of fact it was the first time that the villain had ever seen him.

But some strange intuition told him that this was the foreign nobleman who had been trying to win the graces of Belle Knapp.

His brow darkened, and for a moment he seemed tempted to address the count.

But he restrained himself and turned away, saying:

"Come on, we are wasting time here."

Then they proceeded to the street and entered a cab.

Orders were given the driver to proceed to the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry. The carriage rolled away.

Old King Brady smiled and turned his steps toward the elevated railroad station.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE RACE TRACK.

The old detective boarded a downtown train.

He also was going to Gravesend, but not by the same route.

He proceeded to Whitehall Slip, and boarded a ferry boat for South Brooklyn. There he entered a Long Island train which would take him direct to the race track.

He did not wish Lavigne to think that he was being followed.

Arrived at the track, the count bought a paddock badge, and entered the enclosure.

He joined the crowd which was already beginning to arrive, and soon reached the grand stand.

Knots of men, horse-owners and gamblers, were gathered on the lawn.

It was hours before the race, but all liked to gather here and talk over the prospects of the day.

The count strolled about for a while.

The jockeys came one by one to the scales and were weighed. Some were over weight and some were under. These made up the deficit in lead weights in the flap of the saddle.

Old King Brady waited as long as was discreet, then turned his steps toward the stable.

A number of the thoroughbreds were being led by the halter for exercise.

One of these wore a blanket on which was the name "Batavia."

Lurking at the door of a stall, Old King Brady saw the treacherous Skinny Bent. At once he was interested.

He took a close look at Batavia. There seemed nothing wrong with the horse.

He was as handsome a specimen of the thoroughbred as one often sees. Many thousands were pinned to his good ability to gallop.

Old King Brady wondered if the horse had been already "doped."

He doubted it.

It would seem that the drug, if administered so early, might take effect before the race. So doubtless Bent had not done so.

It seemed to Old King Brady that it was his duty, if possible, to frustrate this treacherous plan.

But how?

He did not wish his hand seen in the matter. After a moment's thought he adopted the only course which seemed in any way expedient.

Drawing a page from his note-book, he penciled a few lines, thus:

"To August Belden: Take this warning: Your horse, Batavia, is to be drugged before the race. Take him out of the reach of Skinny Bent instantly, or the race is lost. Act quickly! From,

AN EAVESDROPPER."

The old detective knew the weakness of an anonymous note; but something must be done.

If Belden would only heed it, then his end would be gained. There was certainly a chance.

The count found a small boy in the crowd.

"Do you know August Belden?" he asked.

"I does, mister."

"Well, take this note to him. Do not fail. Here is a dollar for your trouble."

The boy scurried away. A few moments later Old King Brady saw him give it to a man of fine features and gentlemanly bearing.

Belden, for he it was, read it. A troubled expression showed upon his face.

He read the note to a couple of his friends. There was some discussion.

Then all turned toward the stable.

Bent had come out of the stall to lead Batavia in. The trainer at that moment came along.

Belden showed him the note. It had a powerful effect upon the fellow.

He turned savagely upon Bent, and accused him of treachery. The lad strenuously denied the charge, and began to weep and plead.

"Sure, Mister Belden, it's not true. I wouldn't harm a hair of the horse, I'm too much in love with him. Nobody wants to see him win as I do."

"Bent," said the millionaire, sternly, "much depends upon you. If it is discovered that Batavia is trifled with, you know the penalty?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a hard term in prison. The offense is a serious one."

"I swear it, sir——"

"Enough! I don't believe you would do it; but remember you are under suspicion, and if anything goes wrong with Batavia, heaven help you!"

The millionaire turned away. The stable lad followed him with protestations until the trainer intervened, and roughly pulled him back.

"Go back ter the stable, ye young fool. Don't ye know anything?"

Bent slunk away.

Old King Brady had the satisfaction of seeing that his warning had been heeded.

Bent was not allowed by the trainer to touch Batavia.

So the "dope" scheme was a failure.

Perhaps Lavigne would lose. All depended upon the running ability of the Hornet.

Old King Brady knew that Harry would ride to win.

He wished to gain the good will and confidence of Lavigne. He could only do so by riding a square race.

People now began to arrive rapidly.

Soon the great stand was filled to overflowing. It was one of the main social turf events of the season.

Consequently wealth was on hand in full force.

The betting ring was crowded.

First the odds were on one horse, and then the other. The field was given no consideration whatever.

The Count D'Arcos now strolled across the lawn.

In one of the boxes he saw Belle, and tipped his hat.

"Are you not coming up to see me?" she called.

"Very soon!" replied the count, gallantly. "I am at present busy placing odds on the Hornet."

"You will surely win."

"I hope so!"

Just at this moment Lavigne and Knapp, with their jockey, came strolling along.

Carson looked very fine in his handsome jockey suit.

He was in gay spirits, and at sight of Old King Brady, called out:

"Hello, count! Is that you?"

"Hello, Dick!" replied the pseudo nobleman. "Do you have the mount on the favorite to-day?"

"I reckon I do, count. If you want to win back him."

"I have done so."

Lavigne scowled blackly at D'Arcos. He turned angrily to Carson.

"Do you know that jackanapes?" he asked, shortly.

Carson turned a look of surprise upon him.

"Certainly!" he said. "That is the Count D'Arcos."

"Humph!" said Lavigne, with a savage intonation. "I never had no use for them foreigners. Cuss 'em, I say!"

"Do you know the count?" asked Carson.

"No!"

"Let me introduce you?"

An oath dropped from Lavigne's lips. A swift flash of jealousy and hatred showed in his eyes.

Then he changed his manner. With a sudden impulse he said:

"All right, go ahead!"

"Count!" called the jockey, briskly, "this way, please. Allow me to introduce you to the owner of the Hornet, Mr. Lavigne."

The count stepped quickly forward, and held out his hand with a frank smile.

"I am charmed!" he said, warmly. "This is indeed a pleasure. I have backed your horse to win."

Lavigne bowed stiffly, and gave the count a cursory glance.

"Yes," he said, curtly. "I have heard of you through a lady friend."

The count puffed at his cigarette, and looked dreamily at Lavigne through the smoke cloud.

"Ah, which?" he asked, languidly.

"You should know well enough."

"Pardon me!" said the count, stiffly. "My lady friends are many."

"I suppose so. Well, this friend happens to be my promised wife. Do you see the point?"

"Oh, yes," said the count, slowly and with peculiar intonation. "Monsieur is engaged; so he is like many others—jealous. Ah, ha, ha, do not become angry, I beg you! It is my little jest. I wish to assure you there is no fear of me. I am the very good friend of mademoiselle. She loves me not. It must be she loves you. My congratulations!"

The count was so genuine, so affable and cheery in his tone and manner, that in spite of himself Lavigne felt a softening of spirit.

"All right," he said, curtly. "It is just as well to have an understanding. I hope you are backing the right horse?"

"It is your horse!"

"Then I think you will win. Come, Carson, let us go over and see the steward about that extra weight allowance. Good-day, Count Darkus."

The count flipped his cigarette lightly away and grinned. He watched the two men a moment.

Then he turned to the grand stand. In a few moments he stood beside Belle Knapp.

"Well," she said, with a charming pout, "I thought you had given me up entirely, you are neglectful."

"Only necessity has kept me from your side," said the count, gallantly.

"Is it not nearly time for the racing?"

"The horses are coming to the post for the first race now."

"Ah, that is the five furlongs."

"Yes."

"I shall place a bet on Athlone for that. He will win."

"Athlone at four to one."

"Yes."

"Here comes a commissioner."

The commissioner took the wager and departed; then the dozen sleek thoroughbreds went to the post.

Athlone was beaten away off. Belle sighed and said:

"That is the kind of luck I am having of late. I cannot win. What if we lose the handicap?"

The count bowed.

"It will be no loss to you," he said.

"Why?" she asked. "It will surely ruin Lavigne. I shall have no more hope of assistance from him."

"But you will have me, and all my resources," said the count.

Belle laughed in a gurgling way, as if the thought delighted her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RACE.

The great handicap was the third race on the list. After the first two races were disposed of, the stewards called for the handicap horses.

They paraded before the grand stand in all their beauty of form. But among them all the Hornet showed up the best.

Snapper White, the jockey who had deserted Lavigne, was to have the mount on Batavia.

Old King Brady managed to get a few words with Harry before the race.

"How are you getting on?" asked the young detective.

"Finely!" replied Old King Brady. "I have the inside track."

"You have done well."

"Indeed, luck has been with me. The woman very easily walked into the net."

"That is good! Then you think she will turn against Lavigne?"

"If nothing occurs to break the spell. Much depends on this race. You will ride to win?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, I suppose it is necessary. I will see you again soon."

"If I win this race I shall have the inside track with Lavigne. The Hornet is named for the Derby, and of course I will ride him."

"Good! We will keep in communication."

"Yes."

With this the two detectives parted. Old King Brady rejoined Belle in the grand stand.

Harry went to the paddock. His horse was being saddled.

A moment later he was mounted and on the way to the post.

Riding races was no new experience to Harry Brady.

In younger life he had spent much time in a racing stable, and was thoroughly familiar with all the tricks of the profession.

So he was by no means a novice.

He sat his horse gracefully, and was a good judge of pace. At the post there was a long and tedious delay.

There were many breaks, and the starter was wholly out of patience. Several of the colts were fractious.

But finally the word was given, and the horses leaped away.

Batavia was second horse, while the Hornet got a bad start, and was in the rear.

But Harry rose in the stirrups and moved him up until he was in third place. Then the young detective sat still and waited.

It was exciting enough.

Around him were the springing, bounding horses; the gravel flew from their hoofs in a cloud, the whips cracked

and there was a sensation of flying through the air at terrific speed.

The jockey must be a youth of ready wit, of quick discernment and steady nerve.

He must at all times be ready and quick to avail himself of an advantage.

Ten thousand subjects flit kaleidoseope-like through his mind, above all which is the sense of responsibility, the desire, and the knowledge that he is expected to win.

And seconds are hours to him. In that brief minute and a half, or thereabouts, in which he is contesting every inch of ground with fierce rivals, much is thought and done.

Harry kept his position with rare nicety of calculation.

One colt after another tired and hung back.

But the young detective felt his horse good under him. He instinctively felt that he should win.

But Batavia, the unbeatable, was a half length ahead.

All in that brief space Harry figured out his race.

He would wait.

Not until well in the stretch would he move up. In the meanwhile he would nurse his mount.

Batavia was a game horse. He would not quit.

He could only be beaten by very superior speed.

One after another the field dropped back. Only three horses rounded the corner into the stretch together.

One of these was a big chestnut, Moravia. In the first dozen strides, however, he gave up. Only Batavia and the Hornet showed ahead, and the former was leading.

Snapper White was riding easy, and watching his rival with a keen eye. Harry saw that the moment had come.

Both jockeys rose at the same moment and began flogging their horses.

Then followed the most desperate of rides to the wire.

Batavia increased his speed, and for half the distance seemed sure to win. Inch by inch the Hornet gained.

Nearer and nearer they came to the wire. The great multitude was frantic.

Count D'Arcos and Belle Knapp were in the latter's box, and the woman viewed the race with a strange attitude.

She was almost pallid, and stared at the fleeing horses in a vacant way.

The count, on the other hand, pretended much excitement and delight.

"Look, look!" he cried. "The Hornet is sure to win. He is only a foot behind—he will do! Hurrah!"

But the woman's lips moved in a mechanical way.

"It will save Lavigne!" she said. "It will put him on his feet again. But will it help me?"

She looked comprehensively at the count. His face darkened.

He turned, and neither saw the finish of the race, though both knew that the Hornet had won.

"I understand," said D'Arcos, significantly. "But that shall not change our plans, ma belle!"

"Ah, but you do not know Lavigne. He is powerful!"

"So am I."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"You cannot cope with him," she said. "He is deep and

dangerous. He would follow us to the farthest ends of the earth, and he would murder us both."

D'Arcos laughed recklessly.

"There is a way to adjust that," he said. "It lies with you."

Belle repressed a shiver.

"Ah," she said, "I dare not go back on a pal!"

"Bah! You are weak! He would throw you aside like a puppet. Listen, ma belle. It is our only hope. You need only give me the evidence. Your responsibility will cease. I shall do the rest."

She looked at him penetratingly a moment, as if there was a suspicion in her heart.

"I know very little about you," she said, half in distrust.

It was with difficulty that they could make each other heard above the cheering of the crowd.

Just at that moment, and before Old King Brady could answer, Hugo and Lavigne rushed into the box.

"We have won, Belle!" cried Lavigne, with wild excitement. "Did you see the game race the little horse went? Was it not a dandy win? Carson rode like a fiend."

But the last words died on his lips. He stared coldly at D'Arcos.

Belle had turned deadly white. She clutched at her bosom and leaned against a chair.

"The lady is ill," said D'Arcos, with a step toward her. But Lavigne stepped before him.

"The lady has friends present to care for her!" he said, coldly. "This is an unwarranted intrusion."

"An insult!" exclaimed the count hotly. "Stand aside!"

"Not on your life!" gritted Lavigne. "What right have you here? Get out before I kick you out!"

The two men stood glaring at each other. Lavigne raised his glove and struck the count in the face.

The latter stepped back, and for a moment seemed about to return the blow; but with an effort he bowed and smiled in a polite, cold way.

"Monsieur has given the right to challenge. I will name a friend, and monsieur may do the same."

"Oh, you want to fight a duel, do you?" gritted Lavigne, scornfully.

"I demand satisfaction!"

"Well, get it the best way you can!"

"You refuse to fight?"

"You dirty foreigner, if you want to fight, put up your dukes, and I'll give you all the fight you want."

"We fight with swords in my country," said the count, frigidly.

"Yes, I know you do, you frog-eating Frenchman; but if you fight me, you'll fight with your fists, in true American style."

"It is the custom of the challenged to name the weapons," said the count, with a low bow. "I am the challenger. The privilege is yours. If you say it must be a fight with fists, it shall be so. I shall meet you."

Lavigne looked from the count to Hugo in surprise.

Then he guffawed:

"Why, you greasy frog-eater!" he cried, "I'll push your face in at the first blow. There won't be half a round!"

"Monsieur makes cheap talk!" said the count contemptuously. "He fears to fight, even with his own choice of weapons."

The taunt stung Lavigne.

It was enough. He turned to Hugo, and said:

"What would you do? I think it would be fun to give this garlic-eater a good trouncing."

But Belle stepped forward.

She had recovered, and her face was flushed with anger.

"Hold on, Anton Lavigne! I am the aggrieved party in this affair. I am the one to demand satisfaction."

Lavigne was astounded.

He turned white and then red. The green light of jealousy was in his eyes.

"You!" he snapped. "What is the matter with you?"

"A good deal! You have come into this box and insulted my guest."

"Your guest?"

"Yes. The count is a friend of mine, and I don't intend to see him come to harm at your hands."

Lavigne whistled softly. A murderous light was in his eyes.

"I have suspected this thing!" he said. "I see that you have no further use for me. You don't mean to keep your promise. You are false!"

"That is a lie, Anton Lavigne!" flashed Belle, angrily. "I have been as true a friend as you ever had; but I have a right to other friends, and you have no right to insult them."

"We shall see!" said Lavigne, softly.

"Don't be a fool, Belle!" said Hugo, with plain anxiety. "Kick the cursed Frenchman out. We can't have no trouble now!"

But the count turned to the door of the box. He looked at Belle.

"I wish mademoiselle good-day!" he said, politely. "To Monsieur Lavigne I will say that my second shall call upon him without delay."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL AT WEEHAWKEN.

"Hold on!" said Lavigne, roughly. "Do you really want to fight?"

The count bowed.

"I have given the challenge," he said.

"All right," said Lavigne. "I am stopping at the Savoy. We can arrange to get out in the Park early in the morning and settle it. This is my second, Mr. Hugo Knapp."

"I am most charmed!" said the count. "I shall name the Comte de Villiers as my second. He will call upon you to-night."

"All right."

White and angry, and somewhat terrified, Belle had sunk

into a chair. The shouting people, the race track, the victory of the Hornet was all lost to her now.

She was absorbed in the one consciousness that she was at odds with the one man in the world of whom she had a deadly fear.

And when the count departed she stood tremblingly before him with a feeling of wild terror in her bosom.

She knew that she could not depend upon her brother for assistance, or even sympathy.

He was craven and base to the core. He would have sold her, as well as his own soul, at any time for money.

But Lavigne paid her no further heed. He uttered no threats nor hints as to his future purpose. He checked off some pool tickets with the assistance of Hugo, and then left the box.

Belle rode back to New York alone. She saw nothing of Lavigne again that day.

Lavigne and Hugo went from the grand stand to the stables. A crowd was gathered about the winner's stall.

Carson, the jockey, stood in a knot of men, flicking the grass with his whip and prophesying a great career for the horse he had ridden.

"He's fast as a ghost!" he declared. "I never rode his like! He had a link left in spite of that finish."

"And you rode a game race," said one of the crowd.

"I did my best," said Carson, modestly.

Lavigne drew Carson aside.

"I want to engage you to ride exclusively for me," he said.

"I'll let you know in a few days," said the jockey.

"You have got to ride for me! I'll pay you double what anybody else will."

"I guess I'll have to tie to you, then."

"Then it is settled."

"Yes."

"All right. I'll bring a contract over to-morrow. You can sign it."

Then he turned to Hugo:

"Come, let us get back to the city. We have got work to do."

The two gamblers started for the train. As soon as they had disappeared, the Count D'Arcos appeared.

He came along leisurely, and was joined by Carson.

"Well," said the young detective, "how did you like my race?"

"Well done!" said Old King Brady. "And everything is working fine!"

"You are still on Belle's track?"

"Yes."

"Have you gained a point?"

"Indeed I have! She is out with Lavigne, and tempted to fly abroad with the Count D'Arcos."

"Bravo!"

"But she fears the vengeance of Lavigne."

"Why not dispose of him?"

"Scruples of conscience! But she will yet do it as a measure of self-protection. You see, Lavigne has become jealous of the count."

"The deuce!"

"It is true."

"Things are progressing."

"I should say so! It has gone so far that the count has challenged Lavigne for an insult offered him."

"And Lavigne accepts."

"He does."

"When is the duel to occur?"

"Early to-morrow morning, in some secluded spot in the Park."

"Ah, what are the weapons?"

"Lavigne has chosen his fists."

Harry laughed, and said eagerly:

"What fun! Let me fight it for you?"

"That is impossible! But you can be present."

"How so?"

"I must have a second, the Comte de Villiers. He must call upon Hugo Knapp this evening at the Savoy and arrange the affair. You can do a little masquerading."

"Well, I should think so!" cried Harry, eagerly. "That will be rare sport. I am going back to the city in an hour or so, and will meet you at the landing."

"All right."

"I will there make up, and we can discuss plans for the future."

"Very good."

The Count D'Arcos was soon making his way to the train. When New York was reached he went to Delmonico's and dined. He lounged about the fashionable uptown resorts until past eleven o'clock.

Then Old King Brady dropped into a dark side street and lost his character of the Count D'Arcos.

He became once more the keen detective, the indefatigable trailer of crime.

Making sure that he was not followed or shadowed, Old King Brady made his way to the lodgings occupied by himself and his partner.

Harry was already there waiting for him.

But he was not Carson, the jockey, now. His makeup was extremely swell.

He was the Comte de Villiers, the foreign envoy, and the chosen second of the Count D'Arcos.

As Old King Brady threw himself wearily into a chair, Harry exclaimed:

"Well, old pard, we are doing well!"

"I think so," agreed the old detective. "Did you keep the appointment?"

"Yes."

"Then all is arranged?"

"It is."

"What are the terms?"

"It is to be a finish fight with four-ounce gloves. Nobody to be present but the principals and their seconds. Any foul blow ends the fight."

"Who is the umpire of that?"

"The seconds must agree on the point, as a matter of honor."

"Humph!" said Old King Brady. "I have not the great amount of faith in the honor of Knapp."

"Nor I, but you will be able to stand him off before any foul blow can be given."

"I think so. Where is the meeting place?"

"We thought of the Park, but there is danger there, and we decided finally to go to Weehawken. There is a secluded spot just under the Palisades."

"Very good. To tell the truth, I can see little to be gained from this affair. I am not sure but that I was foolish to allow myself to be drawn into it."

"To tell the truth, I agree with you. However, if you give him a hard thrashing, it may be the means of gaining his respect and fear, and result in some personal advantage."

"And may have weight with the woman, Belle Knapp."

"Just so."

Thus the two detectives proceeded to make deductions until past midnight. Finally, however, they slept.

The next morning, however, at an early hour, they were aboard a ferry bound to Weehawken, which is a Jersey town opposite New York.

When they arrived at the dock they took a little path which led along the Palisades for a good distance.

And here, right in a cleft in the cliff, was a spot of green-sward.

This was the spot appointed for the duel. It chanced that they were the first on hand.

But the others soon arrived. Knapp and Lavigne came leisurely up and saluted the two disguised detectives.

Lavigne was cool and equally confident. He had great faith in his powers as a boxer, and believed it an easy matter to knock out his man. Of course Old King Brady saw this.

But he smiled in a grim way.

Lavigne opened the satchel and took out the gloves.

"Really," he said, jocularly, "this is one of the most pleasant enterprises I have ever undertaken. I shall hope to give you some good sport, my friend."

"The pleasure is mutual, monsieur," said the count, politely. "I am sure I shall enjoy it."

"You are sure?" said Lavigne, lifting his eyebrows.

"I am!"

"You are a trifle older man than I."

"It may be."

"Do you know the rules of the game? Have you ever done much boxing?"

"I think I can give a good account of myself," said the pseudo count, quietly. "It is understood that there shall be no hitting in the breakaway, and a foul blow loses the fight."

Lavigne looked surprised.

"That is right," he said. "You have been rightly informed."

"I am glad to know that. Another thing."

"Well?"

"We are battling for the favor of Mademoiselle Knapp. We are rivals. The loser shall abandon the field."

Lavigne's eyes flashed.

"That is agreed," he said, thickly.

"Very good. I am ready."

Knapp and the Comte de Villiers had been holding a conference. Now they came forward, and Knapp said:

"Are you both ready?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Let the fight begin."

Lavigne squared away and began to dance around Old King Brady. The old detective watched him warily.

There was a light pass by Lavigne, a parry by the count. Then the former landed lightly on the old detective's ear.

Satisfaction and confidence showed in Lavigne's face.

It was apparent to him that the count knew little of the art of boxing.

He could see that openings were plenty, and he looked for an easy victory. He could not resist a taunting remark:

"That's a splendid lead you have, Mister Darkuss. See if you can hit me on the nose. Biff away, old man!"

"Give me a chance," said Old King Brady, ironically. "Come a bit nearer."

The detective still maintained his awkward guard, and stood a few stiff punches from Lavigne about the chest and ribs. He saw the over-confidence of his antagonist.

So, after a while, when Lavigne made a bull-like rush, the old detective side-stepped with marvelous skill and quickness, and with the swiftness of lightning swung an upper-cut which carried Lavigne's head back as if smitten with a sledge-hammer, and he went tumbling a dozen feet away.

The villain's head rang like a chime of bells as he gained his feet.

He was groggy and confused; for a moment he hardly knew what had happened.

So astounded was he that he stared blankly at his antagonist, until Knapp called:

"Six seconds! Look out!"

Lavigne came forward with more caution. His eyes were becoming opened. Matters took on a different hue.

CHAPTER IX.

LAVIGNE RECEIVES A SURPRISE.

It was certainly a shock to the ruffian to receive a knock-down like that. He stared at Old King Brady as they sparred lightly for an opening.

Again he saw the loose and awkward guard of his antagonist.

He saw the apparent clumsiness and lack of skill he displayed.

"How the devil did he ever hit me like that?" he reflected. "It must have been a chance blow."

And with this assumption his confidence began to return.

Knapp looked puzzled and uneasy. Harry was grinning with keen delight.

He knew that Old King Brady was just playing with his man.

"Have you had enough?" asked the old detective, as he weakly tried to parry a few of Lavigne's fierce body thrusts. "If you are satisfied, say so."

"Satisfied!" growled the villain, savagely. "Not till I knock your block off, you garlic-eater. You can't hit me that way again in a hundred years."

"Perhaps not," said the old detective, coolly. "Don't be too sure."

Lavigne seemed able to reach the detective's body with ease, but somehow he always parried the face blows.

Four rounds were fought thus, and they were coming up for the fifth, when the polite count bowed and said:

"If monsieur's honor is satisfied, we will stop now."

"Stop!" roared Lavigne. "You cussed coward, you're afraid to fight it out! Don't you know it's a finish fight?"

With which he rushed upon the old detective like a mad bull. The latter was not ready, and the seconds had not given the word. Old King Brady's left glove was being buttoned by Harry, and he was off his guard.

Before he could turn Lavigne had dealt him a terrific blow back of the ear. The old detective went down like a log.

Lavigne, in savage fury, leaped upon him and began to pummel him in rough and tumble fashion.

Harry's blood was on fire.

"Foul!" he yelled. "Get off, you brute! It is a foul!"

He started to pull Lavigne off, but Knapp caught him by the shoulder and wrenched him back.

"Let 'em alone!" he cried. "Let 'em have it out any way they can. It's as fair for one as the other."

"You lie!" roared Harry, consumed with righteous wrath. "That was a foul attack, and worthy only of thugs!"

"Don't you call me a thug!" growled Knapp, making a blow at the young detective. "I'll break your head for that!"

Quick as a flash Harry parried the blow and sailed in. He saw that the two villains regarded them as a couple of soft ones and easily fooled.

Knapp made tremendous blows at the young detective, but suddenly found that he was "up against it" good and strong.

Harry smashed him in the nose, closed an eye, and gave him a terrific drive in the wind that knocked him half senseless to the ground.

The young detective half turned to give aid to his companion.

But in that moment he saw that his alarm for Old King Brady was unnecessary. The old detective had received a hard blow, and taken unawares, he had been swept from his feet. But he was not rendered defenceless by any means, and when Lavigne jumped upon him in such a cowardly fashion, the old detective was ready for him.

He clutched him by the arm and waist and hurled him over his head. Rolling over in the same instant, with the strength of a giant, Old King Brady gained his feet and lifting Lavigne bodily hurled him violently from him.

The old detective's blood was up.

"You cowardly cur!" he roared, "that was the meanest attack a man could make. Defend yourself, for I'm going to pound you to a jelly."

Old King Brady made a rush, and beat down Lavigne's guard as if it was of straw.

He rained blow after blow upon the cowardly villain.

Lavigne could make no defense whatever. He was beaten to the ground, and as fast as he tried to get up he was knocked down again.

At length he remained down like a whipped cur, and begged for mercy.

"I cave!" he yelled. "It's your fight. I give up!"

Harry had Knapp in the same position. Now the heat of the thing was over both detectives recovered from their anger.

Neither was hurt, save for the slight abrasion back of Old King Brady's ear. But Lavigne and Knapp were badly battered.

They were whipped completely.

"Well," said the pseudo count, as he proceeded to put on his coat and arrange his clothes, "I hope you are satisfied, monsieurs both. The next time you choose weapons, make it bad eggs. You would do better with such weapons than with the fists, or pistols, or swords. We may meet again. Bonjour, monsieur! I will carry the word to La Belle. She will send you her sympathy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Old King Brady simulated peal after peal of contemptuous laughter.

It stung Lavigne, and made him savage. He showered curses upon the detectives and made threats:

"I'll have it out with you in another way!" he yelled, vengefully. "I'll have every drop of blood in your heart. I'll murder you, I swear it!"

Old King Brady turned, and said with emphasis:

"Your threat is characteristic of you. You will murder me as you treacherously murdered Douglas Weld."

Lavigne started and staggered as if stricken by a lightning bolt.

He stared at the speaker with bloodless face and chattering teeth. He was as abject a picture of fear as one might conceive.

"What?" he whispered, hoarsely. "What do you say? Who the devil are you?"

"I am not the devil," said the pseudo count, impressively. "But he has his net set for you, Andrew Boyd. You are sure to be caught in it."

Lavigne gasped and shivered. He did not reply.

The two detectives bowed in a mock-polite way, and walked away, leaving the dumfounded villains behind them.

It was a deadly bomb which Old King Brady, on impulse, had hurled at them.

It would have the desired effect, he fully believed.

"Had we ought to lose sight of them?" asked Harry. "They may take the alarm and skip the country."

"Have no fear of that," said Old King Brady. "Lavigne cannot skip out yet."

"Was it wise to put them thus on their guard?"

"It will rattle them, and they will make some injudicious move," said the old detective. "Now I must bring the most powerful of levers to bear upon Belle Knapp. She fears Lavigne in a deadly way. She will be only too glad to break with him, if she thinks she can do it safely, and at the same time better herself."

"I am inclined to agree with you."

"Yes, I believe it is true."

"We certainly gave those rascals all the fight they wanted."

"Yes."

"You don't think they will suspect our identity, do you?"

"I hardly think so. Yet it is well to work with care."

"What shall we do now?"

"I think it is a good plan to return to the city and continue our characters as Count D'Arcos and Carson, the jockey."

"We will put Compte de Villiers on the shelf, then?"

"Yes, for a time."

"I will leave you in New York, then. I will go back to Gravesend and the race track."

"Yes. I shall visit Belle Knapp at the Savoy. Perhaps I can now bring her to terms."

"I hope so. The case will be won."

"Yes. I will notify you of my success with her, and you can fasten upon Lavigne on sight."

"All right."

The Bradys now went down to the ferry. They took the first boat for New York.

They saw nothing of Knapp and Lavigne, and assumed that they would take a later boat.

When New York was reached they went at once to their lodgings.

Harry again assumed his character of Carson, the jockey.

Old King Brady decided to at once make a call on Belle Knapp at the Savoy.

"I don't believe Lavigne will care to tackle me again right away," he said. "At least, I shall not fear him."

"Very good," said Harry. "I will go back to Gravesend."

"If anything new comes up, be sure to let me know at once."

"I will do so."

Old King Brady set out for the Savoy, and Harry started for the race track. The young detective reached there later in the day.

He made himself busy around the stables, and accepted a mount in one of the races, riding up second in a big field of horses.

It was near the evening hour when the young detective saw Knapp and Lavigne coming across the yard.

They were dressed in flashy suits and plenty of jewelry, but this did not hide the disfiguration of their faces.

Each had black eyes and ugly bumps on their faces. They looked as if they had been through a heap of trouble.

Carson, the jockey, looked at them with apparent surprise.

"Why, hello, boss!" he cried. "What the deuce happened to ye? Been trying to stop a trolley car?"

Lavigne scowled, and an oath dropped from his lips.

"You wait till I get through with the gang which assaulted us!" he said.

"Gang!" exclaimed Carson. "Was it a gang?"

"Yes. We were over in Jersey this morning, when we were set upon by a gang of a dozen toughs. We gave them

a rough fight, and finally put them to flight. But we got marked a little."

"I should say so!" said Harry, with difficulty keeping a straight face. "That beats all! I'd have the law on them."

"I'll fix 'em!" growled Lavigne. "Well, how's the horse?"

"Fine as silk!"

"He is named for the Derby, next Wednesday. Will you ride him?"

"I will be pleased to."

"Very good. You are a good jockey, and I don't believe you can lose with the Hornet. But he's up against a hard field."

Harry affected confidence.

"I don't care for that," he said, "I will beat them."

"Good for you! I'm going to stake all I've got on that race. It is make or break, and all depends on you."

"You can trust me to win."

"I believe it. Let's have a look at the pony."

With this they entered the stall. Harry gave a start. He saw a slim figure glide out of a corner of the stall.

It was Skinny Bent, the treacherous "swipes" who had been discharged by Belden.

CHAPTER X.

HARRY DOES SOME SHADOWING.

The young detective knew that Bent had no right in the stall, and at once suspected that he was there for no good purpose.

So he called sternly:

"Hold on there, Bent! I see you. Come back here!"

The "swipes" hesitated a moment, and then turned about.

"What do ye want?" he asked.

"You have no right in this stall. What are you doing here?"

The fellow showed his yellow teeth in a sickly grin.

"I ain't doin' no harm," he said. "I came in to look at the little hoss. He won a good race to-day."

Just then the trainer came in. Harry glanced at him in a comprehensive way. But he said:

"It's all right, boss. I know this lad well, and he's with us."

"Yes," said Harry, ironically, "he is with us just as long as he can make it to his advantage."

"Cross my heart, boss!" declared Bent, earnestly. "I'm the best friend this little hoss has got. You bet I was glad to see him win."

"You were going to dose Batavia for us, weren't you?"

The lad looked frightened, but managed to reply:

"I reckon I had a job to do fer ye, boss. Hain't ye got no further use fer me?"

"Yes," said Lavigne, earnestly. "You can have a good chance, if you will take the oath of allegiance. Is it a go?"

"By all means!" cried Harry. "He'll take anything that has any chance in it for an opening."

"You bet I will!" agreed Bent. "I'm straight goods. I am."

"All right," growled Lavigne. "We'll see about that. Come around and see me before Wednesday. Do you see?"

"All right, boss."

"Now, get out!"

Bent stood not on the order of going, but disappeared instantly. Lavigne plucked Harry by the sleeve, and said:

"Come here, Dick. I want to have some private conversation with you."

The jockey followed Lavigne out of the stable and to a secluded part of the grounds. Here they sat down on a pile of lumber.

Lavigne lit a cigar.

"You're a good rider, Carson," he said.

"I always do my best," said Harry.

"You always ride to win?"

"Always!"

"Did you ever ride a race for policy?"

The jockey looked inscrutable.

"I mean, did you ever ride and lose, when it was policy to do so?"

"Never. I will take no mount unless I am allowed to ride the horse out."

"But if the trainer gave you orders to ride a waiting race, and you waited too long and the other horse nosed you out."

"That would be poor calculation on the trainer's part, and stupidity on mine."

"Yes, yes, that's it!" said Lavigne, rubbing his hands. "Did you ever find it easy and proper to ride that kind of a race?"

A light broke across Carson's face.

"Oh, I see what you mean," he said, slowly. "Well, I'll tell you that I never did such a thing in my life, and I never will. I ride to win or I don't ride at all."

Lavigne looked keenly at Carson. Then he held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "I believe you are an honest jockey. I only asked you this to make sure of the fact. You shall ride my horses forever."

"I will be glad to do so under winning orders," said Carson.

"That settles it," said Lavigne, rising. "Go right ahead on that basis. I want you to win the Derby Wednesday."

"I will try to."

Lavigne turned away, and Carson went back to the stable. The evening was at hand, and Lavigne stood by the track fence whittling a stick.

Harry noted the fact that he had allowed the last New York train to depart. What did it mean?

Was he going to spend the night at the race track?

The young detective was puzzled by Lavigne's words and conduct. Then suddenly a light broke across him.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "I wonder if he was sounding me with a deeper purpose? Perhaps he wants to throw that race Wednesday. If so——"

He was puzzled.

If such was the case, there were plenty of corrupt jockeys

he could have secured. But they might make the job more evident. Nobody would think of accusing Carson of dishonesty.

Then Harry remembered his words with Skinny Bent.

"There's something in the wind!" said the young detective. "I'll keep an eye out."

There was no doubt but that Lavigne had been badly frightened by the declaration of Count D'Arcos. It was not difficult for Harry to make deductions.

"It looks like a grand smash," he mused. "They'll put up a big race track job, and likely skip the country."

The young detective kept an eye on Lavigne. He decided to do a little shadowing.

Suddenly he saw a man's figure coming through the track gate.

Even in the dusk Harry recognized him. It was Knapp.

The two villains walked away together after a short consultation.

The young detective lost no time.

He slipped into the shadows among the trees and took a parallel path. But people were about at that time.

Lanterns were lit in some of the stalls, and the negro hostlers were singing at their work; but nobody noted the disappearance of the young jockey.

Harry continued to shadow the two villains until they emerged upon the ocean drive. Here they turned toward Manhattan Beach.

The young detective knew that something unusual was up.

They were conversing earnestly in low tones.

Finally they turned down from the highway into a half finished cellar. Here was a built a contractor's shed.

It was an out-of-the-way and deserted spot. The two villains found seats on a heap of lumber.

Harry paused a moment, and then decided upon his move.

He passed lightly around to the other side, and silently lowered himself into the place.

He crept up behind the pile of lumber. In this position he was almost near enough to the villains to touch them.

He could hear every word uttered. The conversation was edifying.

"I tell you it is the devil on our track!" declared Lavigne, vehemently. "Didn't you hear what he said about the murder of old Weld?"

"Yes, but it might have been only a bluff."

"A bluff? Humph! Perhaps you think I am a fool! I could see the whole thing in his face."

"He knows you, then?"

"That's it."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"I don't know, unless he is the devil himself. He certainly knows who I am."

"And if so, why does he not put the law onto you?"

"There is the question. He has some deeper purpose."

A series of curses embellished Lavigne's remarks.

Knapp was silent a moment.

Then he said slowly:

"I reckon I can explain it all."

"Eh?" exclaimed Lavignely, eagerly. "What is your opinion?"

"I know Belle is my sister," said Knapp, in a hard tone; "but there's no love between us. She would cut my throat just as quickly as I would cut hers."

"What do you mean?"

"You're blind."

"Curse you, speak up! You are talking in riddles."

"And still you can't see the point! Do you know that there is a deep tie between the Count D'Arcos and Belle?"

A frightful malediction escaped the lips of the senior villain.

"Perdition!" he gritted. "Do you think—is it so? Has she betrayed me to him? Is it her game to throw me over?"

Lavigne spoke in a harsh, grating tone. It was terrifying to listen to him.

"There you are," said Knapp. "That fellow has hypnotized her, I say. He has got the story from her, and he means to use it to overthrow you."

Lavigne breathed deep and hard.

If it had been daylight his face would have been seen to be cold, hard and cruel. There was a devilish light in his eyes.

"I will strangle her on sight!" he said, tensely.

"You're a fool!"

"Eh?"

"I say that would be a fool's trick. You would hang for it."

"Do you think I will permit her to live, after such a vile bit of treachery?"

"That's all right. Have your revenge; but don't sacrifice yourself. Wait until the right time comes."

"But don't you see, you fool? She will place me in his hands. He will surround me with detectives. In a little while I will be hemmed in on all sides. There will be no chance for me."

Lavigne arose to his feet.

"There is only one thing to do," he declared. "We have got to make a clean sweep, and get out of the country within the week."

"Now you're talking sense! To-morrow would be none too soon."

"So I believe."

"What is to be done?"

"My whole hope lies in my racing stable. The Derby is run off on Wednesday."

"The Hornet can win."

"Yes, but——"

"What?"

"He is a prime favorite. His price is so high that to back him will not pay a dividend of cent. per cent., and I should have odds."

"There is the stake."

"Bah! A paltry ten thousand! No, there is a better way. I can clean up fifty thousand dollars on that race."

"How?"

"Easy enough! Benbow is the next best horse in that field."

"Very good."

"Benbow's price is very low. I can get him at four to one. Very good! Suppose I buy Benbow."

"Back the other horse?"

"Yes."

"And will Carson pull the Hornet?"

"No."

"He is too stubbornly honest?"

"Yes."

"How then can it be done?"

"Easily enough!"

"Well, how?"

"You know that little mud-sill, that offspring of the stable, Bent?"

"Ah, yes!"

"He will do anything for money. Very well! He shall have access to the Hornet's stall."

"Whew! You will dose your own horse?"

"To make a fortune."

"That is throwing down your friends."

"Curse my friends! I haven't got any. They back my horse and win a pot, and pretend to be my friends. When I lose, they forget all about me."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE GAMBLING DEN.

"That is logic!" agreed Knapp. "I never saw it fail. But it is a hard game to work. If there is the least suspicion——"

"There shall be none!"

"If it can be worked——"

"It can and shall be!"

"And if it succeeds—what?"

"If it succeeds, the Hornet and all my horses go under the hammer."

"You forget. Belle claims to own a controlling interest in the stable."

"She has nothing to show for it. I will recognize no such claim. I am going to clean up every dollar I have got——"

"And then——"

"For Monte Carlo and the gayest resorts of Europe. I shall live like a prince."

"Look here," said Knapp, coolly, "you have overlooked something."

"What?"

"Me!"

"What do you mean?"

"Where do I come in?"

Lavigne laughed hoarsely.

"Oh, I see," he said, "you think I will leave you out. Oh, no, Hugo, we are too good friends. You are to go with me."

Knapp sprang up.

"It's a go!" he declared. "I'm going to help you all I can."

"That's good! Well, the whole plan is made. Then Belle can have her garlic-eating count and go where she pleases. We will be free and happy."

"Good! Now that it's settled, let's go over to Jim Corbin's and try a game of poker."

"I'm with you!"

The two villains left the cellar and went back to Ocean Drive.

A car came booming along, and they boarded it, going toward Manhattan Beach.

Harry stood in the shadows and watched them depart.

"Humph!" said the young detective. "There is work for me to do."

It did not take him long to decide upon what course to pursue.

He went back to the stables, and pretended to turn in.

But a short while later he quietly emerged from the stable unseen by any of the grooms.

He was no longer Carson, the jockey. His makeup was a wonderful triumph of the detective art.

He was a typical Coney Island sport, though of rather a seedy, "down-on-your-luck" pattern.

He made his way to the Drive, and boarded a Manhattan Beach car. His purpose was to visit that resort.

Harry knew well the location of Jim Corbin's gambling house.

It was one of the most popular dens at the seaside. Every night many gamblers congregated there.

It was in Corbin's place that Lavigne had lost the bulk of his ill-gotten wealth.

He was an inveterate and reckless gambler.

Poker was his game.

At times he had phenomenal runs of luck. But at other times he was pursued by the demon of loss.

Harry reached the beach in due time, and made his way to a small saloon near the water.

This had a long, roofed building in the rear. It had once been used as a dance hall.

But now it was used for another purpose. Beneath its roof was a long row of tables and a bar.

At the long table in the centre faro and roulette were played. Here men and women were excitedly grouped.

At the side tables select sittings at cards were held.

When Harry entered the place, which he was only enabled to do by means of a pass-word, which he luckily knew, he looked about for his birds.

There they were at a nearby table. Knapp and Lavigne sat on one side, and two well-to-do men on the other.

One had the appearance of a Californian, with lank figure and broad, powerful shoulders.

The other was a weazened little Jew, or at least he seemed of that type. Upon the table was a heap of chips.

Harry drew near and watched the game for a while.

He saw that luck fluctuated. Sometimes Lavigne won and sometimes the Jew, but the Californian seldom.

It did not take the young detective long to see that Lavigne and Knapp were pulling together.

When Knapp had a good hand, Lavigne seemed to know it, and drew out. When Lavigne had a good hand, Knapp did the same.

The result was that the Californian and the Jew lost steadily.

After a while the keen-eyed Hebrew watched the two villains closely. Suddenly he laid down his cards.

"Pardon!" he said. "I must abandon the game."

"What—have you had enough?" asked Knapp, carelessly.

"Yes. I must keep ze appointment I have. I wish you luck, monsieur."

The Hebrew, who was evidently of the French type, withdrew and left the place. The Californian looked around and saw Harry.

"Ah," he said, "don't you want to come into the game?"

The young detective hesitated.

"Well, I thank you," he said, finally. "I will try a few hands."

"By all means," said Lavigne. "We shall be glad to have you."

Harry procured some chips and at once began the game. The cards were dealt, and play began.

Harry drew a pair of fours, and discarding got another four, with king high.

The bet was raised several times, and the young detective and Knapp dropped out. It was between Lavigne and the Californian.

Lavigne had a good hand.

Harry knew this, for his face was flushed and he bet eagerly, confidently.

The Californian was a sphinx.

He bet slowly and cautiously.

But every time he raised the wager. Soon it rose into hundreds. Then Lavigne excitedly threw down a chip.

"That represents one thousand dollars," he said. "It is one hundred better."

The Californian glanced at his hand and thumbed the cards a moment. Then he glanced searchingly at Lavigne.

"You are bluffing!" he said.

"Well, call my hand and see."

"No. I am going to give you a hot pace. I shall raise you another thousand."

Knapp gave a gasp. Lavigne looked up in surprise.

"You are bluffing now," he said.

"Well, call me and see."

"I haven't much of a hand."

"Neither have I."

The reckless spirit of the gambler seized upon Lavigne. He laughed in a queer way.

"You can't put me in that kind of a hole," he said.

"Here goes for another thousand."

"I'll raise you another."

"Another up!"

"Another!"

"One thousand more!"

As fast as they repeated the raise it mounted upward, until suddenly the Californian said:

"My name is Caleb Howe. I am good for the sum I have wagered, and I offer my check, endorsed by the house, as security."

"I am Anton Lavigne, and I offer a check on the Lincoln National Bank, endorsed by the house."

"Then I call you at fourteen thousand dollars."

"Fourteen thousand dollars."

The call had attracted the attention of many in the place, and they now crowded about the table.

It was truly a high game for Corbin's place, where a few hundreds was the rule.

Lavigne's face was the mirror of confidence and triumph. He felt sure that he was the winner.

"I can beat you," he said. "I have a good hand."

"Show it," said Howe.

Lavigne laid down his hand, and instinctively reached out for the check.

Four sixes was the hand. Certainly it looked good. Four of a kind is always a good hand to bet heavy on.

The Californian's face did not change a muscle. He glanced at the four sixes.

"I thought so," he said, coolly. "I am just a bit better off."

And very calmly he laid four nines upon the table.

There was a tremendous sensation. Sharp ejaculations went up from the bystanders.

"Howe wins!"

"A big stake!"

"It beats the record of the house!"

Lavigne's jaw dropped. His face turned a sickly yellow. He gazed at the other cards a moment. Then he said, in a hollow voice:

"The devil's luck is mine. The stake is yours."

The Californian lit a cigar coolly, and said:

"It is the next gentleman's deal. Shall we go on with the game?"

"Go on with the game?" said Lavigne, furiously. "Yes, until I have had a chance to win it back. Wait, that is only fair. You will give me the chance?"

Howe looked at him through half shut eyes.

"What manner of man do you take me for?" he said. "Of course I will."

"Then here is my check for another fourteen thousand. I'll wager you this against the pot on the next draw."

"Done!"

Lavigne pushed the cards to Knapp.

"Shuffle and deal for us," he said.

But the Californian reached forward and put a detaining hand on the cards.

"The gentleman is a friend of yours," he said.

"What of that?" asked Lavigne, hotly.

"Let a stranger deal."

"What? You don't think we would cheat, do you?"

"I have no thought about the matter. I am only anxious to have the matter go straight and square."

Knapp's face was flushed.

"I would have you understand, sir, I am a gentleman," he said, angrily.

"Then you will not disagree with me upon what is merely a matter of proper form," said Howe, firmly.

"I refuse to make the wager, then," said Lavigne.

"Very well!" agreed Howe. "It is quite as well for me." Lavigne bit his lip.

He saw that the Californian's point was well taken. The reckless spirit of the gambler was upon him.

He hated to see the fourteen thousand dollars vanish without at least an effort to recover it. He wildly fancied that he could beat his opponent on the next draw.

So he said, with ill-grace:

"Well, have your way. Let a stranger deal the cards."

"First let us have our checks certified."

"Look here!" cried Lavigne, angrily, "you don't mean to impugn my honor."

"No more than you have a right to question mine. It's as fair for you as for me. If you win, you want what is coming to you. That is all."

Lavigne saw that he had a man of nerve to deal with.

CHAPTER XII.

LUCK FAILS LAVIGNE.

"All right," he growled. "Bring up the proprietor, and we'll certify the checks."

Big Jim Corbin now put in his appearance.

"What's the matter?" he asked, curtly. "What am I wanted for?"

"Certify these checks," said Lavigne. "You know me, Jim. My name is good at the Lincoln National Bank for this money."

"Yes, I'll endorse your I. O. U."

"Do the same for me," said Howe.

This was done.

The checks were sent to the cashier, who credited the amount to each, and stood ready to carry the balance over to the winner.

Corbin was named as a satisfactory party to deal the cards.

He shuffled them before the two gamblers, and dealt each a hand.

Lavigne's face flushed.

He discarded two cards.

"Give me two," he said. "If I get the card I want, I'll wager my life!"

The cards were dealt.

Lavigne picked them up.

A gleam of triumph shone in his eyes. He exclaimed exultantly:

"I have got it!"

Corbin turned to the Californian, who seemed to be musing over his hand.

"How many cards, Howe?" asked Corbin.

Very leisurely the Californian glanced over his hand. He glanced at the table, and said with a slow drawl:

"None!"

"No cards?"

"No! I stand pat!"

Lavigne's face turned livid.

His hands trembled as with the palsy. He stared at his opponent.

"You stand pat!" he ejaculated. "You must have a good hand."

"I fear that if I draw I may not better it," said Howe.

"You may have a better one."

"What have you got?"

"What is yours?"

"Full house. Three aces and two fours."

Howe laid his hand on the table.

"I have a straight flush, king high," he said, quietly. "I fear that I win."

Lavigne gasped and sat nervelessly back in his chair. For a moment there was a dead silence.

Then Corbin turned to the bookkeeper.

"Transfer that fourteen thousand to Mr. Howe," he said.

"All right, sir."

Knapp was almost as pallid as his friend. He chewed at his cigar, and looked vacantly at the floor.

Howe arose, and said bluffly:

"Well, friend, luck was with me this time. I hope there's no hard feelings!"

"The devil is against me!" gritted Lavigne. "Curse the luck, I'll win yet!"

He arose and staggered to the roulette table. He watched the little ball, and soon began to bet on it.

Harry kept a close watch of the unlucky gambler. He saw that everything went against him.

Lavigne played madly, and wholly without judgment.

But he lost.

Steadily and surely he lost. There was no chance for him.

After a long time Corbin came up and whispered to the croupier. The latter reached over and said politely:

"I am sorry, my friend; but your credit is exhausted."

Lavigne was purple.

"What?" he gritted. "You won't let me play any more!"

"You have no more credit."

"Curse you, give me a chance to win it back. That's no more than fair. You're a lot of sharks and thieves."

In a half insane way Lavigne began to rail against the place and the keeper. Finally Knapp caught his arm.

"Come on, Anton," he said. "Let us get out of here."

Harry followed them out into the night. They walked on, Lavigne with bowed head, until they were upon the beach.

"Never mind, old man," said Knapp. "Luck was against you."

"Luck!" exclaimed Lavigne, savagely. "I don't have

any luck. Curse it, I say! Curse the world! Curse everybody! I can't succeed at anything——"

"Pshaw—stop that! You know you are always lucky with the horses."

Lavigne drew a deep breath.

"That's where I will win it back," he said. "I will make it on the Derby. I don't know why I was such a fool as to go to Corbin's place. It took from me every cent of ready money that I had. I am penniless."

Knapp shrugged his shoulders.

"You will play!" he said.

"But I will play no more, I promise you that! I am done with gambling."

Knapp laughed loudly.

"Until we get to Monte Carlo!" he said.

"Ugh! We may never see the place. Something tells me that we shall not. I can't get that cursed count and his warning out of my head."

"Bah! Your nerves are weak. Let's go up to New York and see Belle. We must talk matters over."

"With Belle?"

"Yes."

"Humph! Are you a fool? Is she not a traitor?"

"We do not know. She may be only flirting with that count. Perhaps she was not the one to tell him the secret. We will not judge her until we find out."

"Find out—judge her!" gritted Lavigne. "Don't talk to me, I'll throttle her on sight!"

"No, you won't!"

"What?"

"I say you won't!"

"Why?"

"Because she is my sister," said Knapp. "And then, there's no sense in it."

"By the justice, I believe you're a traitor, too. You are going back on me as well. I'll find out where I stand soon, and then—look out for trouble!"

"Oh, come off! You're way off your base to-night. Come up to New York with me. We must make sure that Belle is against us. She may be working a game of her own."

"A game of her own?" said Lavigne, weakly.

"Yes. I don't believe she dares to go against her pals. It wouldn't be well for her to do that."

Lavigne was in a half imbecile condition now. So he said:

"Well, all right, lead the way, I'll go along with you."

Knapp locked arms with his colleague, and they went up to the car station.

They boarded a New York train. Of course Harry did the same.

It was now about midnight. The train in due time reached New York.

Lavigne and Knapp went at once to the Savoy.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, they went at once to Belle's apartments. She had not retired.

As Harry entered the hotel lobby, he saw the Count D'Arcos walking leisurely about and smoking a cigar.

The young detective at once went up to him.

"Hello, partner!" he exclaimed.

"Harry!" ejaculated Old King Brady. "What are you doing here?"

"Shadowing the sharpers."

"Lavigne and Knapp?"

"Yes."

"Are they here?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"They have just gone up to see Belle. Lavigne has had a setback in gambling, and is on his last legs. What luck have you had?"

Old King Brady rubbed his hands with much satisfaction.

"As the Count D'Arcos," he said, "I have met with great success. Belle has made me manager of her racing stable. We are to engage you to ride——"

"Racing stable? Has she such a thing?"

"Why, certainly! She has a deed of the Hornet and over half of the race horses in Lavigne's stable."

"Whew! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. She has made up her mind to break with Lavigne forever. The horses he foolishly placed in her hands, so now she can easily claim them."

"She is a traitor to him?"

"She has gone back on him. She fears him. Only my assurance keeps her up."

"But has she made a clean breast of it all? Have we the necessary evidence now to convict Lavigne?"

"No, she is still obdurate. But I think she will divulge soon."

"We are dished if she does not."

Old King Brady shrugged his shoulders.

"We need not fear," he said. "It will be all right; she will come to terms."

"I hope so."

"What do these chaps want to see her about at this hour?"

"They are in bad circumstances. They are going to her for assistance, and to satisfy themselves whether she is with them or not."

"That is interesting. I think we ought to take a hand in that."

"So do I, but how can we do so?"

"Let me see, the numbers of Belle's apartments are 94 and 95. I believe there is a connecting room, number 96. Let us get the key to that room. We may be able to play the part of eavesdroppers."

"Just so. Can we get the key?"

"I am already registered here, but you can ask for room 96."

"If it is not taken."

"Yes."

"If it is try 93. That will be on the other side. I think all the rooms here are connecting."

"Very well."

Harry went to the desk.

"I wish to register," he said. "I have some preference as to the room. Can you give me number 96?"

The clerk turned to the key register. He made prompt reply:

"Yes."

"Thank you," said Harry. "I have no baggage. What is the charge for one night?"

"Four dollars."

Harry paid the price, and then wrote on the register, in a flowing hand:

"Benton Hayes, Memphis, Tenn."

"Front!" called the clerk. A bell-boy presented himself. "Show this gentleman to 96."

"All right, sir."

Harry entered the elevator.

In a few minutes he was in No. 96. He had not long to wait.

The door opened softly, and the Count D'Arcos entered. Harry held up a finger and both listened.

The murmur of voices came from the next room. There were the high-pitched accents of a woman's voice.

"There is some excitement in there," whispered Harry.

"Yes."

"We must be in it."

"Sure!"

Old King Brady crept to the connecting door and applied his ear to the key-hole. He found that he could hear every word uttered in the next room.

He listened intently.

Harry prostrated himself upon the floor and listened at the crack under the door.

What the two detectives heard was of great interest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRASH COMES.

Knapp was talking.

"It's just this way, Belle," he said, earnestly. "We don't want to distrust you, but we don't know what your game is."

"Well, I don't intend you shall," returned Belle, defiantly.

The Bradys were surprised at this reply. It was an unexpected ebullition on her part.

"Oh, you don't?" gritted Lavigne. "Well, we'll see——"

"Hold on!" interposed Knapp. "I'm doing the talking, old man. Just leave this job to me."

"That's right, Hugo. It's about time you stuck up for me," said Belle.

"I'm going to stand up for you until I am assured you are not working against me," said Knapp.

"That depends on how you regard it."

"Well, tell us the truth. What are you doing with this Count D'Arcos?"

Belle laughed scornfully.

"I suppose Anton is jealous."

"Well, you'll admit he has a right to know what is going on."

"I don't admit it."

"Curse it, what's the use of all this parley?" growled Lavigne. "I told you——"

"Shut up!" snapped Knapp. "Now, Belle, we want the truth: Are you playing with this D'Arcos, or are you serious with him?"

"You expect me to answer such a fool question?" asked the woman.

"Yes."

"Well, I decline."

"What's the use?" began Lavigne.

"Hold on!" said Knapp. "I know women better than you. I want to tell you one thing, sister, you make a mistake when you go back on us."

"You assume that I have."

"Your words and your actions don't satisfy us."

"I am sorry."

"Who is this count?"

"You know him as well as I."

"Has he money?"

"Yes."

"I see! I tell Anton that you are only working him for the coin. But he is sure that you are in love with him."

"I hate a jealous man."

"There you are!" laughed Knapp. "She is making you jealous, Anton. That's a woman's nature and her privilege. Look here, Belle, how did D'Arcos get onto the Douglas Weld affair?"

Belle's eyes opened wide.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't understand? Well, I'll tell you. He knows that Anton killed the old man. He flung it in his face at Weekawken. It is certain that he knows all."

"Humph!" said Belle. "Well, what if he does. He don't give it away."

Both villains gave a start.

"But he could!" growled Lavigne. "and it's not safe to know he is alive."

"Oh, you're going to plot to kill him, as you did old Weld?" she said, tensely. "Well, let me tell you, Anton Lavigne, if you harm a hair of his head I'll send you to the gallows the next moment, if I break my word and lose my life."

A snarling cry of rage and fear escaped Lavigne. He bounded to his feet.

"You cursed traitress!" he cried. "I'll end your career——"

But the woman's right hand went up. It held a revolver.

"Stand back!" she said, coldly. "I am no longer in fear of you, Anton Lavigne. I can see that you are a snake. I am done with you forever. If you ever darken my life or cross my path again I'll shoot you like a dog."

Lavigne stood trembling and livid.

He dared not advance, however.

He was held in check by the woman whom he had always regarded as his dupe and a willing tool in his hands.

Knapp stood silent for a moment.

Then he said:

"Put up your gun, Belle. Anton is out of sorts. He'd never harm you, I'll answer for that."

"I will take it back, Belle," said Lavigne, with a crafty change of manner. "You see, I love you, and I'm near mad with jealousy."

"Yes, I see," said Belle, coldly. "But you've killed your chances. I'll never have anything more to do with you."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to marry that D'Arcos?"

"That's my business."

"Well," said Lavigne, gratingly, "go ahead, I'm done with you. You've lost your best friend, I can tell you."

"I can stand it."

"Perhaps you can; but I am clearing up my affairs. I shall sell my racing stable and quit the country."

"Let me tell ye something else. This D'Arcos is a pauper and an impostor. If he tells ye anything different he lies. He'll throw you over like mouldy cheese when he has got through with ye. Then you'll want the friendship of Anton Lavigne."

Belle's face did not change.

"I am willing to take all chances," she said.

"But you'll have to support him. What have you got to live on?"

"What have I got?" said Belle. "I will show you. I own a racing stable."

"A racing stable?"

"Yes."

Lavigne gasped. He recalled the fact now that his stable of horses had been deeded to Belle to protect them from gambling debts.

"Jericho!" he ejaculated, "is that your game?"

"If you attempt to sell any of those horses, it will be at your peril!" said Belle.

Lavigne was limp and white with impotent rage.

"So that is your game?" he said. "You are truly a traitress."

Knapp was silent.

Already his craven soul was considering the advantage of allying himself with his sister. Villainy had fallen out.

"No, I am not," said Belle, coldly. "You have used me as a tool in all your rascally games, Anton Lavigne. Now the time has come for me to turn. I am going to enter upon a new life. I shall put you out of my life forever."

Lavigne arose to his feet.

He was completely unnerved.

"Come on, Hugo," he said, "let us go out and talk it over. I can't stay here any longer."

"Hold on!" said Knapp, tentatively. "How is it going to be about the race Wednesday? Who will control the Hornet?"

"The horse is mine," said Lavigne, "and he runs in my colors."

"The horse is mine," said Belle, "and he will not run in your colors."

Lavigne was aghast.

"How are you going to stop it?"

"I have deputed a sheriff to take possession of the horses," said Belle. "I shall see that my property is protected. You will enter those stables again at your peril."

"You infernal traitress——"

"Stop!" roared Knapp, "you have called my sister all the opprobrious names you ever will."

But the words were hardly off Knapp's lips when Lavigne whirled like a flash and dealt Knapp a terrific blow on the temple.

He went down senseless, crashing to the floor in a heap.

"Now," roared the maddened gambler, "I'll square accounts with you, you hussy!"

Belle, with a cry of anger, again pulled her revolver.

But Lavigne seized her wrists. The weapon was discharged, and the bullet went crashing through the door into 96.

Lavigne rushed upon the woman like a madman.

Her screams went up shrill and terrifying. In an instant attaches were rushing through the corridors.

"Come, Harry!" cried Old King Brady. "It is time to act. He will kill her."

They threw themselves against the door. It fell inward with a crash.

But Lavigne did not carry out his purpose of murder. He saw with cowardly instinct that this was not the time or place.

So, with a curse, he hurled the woman across the room. Then he dashed out of the room, just as the detectives broke in the door of 96.

The next moment the Count D'Arcos was administering restoratives to Belle, who had fainted.

Knapp had come out of his spell, and was sitting up rubbing his head. The room was now filled with the hotel attaches.

The hotel detectives at once took charge of matters. Knapp was held briefly, until an explanation could be made.

Harry, in his role of Benton Hayes, the Southerner, and the Count D'Arcos, easily explained their part in the affair.

Belle soon revived sufficiently also to tell her story.

The result was that Knapp was suffered to go. Belle refused to press a charge against Lavigne, so no effort was made to capture him.

The Count D'Arcos remained with Belle some while to offer cheer and consolation. He introduced Benton Hayes as a friend from the South.

Some while later the detectives took their departure. Harry took a room in another part of the hotel, and the two detectives retired for the night.

They made no effort to pursue or arrest Lavigne.

They did not fear his leaving the city. They knew that he had too many interests at stake to leave the country yet.

The next morning a messenger appeared at the door of Count D'Arcos' room with a note.

Thus it read:

"My Dear Count: I am deeply grateful to you for keeping so close a watch over my welfare. But for your timely arrival last night Lavigne might have killed me. I am done with him forever.

"The racing stable belongs to me. He has squandered all his fortune in gambling and folly. I have long been his servant and slave. It is no more than my due to claim the horses. Now, you kindly offered to manage the stable for me.

"I shall be happy to have you do so. See if you cannot secure the services of Carson, the jockey, for the Derby.

"Moreover, if you will take complete charge of the stable, I will be obliged. I have employed able counsel and officers of the law to protect my rights, and they will protect you. Lavigne has reached the end of his rope. He will not dare to go to the track. By doing all this you will greatly serve me.

With friendly regards,

"BELLE KNAPP."

"This is a complete turning of the tables," said Old King Brady. "I tell you, Harry, this case is getting interesting."

"I should say so!" agreed the young detective.

"She names one truth."

"What?"

"Lavigne has reached the end of his rope."

"It looks like it. Still we have not the evidence to convict him."

"It will come."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

"Well, I hope so! We are certainly getting along all right. I will go out to the track and resume my guise as Carson."

"Very well. I will see you out there. The best thing we can do is to play the game right through to the end. It is too early as yet to make an arrest."

CHAPTER XIV.

LAVIGNE'S LAST GAME.

So it happened that later in the day Old King Brady, in his role of the Count D'Arcos, entered the park of the Sheepshead Bay track.

He made his way at once to the Lavigne stables.

The negro boys were walking the horses, and everything seemed as quiet and regular as ever.

But near by were two men in blue suits. They walked about and eyed every new-comer.

These were the sheriff's deputies hired by Belle to guard her property. Lavigne was nowhere to be seen.

But Harry, as Carson, the jockey, had been galloping the colts for exercise. He greeted the count.

"Well, how is everything?" asked Old King Brady.

"It seems to be quiet," said Harry. "Lavigne came over and tried to assert his rights."

"He was rebuffed?"

"Why, yes. He has no case at all. It is a simple fact that Belle Knapp has a deed of this property and owns it. That is all there is to it."

"It is hard lines on Lavigne!"

"I should say so!"

"The woman has gone completely back on him."

"Well, I rather guess! But she cannot be blamed. He has pursued a very arbitrary course."

"To be sure!"

"Hello! Here he comes now."

This was true.

Lavigne, with yellow complexion and haggard eyes, came across the stable yard. He saluted Count D'Arcos stiffly.

"May I have a few words with you?" he asked, curtly.

"Certainly."

"You have been placed in charge of these horses by Belle Knapp?"

"Miss Knapp has done me the honor to make me the representative of her stable."

"Of course, you know that these horses all really belong to me?"

"I know nothing of the sort."

"Well, it is true."

"I cannot recognize your claim."

"Just the same it is true. That Knapp woman is treacherous. I warn you to have nothing to do with her."

"I am capable of looking after my own interests. I will hear nothing said against Miss Knapp's character."

"Don't be silly, D'Arcos! I have been fooled by her, and she'll fool you."

"I don't fear it."

"I know you and I had a falling out; but I have no hard feelings against you. You got satisfaction out of me at Weehawken."

"I desire to have nothing to do with you."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No!"

"I am down on my luck just now. Will you do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Let me know the inside of the race on Wednesday. I want a chance to square myself?"

"Well, the Hornet will win the race if it is in his power to do so."

"There is no job?"

"None at all."

"Thank you. I shall then back the Hornet for all I can. But I would ask one more favor."

"What?"

"How did you become possessed of certain facts of my early life? Who told you I was Andrew Boyd?"

Old King Brady looked at the villain through half shut eyes.

"Do you think I am a fool?"

"Did Belle tell you?"

Lavigne's fingers worked like the talons of a hawk, and his face was hard and set as he waited for the reply.

"I will settle that question," said Old King Brady. "She did not!"

"Lavigne's face cleared.

"That is different," he said. "Now, I must bore you with one more question. What use do you intend to make of your knowledge?"

The count laughed lightly.

"I have not done you any harm yet," he said.

"You have no evidence."

"Don't you think I could procure it easy enough, if I chose to?"

Lavigne did not reply.

He was thoughtful for some moments. Finally he said:

"Count D'Arcos, I'm done with that woman. She's yours if you want her! We will be enemies no longer. If you do not cross my path, I'll not cross yours."

"We will leave it that way."

"All right. I hope to get on my feet again soon, and I shall then remember my friends."

With this Lavigne bowed and walked away. Old King Brady turned and joined Harry.

The young detective was interested in the report of the conversation given by his partner.

"He is certainly cured of his passion for Belle," he said.

"That is plain."

"It looks to me as if our time was almost at hand."

"So it is! We have all the birds in our hands now. If the woman, Belle Knapp, will only agree to turn the evidence we shall be all right."

"She must do it."

"I shall try and bring her to terms. We will wait until after this race. I think I shall fully have her confidence."

So the detectives proceeded to lie low and wait.

They felt sure of their game now. They knew that Lavigne felt secure and would not attempt to get out of the country at once.

Count D'Arcos visited Belle at the Savoy, and assured her that the Hornet would race in her name, and under such colors as she might choose to select.

"I shall take blue and white," she said. "It is my favorite, and it will win."

"I think so," said the count. "The Hornet is favorite. A new horse, however, has come to the front. Some think he will win."

"Indeed! What is the name?"

"Butterfly, and it is owned by the Savannah Stables. They say a better horse never wore a pig-skin."

"Bah! These Southern horses never stand the climate. We shall win."

"I hope so!"

"I know it!"

Old King Brady now told of his meeting with Lavigne.

"I tell you," he said, "the best thing you can do is to turn the evidence against him. You will never be safe while he is at large."

"Do you believe that?"

"I do."

"Will it please you to have me do it?"

"Personally it is a matter of no consequence. I only fear that he may do you bodily harm."

Belle laughed softly.

"You need have no fear," she said. "He will never do that."

"Well, then, I may say that I shall never feel easy until he is put away for safe keeping."

Belle was silent.

She looked up into the count's face, and then down again.

"I want to please you," she said. "It is a matter of principle with me. I don't mind admitting to you that I saw him kill Douglas Weld. I was housekeeper for the millionaire at that time. Neither was I the only witness."

"Ah, the other——"

"I swore never to divulge the name."

Again the old detective was baffled.

"If this is true," he said, "it is your duty, and better for you, to give up the facts to the law."

"And swear Lavigne onto the gallows."

"Yes."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the woman. "I don't want to do it. If he lets me alone, all right. If he don't, then I'll see that he is taken care of."

Argument was of no avail.

Old King Brady saw this. So he at once changed the subject.

But the climax was at hand.

Hugo Knapp was in the hospital with brain fever, as the result of the blow Lavigne had given him.

Belle was disturbed over this.

Brother and sister had lived selfish lives, and never had demonstrated affection for each other. Their natures were sordid and hardened.

But blood is thicker than water.

"If harm comes to Hugo," said Belle, vindictively, "may heaven help Anton Lavigne. I'll show him no mercy."

Old King Brady had thought of getting out a warrant for his arrest on suspicion of being the author of the attack upon Hugo.

But nobody had seen the blow given.

It had been assumed that Hugo had struck his head on a chair as he tripped and fell. It was called an accident.

Belle was much alarmed at the condition of her brother.

Thus matters were when the race day came. An immense crowd went out to Sheepshead to see Hornet win the Derby.

He was backed to the skies. All kinds of odds were given.

Belle was in her box, resplendent with jewels. She was waited upon by the gallant Count D'Arcos.

Down at the stables Carson was preparing for the great race. It was a day par excellence.

Thousands of people filled the great grand stand. All the fashion and wealth of the city were present.

Among the fevered gamblers in the betting ring was Anton Lavigne.

He was one of a party who bought heavily. But a glance at his memorandum would have revealed a startling fact.

He was not backing the Hornet.

All his money was placed on Butterfly, the Southern horse, at odds of three to one.

Once Lavigne left the ring and made his way to a row of empty and abandoned stables at the other end of the park.

Here he looked sharply about to see that he was not observed.

Then he whistled softly.

The next moment, from a bundle of straw near one of the stalls, a boy leaped up.

His wolfish features, made wan and thin by want, showed him to be no other than the stable-boy, Skinny Bent.

"Hello, Bent!" exclaimed Lavigne. "Is the coast clear?"

"All clear, boss!"

"And you've done the job?"

"Not yet, boss. It ain't quite time."

"You will fail me!" he gritted. "You are like all the rest. You will fail me!"

"No, I won't, boss. Cross my heart, I won't. I tell ye I'll fix it all right. They won't let me into the stall just yet. But when they take the horse to the paddock I'll fix him. Do ye see?"

He held up a gaunt hand.

In the palm was a hypodermic syringe.

"Eh, how is that?" exclaimed Lavigne. "What have you got there?"

"It's the dope. You shall see."

"How do you give it to him?"

"Leave that to me. You see, I goes along and I says: 'Hello, old hoss, I hope ye'll win.' Then I slaps him on the flanks with my hand. That puts the needle into him. He'll kick, likely, but nobody will ever think anything of it."

Lavigne drew a deep breath.

"Very clever!" he said. "You are a cunning devil, Bent."

"I has to be, boss. This is a hard world, an' it owes me a livin'. Oh, I'll do the job, you bet!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CASE IS ENDED.

Skinny Bent grinned in such a way that even Lavigne received a most hideous impression.

"All right, Skinny," said Lavigne. "You know there is a good price in it for you."

"You bet I knows it, boss. An' I wants to square accounts wid dat trainer."

"I'm going back to place some more money on Butterfly." Lavigne turned and strode away. Bent slipped away behind the stables.

As Lavigne went back to the betting ring, he chuckled to himself.

"Oh, you bet I'll get square with her!" he muttered. "She thinks she has got the best of me. My whole life will be devoted to getting even with Belle Knapp."

"Curse that Hugo, he conspired with her against me! I hope he'll die. I gave him a good lick in the temple. Oh, I'll be on top yet, and then I'll have my revenge."

Meanwhile, down at the stable, there was a great bustle. Jockeys and grooms were getting things ready for the big race.

The horses were being saddled, and the jockeys were in uniform. Presently the horses started for the paddock.

Harry walked along beside his mount with whip in hand. Old King Brady, as Count D'Arcos, walked a little way behind.

In the fringe of people gathered at the paddock entrance was a thin, ill-clad figure.

A yellowish, animal-like face peered out through the throng. Skinny Bent suddenly glided forward.

He ran quickly up to the Hornet, and exclaimed:

"Hello, old hoss, I hope you will win!"

At the same moment he slapped the thoroughbred on the flank. The horse gave a bound and a snort.

But Old King Brady, from the rear, had seen the move.

He also saw something glisten in the stable-boy's hand.

He pounced upon Bent, and caught him by the collar.

"Hold on, you scum of the earth;" cried the old detective. "What did you do to that horse?"

"Go on!" sniffed Bent. "Let go of me, ye old duffer. I didn't do nuthin'."

"Yes, you did! What have you got in your hand?"

Bent made a move with his hand, but Old King Brady seized his wrist. A quick wrench, and the hypodermic syringe dropped from his grasp.

"You infernal scoundrel!" cried the old detective. "Hey! Hold on there! Bring the horse back! He has been drugged! Get an officer, quick! Arrest this fellow!"

Like wildfire the report spread through the grounds. People rushed to the paddock.

The judges came down to investigate. The prisoner was taken to the steward's office and held in strict custody.

Bent was sullen and defiant.

"I hain't done nuthin'," he said. "Ye can't prove nuthin'."

The possibility of the Hornet being drugged was a terrific shock to the racegoers. All sorts of dire threats were made against Bent.

Belle Knapp came down to the stable, the angriest of all.

"I'll have him prosecuted to the full extent of the law," she cried. "But I don't believe he's at the bottom of it."

"There you are!" whispered Harry. "If the truth were known, I'll wager it was that old scoundrel Lavigne."

"Lavigne!" gasped Belle. "Ah! I wonder if the boy will confess."

"Let us go down and see him," said Harry.

"All right."

So they went down to interview the prisoner. Bent received them sullenly.

"Bent," said Harry, quietly, "what did you get for that job?"

"What job?"

"Drugging that horse."

"I never drugged the horse."

"Yes, you did, and you know you did. I can prove that Lavigne hired you to do it.

The boy's face was ashen.

He would say nothing.

"Now, this is a serious matter," said Harry. "But if you will confess all and incriminate Lavigne, I'll see that you get off scot free."

"Will you agree that no harm shall come to me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, Lavigne is the chap. He watched me. I told him I'd do it, and he agreed to give me a hundred right after it. But I'll tell ye"—Bent lowered his voice:

"It was all a bluff. I never meant to dope the hoss from the first. I think a heap of that hoss. You see, Lavigne has backed the Butterfly to win first.

"I was jest playin' a bluff on Lavigne to get the hundred. There warn't no dope in that syringe. Go ahead an' win out ther race. You kin do it. Yer hoss is all right."

"I believe he tells the truth," said Harry. "Shall we start the horse?"

"Yes," Belle said. "Start him and win it if you can. Anton Lavigne meant to ruin me. I'll betray him for that."

Harry saw that the woman's mind was made up. She had broken her resolution not to betray Lavigne.

The victory was won.

Harry hurried back to the stable.

The judges were there, with some veterinaries, to examine the horse. As Harry came in one of the judges asked:

"Has the owner decided to start this horse?"

"Yes!" replied Harry.

"We find no trace of a drug in the syringe," said a veterinary. "It is a very odd trick."

"Well, the Hornet will start, and I will do all I can to win," said Harry.

Harry had a chance to tell Old King Brady of the affair in an aside.

"She has made up her mind," he said. "Don't let Lavigne get off the grounds. Arrest him on sight."

"They're off!"

The Butterfly started in at once to make the running.

But out of the field shot a lithe limbed horse.

"The Hornet!" was the cry.

Step by step, stride by stride, the lead was cut down. The Hornet was outfooting his fleet rival.

Now they swung into the stretch. Both jockeys raised their whips. But Harry did not use his.

He saw the race was won.

The Butterfly was faltering. The Hornet ran true as a die, and was first under the wire by two lengths.

Back to the weighing scales came the racers. The crowd shouted themselves wild. Carson and the Hornet were the heroes of the hour.

But as the horses assembled before the judges' stand there was a stir. A well dressed man rushed up and brandished his fists.

"I have been robbed!" he shouted. "This is a conspiracy! The world is against me! They have taken my money and stolen my horse. This is my horse, do ye hear? It's my horse, and I'll shoot the man who attempts to take him away from me."

It was a surprise to everybody. All eyes were fixed upon Lavigne, for it was he. Harry made a motion to Old King Brady.

Old King Brady placed a hand on his shoulder. The end had come.

"You are my prisoner," he said. "Come, Andrew Boyd; the game is up."

The light of half-insanity was in Lavigne's eyes. The heavy losses he had met with had for the moment unbalanced him.

"D'Arcos!" he said. "We are friends."

"I am James Brady, the detective. You are my prisoner."

Then a violent scene followed. But handcuffs were placed on Lavigne and he was led away.

The game was ended.

The race was over.

That evening the Bradys visited Belle Knapp at the Savoy and obtained from her a complete deposition of Lavigne's guilt.

He was convicted easily of murder. Moreover, the charge became a double one, for Hugo Knapp died in the hospital.

And thus ended the case.

Andrew Boyd died in the electric chair. Belle Knapp was somewhat shocked by the discovery that the gallant D'Arcos was only Old King Brady, the detective.

She left the country before any charges could be brought against her. She was never heard of again by the Bradys.

The two detectives received many congratulations on the successful winning of the racetrack case. But they modestly kept on at their work and soon were engaged upon a new case, even more thrilling than the one we have just narrated.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS IN THE CHINESE QUARTER; OR, THE QUEEN OF THE OPIUM FIENDS," which will be the next number (137) of "Secret Service."

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