

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 36.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 29, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS DOWN SOUTH; OR THE GREAT PLANTATION MYSTERY.



Creole Jack and Old King Brady listened attentively to the narrative of the black river hand. They did not see Judy standing behind them with uplifted hands.

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THE BRADYS DOWN SOUTH;

OR,

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A DETECTIVE STORY OF INTEREST.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

STATING THE CASE.

The Bradys, keenest of all detectives, had just finished the Harlem murder case, and were taking a bit of a breathing spell after their arduous efforts when the following message reached New York:

"Chief of the Secret Service.

"Send two of your best detectives at once to Benton Plantation, Hector Township, Louisiana. A case of great mystery.

"CARTER, New Orleans Chief of Detectives."

The chief at once dispatched word post haste to the Bradys.

"They are the men to tackle this case," he declared. "They will fathom it if anybody can."

Now the Benton Plantation case had for some days been the subject of newspaper talk and treatment.

The detectives were not entirely familiar with all its details.

But they knew that it was an affair of no light sort. So when the message came they were at once interested.

"I reckon there's something cut out for us now, Harry," said Old King Brady in his laconic way.

Young King Brady, who was the old detective's protegee and pupil, replied:

"I am of that opinion myself."

Old King Brady drew out his notebook and scanned it.

"Let me see," he said. "I made some notes on that case."

"I am sure you did," replied Harry.

"Yes, here they are. The Benton Plantation mystery. A case of peculiar atrocity. Judge Benton, owner of the plantation, is found in a cotton press with head and shoulders crushed to a pulp and beyond recognition.

"Two negro field hands, Tom Scott and Jake Small, are hunted down by a Vigilance Committee and lynched. Two days later it is discovered that the body is not that of Judge Benton at all.

"This is established by the peculiarity of a deformed foot which the judge was known to have. The clothing, however, was Benton's. Then it transpires that the committee were hasty and that Scott and Small were not guilty. They were elsewhere at the time of the crime.

"The mystery resolves itself into these questions: Who is the murdered man? Who put the body in the cotton press? How explain the mysterious disappearance of Judge Benton? Not a clew is offered."

There was silence for some moments after Old King Brady's statement of the case.

The young detective was thoughtful. Old King Brady made more notes.

Then he said:

"Yes, Harry, there is work cut out for us. It will be as shrewd a case as we have tackled for a good while!"

"I agree with you," said Harry. "But we shall succeed all the same."

"I hope so!"

So it came to pass that the Bradys accepted the case.

They collected all the material they could in New York. Then they took the cars for New Orleans.

They proceeded from there at once to the Benton Plantation.

Hector was a typical Louisiana town, with its ramshackle buildings, its negro huts and general air of sleepiness and quiet.

The detectives alighted from the train in close disguise.

They were ostensible cotton buyers from the city. They visited all the cotton warehouses and made prices.

But they did not purchase.

That was not their purpose.

In the course of their quest they visited the Benton Plantation.

They found that it was a very fine estate sloping down to the waters of a bayou. Judge Benton was considered one of the wealthiest and representative men.

His family consisted only of a daughter and a nephew.

Eulalie Benton was the belle of the region about, and altogether a lovely girl.

Barton Hill, the cousin, was a lazy, shiftless fellow, always to be found lounging about the levee, or fishing and hunting in the swamp.

"Dere ain't no wuk in dat boy," declared Uncle Hoke, the ancient watchman of the plantation. "'Tain't bo'n in him. He jes' cums natural by it!"

The judge would laugh and say:

"Oh, well, Barton will come around in time. He hasn't got his growth yet."

The judge was kind to Barton for the reason that he was the son of his dead and dearly beloved sister.

But in spite of his shiftlessness, Barton knew enough to fall in love.

He was completely gone over his fair cousin Eulalie.

Now this lovely young miss on the other hand cared little or nothing about him. But this only added fuel to the fire of Barton's passion.

Finally he had the temerity to ask Eulalie for her hand.

The answer was a flat refusal. Barton plunged into the swamps and was missing a week.

When he came out he seemed to be a changed person.

He became gay, and to a certain extent clever. He affected the society of the young men at Hector and improved his dress and manners.

But he did not press his suit with Eulalie further.

The young girl showed a decided preference for another. That other was Leslie Carlton, the son of the owner of the next plantation.

Thus matters were when the fearful crash came and Judge Benton dropped from sight in so mysterious a manner.

Then things were turned upside down at the plantation.

When it was first assumed that the body found in the cotton press was that of the judge, steps were at once taken to administrate upon the estate.

Lawyers were called from New Orleans and the will was read.

And a most startling revelation it was. To the amazement of everybody it bequeathed the bulk of the property, including the plantation, "to my dear sister's child, Barton Hill."

Eulalie, his own daughter, was cut off with a paltry five

thousand, with another five thousand added if she would at once marry her cousin.

It was a most astounding will.

At first Eulalie's friends and sympathizers were inclined to dispute the document.

But Baxter Gray, the family lawyer, stood up and swore to its correctness, and nothing more could be said.

There was talk of a contest. But it was conceded that this would avail little.

It was a fearful shock to Eulalie. But Hill was non-committal.

He would certainly have been able to claim all but for an unlooked-for incident.

The startling discovery was made that the body found in the cotton press was not that of Judge Benton at all.

This created a tremendous sensation.

The administration of the estate and the probating of the will was stopped.

It was not known but that Judge Benton was still alive.

All sorts of theories were advanced.

One was that the judge had murdered the unknown and placed his body in the press and then fled.

But the judge's best friends contested this strongly.

They would not believe it.

Judge Benton was by far too well and favorably known.

It could not be true.

He was not a murderer.

His disappearance was plainly a tremendous mystery. The fame of the case spread far and wide over the country.

But nobody suspected the true character of the two cotton buyers who went about the town but yet bought no cotton.

The Bradys sifted matters with skillful hands and silent method.

But for a long time they were without the slightest clew.

Deductions all seemed vain and useless. The mystery was most dense.

Finally, however, Young King Brady outlined a definite plan.

"I believe," he said, "that it will pay to shadow that young nephew, Hill. He looks like our mark!"

"But he proved an alibi at the hearing," said the old detective. "He was in New Orleans at the time."

"That may be, but for all that he may know something about the case."

Old King Brady was thoughtful. Finally he said:

"Well, it will do no harm. We have no other lead. It may lead to something."

Hill was in the town just then as chance had it, and the detectives soon had him shadowed.

He was a frequenter of the one barroom of the place, and here the Bradys had found him.

They lounged into the place.

Hill was standing by the bar with a glass of whisky in his hand and talking with the barkeeper.

He did not cease his talk as the newcomers appeared, nor did he change his subject.

"I tell you these croakers don't know what they are talking about," he cried. "The old man is dead and you can bet on it!"

"Probably they'd find his body over in the bayou if they looked for it," said the barkeeper.

"They don't want to find it," shouted Hill. "They are afraid I'll get what belongs to me."

"I'd fight it."

"I'm going to. You bet that's my inheritance and I'm going to have it."

"That's the way to talk. I like to see a man like you get money, Bart. You know how to use it."

"Well, you bet I'd make a show with it. I've nothing against my cousin. She can have part of it if she'll do the right thing."

At this moment the two detectives came to the bar.

"Beer!" said Old King Brady.

"Whisky!" said Harry.

"All right, gents!"

The bartender turned to his bottles and glasses. Hill puffed leisurely at his cigar and looked curiously at the detectives.

Then he said:

"Howdy, gents! I reckon you ain't had much luck buying cotton!"

"No!" replied Old King Brady. "How is it in the country above here?"

"Humph! Just as bad! I allow it's a short season. They say there's a right smart bit of it up in Mississippi."

"Ah!" said the detective. "Are you from that part of the country?"

"No!" replied Hill. "I locate right here. But I'm going to New Orleans to-morrow, and that will be my home after this!"

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING FOR CLEWS.

The bartender winked.

"Bart thinks it's a bit too slow for him up here," he said. "Things are a little more rapid down in the city. Eh, Bart?"

"I don't care for that," declared Hill. "But I like New Orleans. It's a right peart place."

"That it is!" agreed Old King Brady. "We've just come from there!"

"Ah, going back soon?"

"We thought of returning to-morrow."

"That's all right," cried Hill. "I'm going on the same train. I'd like to meet you in the city. Drink, gents?"

"Don't care if we do," said Old King Brady, making a sign to Harry.

The two detectives stood up to the bar and the bartender filled their glasses.

They took care, however, not to drink the liquor, but managed to drop it at an unobserved moment into a cuspidor under the rail of the bar.

All the while, however, the detectives kept up a lively

They did not fail to make a great impression on Hill.

The detectives feigned an anxiety to introduce Hill to some of the secret gaming houses of the city.

Now, this was just what the profligate wanted. He recognized in the two men before him valuable companions and allies.

So he fraternized with them.

Of course this was just what the detectives wanted.

Nothing could have worked better.

They did not fail to take advantage of it. In a very short while Hill was almost at their mercy.

"Now you're going on that nine-forty train in the morning, are you?" asked Hill.

"We are!" replied Old King Brady.

"Hang me!" exclaimed Hill, "I've taken a mighty fancy to you gents, and I'd like to travel with you. Where are you stopping at present?"

"At the Magnolia Hotel."

"An unsufferable place for gents like you. I want you to come out to the plantation with me and spend the night. Then we'll go down to the city together to-morrow."

The detectives exchanged glances.

"I hope we're not presuming," said Young King Brady.

"I wouldn't ask you if I didn't want you."

"Oh, we'll do it," said Old King Brady. "We don't refuse that sort of an invite. You can count on us."

"Good! Have another drink!"

Again and again the barkeeper served the drinks. Things were fine and salubrious.

The detectives fraternized completely with Hill.

Finally the profligate looked at his watch.

"Looky here!" he exclaimed. "It is high time to be moseying fer the plantation. Are you gents all ready?"

"We'll go down to the Magnolia and get our grips and settle."

"All right! I'll go with you!"

With this they left the barroom. It was not a great way to the Magnolia.

Very soon they were on their way to the plantation in Hill's carriage. The detectives felt that lively work was before them.

They gave their names to the villain as Hayes and Smart.

In due time the carriage rolled into the magnolia-bordered drive leading up to the plantation.

It was fast growing dark.

Up to the broad piazza and high stoop rolled the carriage. On the piazza sat a young lady and a young man.

She was beautiful as a dream after the Southern type, with charming manners and ease of movement.

He was fair and handsome, with a fine athletic figure and honest blue eyes. He was every inch a gentleman.

She was no other than Eulalie Benton, the belle of the region about and the sought after of all the eligible young men of the place.

He was Leslie Carlton, the son of a wealthy New Orleans merchant, and her true lover.

Hill knew this well, and he hated Carlton in a most

In fact, this matter of dislike was purely mutual. Carlton had a keen contempt for the profligate nephew.

Yet the two had never come to an open rupture. This was due to the fact that on every possible occasion they avoided each other.

But as Hill leaped out of his carriage and saw Carlton on the piazza his face clouded.

Filled with drink, he was in just the mood to pick a quarrel. It appealed to his inflamed passions to see Carlton in the company of the girl whom he coveted.

So he clambered slowly up the steps, scowling savagely.

Neither Carlton nor Eulalie spoke or appeared to notice him.

Hill reached the piazza and stood a moment looking at the pair.

Then slowly the smouldering flame began to kindle. All the venomous hatred and resentment of his nature came to the surface.

He lost absolute self-control.

Almost before the Bradys could guess what it meant, Hill precipitated matters.

"Eulalie," he said in a hoarse, thick voice, "it is no place for you out on this piazza in the evening air. Your father is dead and I'm going to look after you. Go into the house."

At this Carlton partly arose.

But Eulalie restrained him.

She turned to Hill and said with marvelous dignity and grandeur:

"Barton Hill, I am the arbiter of my own pleasures. You will do me the kindness to refrain from assuming authority on my own premises."

Hill gasped and his face turned an apoplectic red.

"Your own premises!" he howled. "Since when, I'd like to know? You call these your own premises? Why, my young lady, you are only living here on sufferance!"

"Then she shall live on your bounty no longer," cried Carlton, starting forward. But Eulalie stepped before him.

"Wait," she said in a resolute voice. "This is my quarrel!"

But Hill glowered at Carlton.

"You!" he hissed. "Who are you, I'd like to know, that you trespass here? Leave this plantation now, or I'll call my niggers to put you off it."

Carlton never moved a muscle, but his blue eyes gazed straight at Hill as he said very quietly:

"I shall remain."

"You will, eh?" hissed Hill. "Then I'll throw you out myself!"

"No, you won't, Barton Hill," cried Eulalie in a ringing voice. "The plantation is not yours, and you have no right to dictate who shall or shall not stay here. Mr. Carlton is my guest."

"The plantation is mine," cried the now infuriated villain madly. "Stand away, you hussy, or you'll get hurt. There, take that!"

Rudely Hill pushed her aside. She slipped and fell upon the floor of the piazza.

What followed was swift and thrilling.

Carlton saw nothing but the insult to the girl he loved; felt nothing but a deadly purpose of vengeance, and acted with swift suddenness and fury.

Hill had hurled himself upon his more slender antagonist.

But Carlton, though slight, was supple and muscular. He met his foe with his good right fist full and fair in the face.

It staggered Hill for an instant, and a howling curse escaped him. Then he made another terrific onslaught.

But Carlton showed more science. Blows were swiftly and hotly exchanged.

The detectives stood ready to interfere should Carlton stand in danger. Otherwise they were disposed to let matters take their own course.

And thus the battle progressed fiercely for some moments.

Then suddenly Carlton rushed in under his adversary's guard, and the next moment Hill went over the piazza rail and crashing down into the shrubbery.

Then very coolly Carlton turned and assisted Eulalie to arise.

All had occurred in a very brief space of time.

In fact, the detectives had only just gained the piazza. Hill, with difficulty, scrambled out of the shrubbery.

He was bruised and bleeding, and in a tempest of rage. But Carlton and Eulalie had disappeared in the house, and the detectives did their best to pacify the villain.

He raved and cursed and threatened dire things. But the detectives finally got him calmed down.

"Never mind!" said Old King Brady. "He got the best of you this time. But you'll even it up in a better way."

"I'll have his life," howled Hill. "If he has a spark of Southern honor he'll fight me."

"Well, we'll arrange that later," said Old King Brady. "We didn't come out here to get into a fight."

This seemed to sober Hill.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I seem to forget that I am your host. I will be remiss no more."

With this he led the way to the door.

"Enter!" he said. "I'll order some bottles of port at once. Make yourselves easy!"

The detectives were shown into an elegantly furnished room.

Judge Benton's house was the finest in the region about.

The old judge was of the real Southern aristocracy and dispensed hospitality with a lavish hand.

Since his death Hill had dared to assume many rights about the place.

Eulalie had made no attempt to balk him, though her friends had repeatedly advised her to.

"He is my cousin," she said. "So long as he does not go too far I do not wish to interfere. It would be my father's wish."

So nothing more could be said or done.

And Hill availed himself readily of his privilege.

He ordered the best wines, domineered the servants and made chaos about the place.

So, on the present occasion, he took possession of the best room in the house to entertain his guests.

Wine and cigars were brought, and Hill settled himself down to an evening of dissipation and excess.

The detectives pretended to drink and made the conversation as bon camarade as they could.

All the while they kept inserting the wedge which they hoped would divulge a valuable bit of evidence.

From one subject to another they skilfully led the villain.

But they did not succeed in getting at the main fact.

Either Hill was too shrewd or he did not really know any details of the mysterious crime.

There were times when the detectives felt as if they were pursuing an ignis fatuus or will-o'-the-wisp.

But after a question adroitly put by Old King Brady, Hill thumped the table and said:

"Maybe my uncle was not murdered, but he's dead anyway, and where nobody will ever find his body."

"Where is that?" asked the detective with great suddenness, but apparent carelessness.

CHAPTER III.

A GAME OF CARDS.

In an instant Hill's jaws snapped together and his face assumed a curious grayish pallor.

He flashed a sullen half-distrustful glance at the detectives.

"I don't know," he snapped. "How do you suppose I do?"

Old King Brady opened his eyes wider and looked at Hill idly.

"I don't suppose anything about it," he said. "I didn't assume that you did know."

"If you knew you'd make it public pretty quick," said Harry.

Hill forced a laugh.

"Of course I would," he said. "But here, have another glass of liquor."

Again they drank.

Then Hill sang a ribald song.

"New Orleans is a warm place," he cried. "Curse the plantation! I hate 'em!"

"Same here!" cried Harry. "Here's success to my Creole sweetheart."

"Done!" cried Hill eagerly. "And many times over!"

Then the villain fell to dilating upon the pleasures of a fast life in the city.

"Humph!" said Old King Brady. "New Orleans is but a village compared with Chicago or New York."

"New York!" ejaculated Hill. "That's where I'm going when I get——" he paused and again shot a furtive glance at the detectives.

Mumbling incoherently he poured out another glass of liquor.

Then an unlooked-for thing occurred.

A faint tapping sound was heard on the window glass.

In an instant Hill was upon his feet.

"Jericho!" he exclaimed wildly. "What is that?"

He pointed to the window.

The detectives looked and they also gave a start.

There, against the glass, was pressed a face, most repulsive and leering.

It was dark and swarthy, and of a negro type.

For a moment the detectives were startled. But Hill seemed to recognize the owner of the visage, for he shouted:

"Come in, for the love of heaven! Don't be afraid. It's all safe!"

Then the face disappeared.

The next moment a footstep was heard in the hall, and then into the room walked a man of the Creole type.

He was flashily dressed, with a suit of plaid, patent leather shoes, a flashy tie and a silk hat.

He bowed profusely and grinned in a demoniac fashion.

"Well, Creole Jack!" cried Hill with a coarse oath, "what do you mean by hanging about a man's place like this? What do you want here?"

The Creole sport, for such he was, grinned again and replied:

"There won't be much to steal on this place, I reckon, after you've had it a while!"

"What's that, you yellow devil!" roared Hill. "Don't get me mad!"

"You'd only have the job of getting glad again," said the Creole sport.

"You like to joke, don't you?"

"So do you, but you can't take one," declared Creole Jack.

"Well, let it go at that," growled Hill. "Let me introduce you to a couple of my friends."

Creole Jack bowed and scraped, and the detectives did the same. Then all sat down to the table.

Wine flowed again.

The detectives at once sized Creole Jack up with ease.

They recognized in him a type of shrewd, cut-throat, devil-may-care fellow, such as made their living around the levees and on board the river steamers in sharp practice and tricky games.

In short, he was a villain who was always to be bought for money.

That he was some sort of a tool or accomplice of Hill's, there was no doubt. The latter had a hold upon him.

Creole Jack had evidently come up from New Orleans to see Hill upon some important and secret matter.

The Bradys were curious to know what this was.

They gathered something from remarks and terms thrown out by both villains. But this was not enough.

After some while Hill proposed a game of cards.

"We've got to do something to kill time!" he cried. "And I'm tired of doing nothing but guzzle wine."

"Hit up the cards then," cried Old King Brady. "We're with you."

Creole Jack drew a pack from his waistcoat pocket and threw them on the table.

Then the game began.

Of course it was draw-poker.

No other game is played in the South. The hands were dealt and play began.

For a time the stakes were moderate, and the luck varied.

Then Creole Jack placed his cards face down on the table and said:

"I have a hand that I will bet one hundred dollars on."

"Call me out of it," said Harry.

Old King Brady looked shrewdly at the Creole. Then he looked at Hill.

The latter's wine-flushed face grew a deeper red. He slowly placed his own cards face down on the table.

"I'll stay in," he said.

Old King Brady studied his hand.

"Well, neighbor," asked Creole Jack, "what do you say?"

The old detective slowly, one by one, placed his cards face down on the table.

"I'll go one hundred better," he said.

This acted like an electrical shock upon the others.

They were startled.

"Eh!" ejaculated Hill. "One hundred dollars better?"

"So I said," declared Old King Brady.

"You must have a good hand."

"Pay the price and you shall see it."

"You are bluffing!"

"That remains to be seen!"

Creole Jack's snaky eyes had been searching Old King Brady's face critically. Now he drew a deep breath.

"I will see the gentleman and go him fifty more," he said.

"Done, and fifty better," said Old King Brady quietly.

Hill smiled in a sickly way and said:

"I throw up my hand!"

Creole Jack averted his gaze and placed a roll of bills on the table.

"I will raise the wager fifty," he said.

"Done, and fifty better!" said the old detective, coolly.

"Fifty more!"

"Fifty again!"

"One hundred!"

"One hundred better yet!"

Creole Jack stopped.

Again his snaky eyes sought the old detective's face.

It was plain that he was startled, as well as uneasy.

"Humph!" he said. "You are playing a steady hand, friend. I can tell you that I am not bluffing."

"Nor am I!" said Old King Brady, quietly.

"Well, I will call you!"

"Very good!"

"What have you got?"

"Four aces!"

At the same moment Creole Jack had thrown his own hand onto the table. It also contained four aces.

It was an astounding moment.

Hill started forward with bulging eyes, staring from one to the other.

"Jericho!" he gasped. "Eight aces in one pack of cards! What do ye make of that?"

For a moment Creole Jack's face turned a sickly gray.

Then the spirit of bravado manifested itself and he cried:

"It's a crooked game, that's what I make of it. The money is mine!"

But Old King Brady's heavy hand went down upon the table.

"No," he said coolly, "not yet!"

"Eh?" blustered Creole Jack. "I drew my cards all straight!"

"We'll see about that," said the old detective. "I don't accuse anybody of cheating, nor you don't want to accuse me. See?"

The detective's steely gaze transfixed the villain.

He at once relinquished his air of bravado. Then he began to whine.

"I drew my cards straight. I ought to have a chance for my money!"

"You'll have all the chance that's coming to you," said Old King Brady.

"But how can there be eight aces in a pack without cheating?" asked Hill.

"That we'll presently find out," replied the detective. "It may have been all a mistake."

"A mistake?"

"Yes. Two packs may have become mixed. The cards, I believe, are yours!" to Creole Jack.

The Creole sport winced.

"Yes!" he said. "They are mine. But they were all straight when I put them on the table."

"Yes; no doubt," said the detective, carelessly. "Have you more than one pack like this?"

Creole Jack's eyes blazed.

"Looky here!" he flashed. "Do you mean to accuse me of cheating?"

"Never mind what I mean," said Old King Brady with another steely gaze. "If you will answer my question we'll soon solve the riddle."

"I reckon I'll have my money out of this," said Hill.

"It's a crooked job. Why don't ye answer, Jack?"

The Creole saw that he was cornered. Bravado was of no use. Subterfuge was plainly exhausted.

He fumbled in his pocket.

"Y-yes," he declared, "I have two packs of cards like these. Perhaps they did get mixed. Quite natural mistake."

Old King Brady bowed suavely.

"Yes, very much so," he declared with irony. "It is easy to make a mistake of that kind. Now, the best thing is to declare the bets off."

"Correct!" cried Hill, reaching for his money.

Dismay and chagrin were stamped on the features of Creole Jack. But he could interpose no objection. He was trapped.

So the game ended.

Then more wine was indulged in.

The hour had waxed late.

Hill yawned and said:

"I believe I will go to bed. I am tired, and I must get that New Orleans train in the morning."

"I think we will also retire," said Old King Brady, "if you will show us our room, Mr. Hill."

"All right, friends," declared Hill, as he touched a bell.

A colored servant appeared.

Then the detectives were shown to a sleeping chamber.

The door was closed and they were left alone.

But not to sleep.

There was work for them to do.

They knew full well that the two villains, Hill and Creole Jack, had some important business to discuss.

What this was the detectives were anxious to know. Old King Brady was fully resolved to ascertain, if such a thing was within human possibility.

CHAPTER IV.

AT BENTON PLANTATION.

"Well," whispered Young King Brady, once they were in the room, "what do you think of it?"

"Things are working slow," said the old detective.

"Yes."

"But results are not far distant."

"You believe it?"

"I do!"

"You are more sanguine than I am," said the young detective. "I don't think we have gained an inch."

"Perhaps not," said Old King Brady, "but I can't see it that way."

The two detectives did not always agree.

Young King Brady had his ideas of a case, and he was of just the disposition to stand for them.

But they never quarreled.

Indeed, Old King Brady rather admired this trait in his young protege.

"He has a mind of his own," he would say with a chuckle, "and that is a good thing. He will succeed."

They now fell to making deductions.

Old King Brady felt sure that Creole Jack was concerned in the mystery.

He was no doubt an accomplice and hired tool of Hill.

Time passed, and finally the detectives decided to make a move.

They listened at the door, and then, making sure no one was outside, lightly lifted the latch.

They crept softly out into the hall.

A few feet away was the landing of the stairway. Below a light glimmered and the faint sound of voices was heard.

The detectives listened.

They were accorded a surprise.

The voices were those of a man and woman. Old King Brady motioned to Harry, and together they crept down the staircase.

In a few moments they had reached the bottom. To the right was the parlor. Here a light burned.

The library, on the other side, was dark. It was evident that Creole Jack had taken his departure.

The detectives could now hear every word spoken.

They distinguished Hill's voice, and it was thick and heavy. The other voice belonged to Eulalie Benton.

"I know that you are my cousin," she was saying, "and my father always felt bound to look out for you, and if he were alive he would wish me to be kind to you."

"Of course he would," agreed the young reprobate. "You've got that all straight. Now, why don't you agree to still more sense and marry me?"

"I have answered that question many times, Barton."

"Well?"

"I do not love you."

A curse dropped from Barton's lips.

"No!" he gritted. "Because you are stuck on that little whipper-snapper of a Carlton, curse him! I'll kill him!"

"I advise you to use different language in my presence, Barton. I object to such profanity."

"Oh, you do, eh? Mighty fine, aren't you? I suppose your lover teaches you that. Now, I'll tell you that he'll never have you!"

"I wish you would talk different."

"Not until you consent to be my wife."

"I will never consent!"

"You will not?"

"No!"

"Confound you for a headstrong fool!" gritted Hill. "Then I'll tell you this: Not a cent of your father's property will you get. I will see you starving in the gutter. My hand will always be turned against you, and I will never cease to persecute you to the death. You choose between such a fate and the happiness of becoming my wife!"

There was an instant of silence.

Then Eulalie Benton's clear, firm voice rang out fearlessly:

"Barton Hill!" she said, almost accusingly, "before you threaten me it might be well for you to realize where you stand."

"What do you mean?" hissed the villain.

"You are blind or you would see the turn of sentiment against you in this part of the country."

"Explain yourself!"

"I will. Know that there are men of wisdom and experience who are inclined to the suspicion that you are connected with and at least partly responsible for my father's disappearance."

A hissing, gasping cry escaped Hill.

Then he leaned forward and said:

"What reason have they for thinking such a thing?"

"Circumstances have pointed that way. It is deemed suspicious that he was last seen in your company. Significance is attached to the fact that his private desk was rifled of important papers and a will which everybody believes is forged was found there; a will which cut off his own daughter and left his property to you."

This startling statement, which was really almost an actual accusation, had a thrilling effect upon Hill.

For a moment he seemed to cower as if with guilty fear.

Then fury and hatred shone in his eyes.

"And that is what they think," he gritted. "Well, let them think. That is all they can do. They have no proof!"

The young girl's voice rang with a strange intonation of grief, of accusation and of entreaty as she cried:

"Oh, Barton, if you know anything of papa's fate, I beg of you do not withhold it from me. Let me know if he is alive or dead, or my heart will break!"

"I let you know?" exclaimed the young reprobate scorn-

fully. "Well, I like that. What should I know about him. Oh, by the way, a question!"

"Well?"

"If I should find your father and bring him back to you—alive—would you marry me?"

For a moment there was a dead silence. A queer, hushed cry came from the young girl's lips.

She was struggling with herself. She was trying to weigh the sacrifice. It resulted in victory for her better sense.

"My father would never consent to such a thing," she said. "It is a monstrous sacrifice, and I would rather die with him than yield my life to you."

A frightful volley of curses escaped Hill.

"Well, you are the most perverse fool I ever knew," he cried. "I can do nothing with you. To-morrow I'll have you turned out of this place."

"You cannot do that!"

"Why?"

"Because I am mistress here!"

"Indeed! How so?"

"That false will cannot be probated, and you have no power here until it is. My father's body has not yet been found."

"Ah!" said the villain with sinister force, "but it will be, and very soon!"

"Do you know, then, where it is?" asked the young girl sharply.

"I make no admission!"

"Barton Hill, you are a villain and a murderer! To-morrow you shall leave this plantation and never dare to return. I need only say it is for your safety. Detectives are already on your track!"

Hill laughed scornfully.

"Oh, you can't prove me a criminal," he cried. "But have no fears, ma petite. I leave here to-morrow for New Orleans. When I return you will gladly beg at my knees for my favor. That will be my victory!"

Hill walked out of the room.

He passed close by the detectives in the gloom.

Up the stairs he went.

As nothing more was to be gained by remaining where they were, the detectives awaited an opportunity to creep upstairs and go to bed.

They were soon in the arms of Morpheus, for both were tired and not sorry for the chance to rest.

The next morning Hill arose quite sobered off. He met his guests, though, in a half surly way.

He was of the kind to show any depression or the effects of disappointment, and it was easy to see that matters had gone wrong with him.

However, after breakfast he grew more cheerful, and a bottle of wine added to this.

They were prompt at the train and soon on their way to New Orleans.

Young King Brady ventured to ask after Creole Jack.

But Hill only scowled.

"I don't know where he is!" he growled. "He went off in a huff after you went upstairs last night. Let him go. I have a poor opinion of him, anyway."

"He didn't appear to me to be a fellow of very great depth," said Old King Brady. "I shouldn't care to trust him with any very great secret."

Hill gave an involuntary start.

"Eh?" he asked sharply. "Have you that opinion?"

"Well, yes; rather," replied the detective. "I may be wrong."

"You are!" declared Hill decidedly. "Jack is all right on a secret."

"Did you ever try him?"

"Eh?"

"I beg pardon!"

"No, I never did," replied Hill tartly. "I keep my secrets to myself."

But plainer than words was all this to the detectives. They were positive now that these two villains were in collusion.

They had a secret between them.

This secret was Hill's.

Creole Jack was his tool.

He was hired and paid. This was circumstantial evidence that a crime of some kind had been committed.

Weighing carefully the conversation indulged in by Eulalie and Hill in the parlor, deductions were easily made.

The Bradys were sure they had the right man now.

There was no manner of doubt that Hill and Creole Jack were concerned in the disappearance of Judge Benton.

They might even be his murderers.

The train rolled on toward New Orleans. In due time that city was reached.

The party alighted and at once went to a hotel.

They registered and went down to dinner. After this the detectives went out, ostensibly on business, agreeing to meet Hill that evening, when it was proposed to visit some gaming joints.

But the detectives did not go far from the hotel.

In an unobserved place they changed their disguises and at once began to shadow Hill.

The villain lounged about the hotel until after two o'clock.

Then he emerged upon the street with a cigar in the corner of his mouth.

The detectives were instantly on his trail.

Like silent sleuths they followed him down the crowded street.

Past the square and its gardens they tracked him.

Before a quaint brick building the villain suddenly paused.

He looked up at the windows above and then darted up a narrow stairway. For a moment the detectives were nonplussed and undecided what to do.

CHAPTER V.

SHADOWING A CRIMINAL.

Then the Bradys noticed a sign which was over the stairway.

Thus it read :

"Baxter Gray. Attorney-at-Law."

The name was familiar to them.

They knew that it was the name of the lawyer who had drawn up the strange will for Judge Benton.

"What do you think of it?" asked Young King Brady.

"It looks queer."

"I should say so!"

"He has probably gone up there to see the lawyer."

"I believe there is crooked work between them."

"There can be no doubt of it. If we can only prove it, then half the battle is won."

"Certainly!"

This was very true, for a motive for the deed could be easily shown. So the detectives decided to adopt the best measures they could to find out what was going on between the two rascals.

It was an easy matter to enter the place.

They crept up the stairs.

Near the landing was a glass door. On it was printed :

"Baxter Gray's Office."

Voices were heard faintly beyond.

The detectives tried to listen.

They became assured that the voices were those of Hill and the lawyer.

But they could not distinguish what was being said, which was a great disappointment.

But the Bradys were not to be so easily defeated.

They looked along the corridor for another entrance to the office.

But there was none.

At the end of the corridor, however, was a window which looked out into a court.

Under this window was the roof of a ramshackle piazza. This piazza extended along under the rear window of the office.

This window, as most all windows in this warm climate are, was open. It was protected by a bit of screen cloth.

Old King Brady looked about the court and scanned the other windows.

Nobody was in sight.

"Now, Harry," he whispered, "I'm going out there. I don't know whether this piazza will hold me or not."

"I think it will."

"I shall try it."

With this the old detective crept out on the piazza and along until under the window.

As chance had it, the two men were near the window.

Every word they uttered could be plainly heard by Old King Brady.

"That's all right," the squeaky voice of the lawyer was heard. "But the law reads different. I tell ye ye've got to go by the law. I know. I'm an older man than you, and you can't fool me."

"Well," snapped Hill, "let it go at that, then. But we've got to do something or we'll never get that will probated."

"It will come in time."

"Yes, but life is short. I want the money, and I want to turn that girl out of there this week."

"You can't do it."

Hill uttered a volley of curses.

"Well, what shall we do?"

Baxter Gray whistled shrewdly.

"There's just one thing," he said.

"What?"

"Find the old man's body. That will settle everything."

Hill was silent.

When he spoke again his voice was hoarse and excited :

"Well," he said, "I will try and do that. I think I can, too."

"Do ye?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes!"

The detective was interested.

"Ah! have ye any idea where it is to be found?"

"I know where it was left!" asserted Hill in a thrilling voice.

Old King Brady's every nerve was on the alert. He now saw that every suspicion and every deduction was verified.

There was no further question.

He was satisfied.

The old lawyer rubbed his hands.

"That is very promising," he said. "It begins to look like a good case. If ye'll do that, I'll guarantee ye the property at once."

"It looks to me like the only move," declared Hill. "It was a blunder of Jack's in putting that other stiff in the cotton press. He ought to have thought of that lame leg."

"Of course he ought. By the way, has that body ever been identified?"

"No."

"Where did it come from?"

"Jack got it from Dud Smith, a hand on the levee. He found it in the water and kept it in pickle to sell to some medical students."

"Well, look here," said Gray, unfolding a newspaper. "Have you read this?"

"What is it?"

"Read it aloud."

Hill took the newspaper.

"In a monotone he read :

"No clew as yet to the missing passenger of the River Queen, James Harding, of St. Louis. His relatives are agonized and offer a large reward for tidings of him or his fate.

"It is assumed by the captain and deck hands that he fell overboard and was drowned, but the statement of Leo King, passenger in stateroom 30, and the discovery of blood on the deck near, has given color to the theory of foul play.

"King heard a scuffle and a cry of pain about midnight. He went out on deck to investigate, but saw nothing.

"Mr. Harding was a man of fifty years of age and slightly lame. His body, if found, should be easily identified."

Hill ceased reading.

"Well," asked Gray, "don't that answer the description of the man brought you by Creole Jack?"

"It does," agreed Hill.
 "So I thought."
 "But what's that to us?"
 "Just this: There's ten thousand reward for that body."
 Hill gave a mighty start.
 "Ten thousand reward?"
 "Just so."
 "Whew! that's a heap of money. Are you sure of that?"
 "I am."
 Hill sprang up.
 "We might as well have that," he cried. "I paid Jack fifty for the stiff. A good investment, eh?"
 "Yes, but you forget."
 "What?"
 "You had better let the body alone. Resurrecting it might lead to inquiry and involve you and all you have at stake."
 This was true.
 Hill knew it.
 Yet so consuming was the greediness of his nature that he could not abandon the hopes of getting the ten thousand.
 "Is there no way?" he asked. "I think there is."
 "It is not safe," adjured Gray. "Let that matter alone. If you get Benton Plantation you get enough. Be satisfied with a sure thing and let the other game alone."
 "Well," said Hill, reluctantly, "is this all you want to see me about to-day?"
 "No."
 "Ah! What else?"
 The lawyer drew some documents from his desk.
 "I want you to sign these," he said.
 Hill gave a violent start.
 "What are they?" he asked.
 "The articles of agreement."
 "What agreement?"
 "You are exasperating," said Gray. "What do you expect? Am I to take your word, simply, for all? I think not. Here is the agreement you must sign."
 The lawyer unfolded the document and read:

"These articles of agreement between Barton Hill of the first part and Baxter Gray of the second part do hereby——"

"Cut it short!" growled Hill. "What is the use of so much red tape?"

The lawyer read on imperturbably a long string of legal verbiage.

The substance was in brief an agreement between the two plotters that Gray should receive twenty-five thousand dollars for his legal services within one month of Hill's accession to Benton Plantation.

When the lawyer concluded the document he placed a red seal on it and said:

"Sign here."

At first Hill hesitated. But finally he sat down and signed the document.

Arising from his chair after this he started for the door.

"I don't know what that amounts to," he sneered. "You never would dare take it into court."

"I wouldn't?"
 "No."
 "And why, my dear sir?"
 "Why, it would show collusion in a criminal sense. The detectives would get onto the game at once."
 The lawyer laughed easily.
 "Permit me to know my business," he said craftily. "I believe that I know enough of law to regulate that. You need have no fear. I have done valuable work for you and I mean to have my pay."
 "Do you dare to insinuate that you will not get it?"
 "I insinuate nothing, but I insist upon having it, be sure of that."
 Hill laughed sneeringly.
 "All right!" he said. "If you want to be distrustful of me, you can."

"It is simply a matter of business. I never take any man's word. His signature he cannot go back on. That is all in black and white."

"All right!" agreed Hill, who was now at the door. "I'll see you later, old man. Just now I have some other business which claims my attention."

"One moment——" began the lawyer. Then he paused. From the window there came a crashing sound, and then the noise of breaking boards and timbers.

In an instant Gray and Hill rushed to the window and looked out.

The sight which met their gaze was both ludicrous and surprising.

The frail piazza, upon the roof of which Old King Brady had been lying, had given way.

Down it went, with the old detective entangled in the debris.

The fall did not hurt him, but the detective was for a moment unable to extricate himself.

And when he did succeed in doing so it was only to look up into the grinning and scornful faces of the villains above.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE LEVEE.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Hill. "Took a little tumble, eh? Who are you, and what are you doing out here?"

Baxter Gray, the lawyer, however, was disposed to take a more serious view of the matter.

His face paled a bit and he whispered:

"An eavesdropper! I'll wager he is a detective!"

"Nonsense!" rejoined Hill. "He looks more like a stevedore."

"That's all right, you fool!" hissed Gray. "He's probably in disguise."

This angered Hill.

He turned savagely.

"Don't you call me a fool!" he gritted. "If you do I'll make you sick and sorry."

"Tut! tut!" admonished the lawyer. "This is no time for quarreling."

Old King Brady did not lose his presence of mind.

He heard every word spoken above, and acted accordingly.

He feigned great lameness and cried:

"Sorry I disturbed ye, gents! That's a long fall from the roof and only for the piazza I'd have been killed."

"Oh," cried Hill, "it was from the roof you fell, then?"

"Sure!"

"I told you so, Gray!" rejoined the young reprobate. "It's all straight. Now, look here, you fellow; you'd better get out of here before the landlord comes along or he'll make you pay damages!"

"That's what I'm trying to do!" returned the detective, limping across the court. "I say, can't ye help a poor fellow along a little?"

Hill drew a half dollar from his pocket and flung it into the court.

"Here you are!" he cried. "Have a good drink on me!"

"Thank ye, sir," replied Old King Brady, scrambling for the coin with avidity.

He bit it with his teeth and started out of the court.

This seemed to settle the doubts of both Hill and Gray.

They disappeared from the window.

Meanwhile, Young King Brady had seen all from the other window.

He exchanged signals with the old detective. Then he made his way to the street.

The Bradys met there and the younger detective cried:

"Well, it was funny to see you take that fall!"

"It must have been!" laughed Old King Brady. "But did I not play my part well?"

"Indeed you did, and I really believe they suspect nothing."

"Nothing."

"What did you learn?"

"Very important facts."

"Well?"

"Hill and the lawyer are in collusion to beat Eulalie Benton out of her inheritance."

"The scamps!"

"More than that, they hint at the fact that Judge Benton's body is to be shortly produced."

"Ah! then the mystery is solved."

"But the case is not won!"

"No?"

"Of course not. You see, we alone are sure of the guilt of Hill and his colleagues. But our opinion is nothing in a court of law. We must have evidence."

"Correct!"

"That must be our purpose from now on."

"Certainly."

"And we can get it."

"It will surely come."

The detectives presently saw Hill emerge from Gray's office.

The villain's face wore a pleasant expression and he seemed perfectly satisfied with the situation.

He strolled on down the street toward the levee.

This was his destination.

To one who has never visited the New Orleans levees but a faint idea of the scenes there enacted can be portrayed by the pen.

It is a wonderful place.

The long lines of river steamers backed up to the river bank, with the piles of merchandise and cotton, the long procession of half-naked negroes and white men running up and down the planks loaded with the cargo, furnish an enlivening spectacle.

It is a busy spot.

The detectives followed their bird down to the levee.

Here Hill strolled about a while, then directed his footsteps toward a saloon on the other side of the levee.

Over its door was a sign.

Thus it read:

"Judy Sharp. Eating House."

"Meals at all Hours. Welcome."

An interpretation of the sign would give one the impression that "Aunt Judy's place," as the saloon was called, was a harmless enough resort.

But, to the initiated, "Aunt Judy's" was one of the most disreputable joints in the whole city of New Orleans.

It would be hard to imagine a more crooked place.

All the thugs and thieves of the levee congregated there at times.

Aunt Judy herself was a slick old fence and always outwitted the police.

She was a colored woman of fair appearance, with a knowledge of the world and a shrewdness that served her well.

It was hard for any crook in New Orleans to beat Aunt Judy.

If they saw fit to try it they were pretty sure to get the worst of it.

Into Aunt Judy's place it was that Hill now strolled.

It was evident that he knew of one joint in New Orleans all right.

The detectives drew near the place.

They were undecided just what move to make now, when Young King Brady clutched Old King Brady's arm.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "Do you see that?"

At this moment a tall, dark man came along the street.

He was flashily dressed.

There was no trouble in recognizing him all right.

It was Creole Jack.

The villain came slowly and jauntily along, swinging a cane.

He also turned into Aunt Judy's.

The detectives were now interested.

There was no means of knowing whether this was an intentional appointment or not.

Through the stained windows nothing could be seen of the interior of the place.

The Bradys did not hesitate long.

"I have an idea," said Harry.

"Well?"

"We are to meet Hill to-night in the guise of the cotton buyers."

"Yes."

"Let us assume that guise now and drop in on them."

"By accident?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

It did not take them long to carry out this plan.

In a very few moments they emerged from a dark doorway near as the two cotton buyers.

The detectives boldly opened the door of Judy's place and entered.

The outer room of Aunt Judy's place was a dingily furnished one. Beyond it were others.

There were tables and chairs, and one could procure cheap beer and vile whisky.

In the outer room a number of rough stevedores were engaged in conversation and drinking.

The detectives passed them by and entered the next room.

As they did so they heard a loud ejaculation, and someone behind him slapped Old King Brady on the shoulder.

"Hello! This is a surprise! Where did you fellows come from?"

Both detectives wheeled about.

It was Barton Hill.

Of course the detectives feigned delight.

"Well, this is luck!" cried Old King Brady. "I'm sure I am delighted and glad to see you, Hill!"

"Did you expect to find me here?"

"We just dropped in to see the place," said Old King Brady, evasively.

"Ah! that's right."

"What are you doing here?"

"Having a quiet time. Jack Cordley is in the next room.

"Ah! The Creole? The fellow who played poker with eight aces?"

Hill laughed.

"He's sore on that point," he said. "Don't say anything on that."

"All right."

"Won't you join us?"

"I guess we won't intrude."

An oath escaped Hill.

"Don't ye fear for that," he cried. "It will be our pleasure."

Old King Brady looked interrogatively at Harry.

The young detective took the cue.

"I am sure I shall be pleased," he said.

"We are yours!" declared Old King Brady. "Let me order champagne."

"Champagne!" gasped Hill. "Do you know what kind of a place this is?"

"Eh?"

"The old woman would have a fit if you asked her for such a thing. Beer will do."

"All right. Call it beer then," said the detective nonchalantly.

With this all entered the inner room.

Creole Jack sprang up and greeted the visitors cordially.

"I'm sure I'm glad to see you, gentlemen," he cried.

"It is a pleasure."

"I agree with you."

"Drink with me."

"It's my treat!" shouted Hill, touching a bell. "I insist!"

Instantly there appeared in the doorway a type of negro woman.

In appearance she did not differ materially from many of her class.

But her shifting white eyes and the repulsive leer always present on her face stamped her at once as a bad character.

She courtesied and whimpered:

"Ah, gentlemen, so pleased. Wha' kin I do fo' yo'?"

"Judy," said Hill, authoritatively, "I want ten bottles of the best beer. See?"

"Yas, suh!"

"Bring it at once!"

The colored woman vanished.

In a few moments she returned bearing a large tray.

She placed the bottles on the table. The Bradys looked surprised, but said nothing.

"Eh? How is this?" asked Creole Jack. "Do you expect us to drink all that beer, Hill?"

"What's the matter with it?" asked the young reprobate, breaking the neck of one of the bottles.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE SHAFT.

"Well," said the Creole with a laugh, "I think you must have a good idea of our capacity."

"That is only two bottles each," said Hill recklessly. "I can drink half a dozen myself."

The Bradys exchanged glances.

It was easy to see that young Hill's footsteps were very rapidly picking their way along the road to ruin.

The beer was drunk and a running conversation kept up.

The detectives kept their eyes and ears open.

It was not long before clues began to come thick and fast. Significant remarks which the villains never dreamed the detectives could understand were made.

They took note of all these. Thus several hours passed.

Then Hill arose and said:

"Gentlemen, I am very sorry, but Jack and I have an appointment this evening, and I fear we shall have to postpone that little card party."

"That is all right," said Old King Brady readily. "We have some important business on hand ourselves."

"Will you name a date when we shall meet you again?"

"That we will defer to you!"

"Say, then, a week from to-night."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

With this, all went out on the levee. It was fast growing dark.

The parting was quickly spoken. The detectives went one way and their birds the other.

But only for a moment.

The detectives were quickly again on the trail.

But Old King Brady drew a letter from his pocket.

"What is that?" asked Harry.

"I don't know, but I hope that it is very important."

"Ah! where did you get it?"

"Hill dropped it out of his pocket."

The detectives were interested.

They paused by an area lamp to read the letter.

Breaking the envelope open, Old King Brady saw a sheet of note paper. On it was written:

"MISTER HILL:

"I rite tu say that I hev kep watch at the pit an' I have not seen anythin' of yer man. Mebby hee is doune there, an' mebby hee is not. I think yu hed better cum out heer an' see about it. Yours trooly,

"DUD SMITH."

The Bradys were for a moment hardly less surprised than elated.

It seemed easy to them to guess at the meaning of this epistle.

"What do you make of it, Harry?" asked Old King Brady.

"I think it is easy."

"Well?"

"They have got somebody down in a pit where he can't get out. Dud Smith is paid for watching him."

"Just so."

"Now, who is he?"

"There is a possibility that he is no other than Judge Benton."

"In that case much is explained."

"Certainly."

The detectives thus made their deductions. They were satisfied that important developments were at hand.

So they continued to follow the two villains.

Hill and Creole Jack made their way along the street leading from the levee uptown.

In due time they reached the railroad station.

A train was waiting on the track. As Hill stepped up to buy the tickets Old King Brady, in disguise, was close behind him.

He noted the name of the station.

"Cypress Mines!"

When Hill had moved away, Old King Brady bought two tickets for the same place.

Hill and Creole Jack boarded the train.

The line of railroad was the same which ran to Hector, and Cypress Mines was only a station this side of there.

Out of the city the train rolled.

It was now rapidly growing dark.

It was plain that neither of the villains suspected that they were shadowed.

On through the night rushed the train.

Finally the guard shouted the arrival at Cypress Mines and the train stopped.

The detectives waited for the villains to get off the car; then they got off at the other end.

In the darkness they could easily follow them without being seen.

Cypress Mines was hardly a village. There were only a few shanties.

Here were once in operation a number of coal shafts.

But they had been long since abandoned. Only a handful of poor whites now lived in the region.

That Hill and Creole Jack were bound for the mining shafts there was little doubt.

Beyond the limit of the village and into a rough path through the wilds the detectives shadowed their men.

After proceeding thus for fully two miles Hill paused and blew a shrill whistle.

It was at once answered from a point on the hillside above.

Then down through the darkness came the rays of a lantern.

The bearer came up rapidly and called out in negro vernacular:

"Hi, dar! Am dat yo', Marse Hill?"

"It's me, Dud," returned Hill. "You were expecting us?"

"Yas, suh."

"What is new?"

"Nuffin', suh. Jes' de same. But cla'r to goodness, I done believe dat man hab got out ob dat shaft."

Hill cursed roundly.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Why, suh, a big nigger cum along here an' tole about a white man in de woods five miles norf ob heah. He done said he haid white ha'r an' whiskers, jes' like de jedge, suh."

"If he's got out, then the jig is up," said Creole Jack.

"I'm going to the old country."

Hill seemed much disturbed.

"Well, we'll find out," he said. "But it can't be. He couldn't climb up out of that shaft."

"Yah, but dat shaft may lead into anoder," said Dud.

"Correct!" cried Creole Jack. "That's where we lamed ourselves in not exploring the mine."

"But it can't be!" expostulated Hill.

"Oh, yes, it can be!" urged Creole Jack.

Now, it can be imagined that all this was very interesting conversation to the two detectives.

It was also a revelation.

The whole fiendish plot was revealed.

Judge Benton had been kidnapped and placed at the bottom of this deserted mine shaft, either to starve to death or to be kept a prisoner indefinitely.

This was the whole game.

But in some way he had escaped.

Old King Brady was for a moment tempted to step up and arrest the trio.

But on second thought he decided not to do so.

It would be better to give the rascals a little more rope.

Other developments were needed and were certainly in store.

So the Bradys still were content to remain inactive. Time showed the wisdom of this.

The villains discussed the situation for a while longer.

Then a rope was produced.

Dud Smith was lowered into the shaft. While he was gone Hill and Creole Jack indulged in a lively wrangle.

"It's a mismanaged affair from the first," growled Jack. "I tell you it will be the ruin of us."

"Perhaps you can tell how it ought to have been managed?"

"I can."

"How?"

"Dead men tell no tales."

"And murderers are hung."

"When they are caught!"

"Bah! they would never catch us. We are as safe as can be. For instance, there is the murderer of Jim Harding, of St. Louis. They haven't caught him yet."

Hill gave a start.

"I wonder if you know anything about that affair?" he asked.

Creole Jack dropped a curse.

"Eh?" he hissed. "What are you talking about? Do you mean that?"

"Easy!" said Hill, coolly. "Supposing it was so? It's nothing to me. I don't care a straw."

"Well, you needn't bank on its being so. See?"

"All right!"

At this moment a signal came from Dud down the shaft.

Hill leaned over the edge of the opening and yelled:

"Well, what is it?"

Dud shouted something which the detectives could not hear.

"He wants to come up," said Hill. "Pull on the rope, Jack."

The two villains laid hold of the rope.

They pulled hard.

The result was that presently Dud came up out of the shaft.

As soon as he gained terra firma and his breath he cried:

"It's all up!"

"What?" cried Hill.

"This shaft leads out through a sluice on the other side of the hill. There was just room for a man to crawl through."

The villains were aghast.

"And he is at large?"

"Yes, suh."

Hill indulged in a terrible groan.

"Then the game is up!" he said. "We are lost, Jack!"

"Just what I thought!" growled the Creole.

"Well, what's the use of kicking?"

"I say, gemmens," said Dud in a speculative way, "dat man must habe got out direckly arter you put him in dar."

"Probably as soon as daylight came to show him the way," said Jack.

"Well, now it 'pears to me dat was several weeks ago."

"Yes."

"De question is, whar hab de ole gemmen been all dis time?"

This created a sensation.

"That's so!" said Hill. "What do you make of that, Jack?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"He is probably lying low and giving us rope enough to hang ourselves with."

"Golly!" cried Dud, confidently, "I'se jes' foolish enough to beliebe, gemmen, dat de old fellah am dead."

"Dead?" gasped the villains.

CHAPTER VIII.

HILL GIVES UP THE GAME.

"Jes' as sho's youse bo'n!" declared the coon. "It am mah positive belief."

"What are your grounds?"

"Common sense, gemmen! It 'pears to me dat de ole jedge he neber hang around in de woods all dis time to gib yo' fellahs any mo' chaince."

Hill and Jack began to see fully the logic of this.

"Well," said Hill, "what further theory have you, Dud?"

"Jes' dis, frens," said Dud with conviction. "De ole jedge he mos' likely was pooty well played out when he git out ob de mine."

"Den he wander around, an', bein' a berry ole man, he mos' likely gib out or else fell in some swamp an' drowned."

Hill whistled.

"On my word, Dud," he cried, "that is the most logical explanation that has been given yet."

"I believe Dud may be right," said Creole Jack.

"Can we afford to take the chances?"

Jack shook his head.

"It looks dubious!" he said. "We can't afford to take many chances. I believe we had better investigate."

"How?"

"Make a search of this vicinity."

"We must wait here all night then."

"Why, of course."

"Well, let it go at that. I believe myself it is the best plan."

"Got any thing refreshing in your camp, Dud?"

"Only some corn whisky, gemmens."

"Well, let's have some," cried Hill. "I'm dry as a fish."

"Same here!" declared Jack.

Dud led the way with his lantern to a dilapidated little cabin in the side of the hill.

Here the party camped down.

The detectives were stumped.

They hardly knew what to do.

Overhead there were to be heard the dull mutterings of a storm.

They had no shelter.

If this was to break upon them the consequences might be unpleasant. Old King Brady shrugged his shoulders.

"We've got to get under cover somewhere, Harry," he whispered.

"That's right," agreed the young detective, "but where?"

"There is no doubt but these rascals will remain here all night. We might as well go back to the railroad station and wait till morning."

"All right."

"Come on, then."

The detectives slipped away in the gloom. Back to the railroad station they went.

Here they found access to an old freight shed.

They crept in under cover and prepared to spend the night there.

They had hardly done this when the storm broke.

It came on with frightful violence. The thunder and lightning was terrific.

Lying there in the shed they made many deductions of the case.

It seemed an eternity before the darkness finally wore away and daylight came.

The storm had spent itself and the day came on clear and bright.

With the first gray light the detectives crept out of their concealment.

They at once made their way back to the mining shaft.

To their dismay the place was abandoned. They were too late.

The birds had flown.

Certainly they had taken an early start. A startling question arose.

Had they taken the alarm?

The detectives hardly believed this, yet they at once set forth on the trail.

They crept cautiously over to the further side of the hill.

Here it was easy to find the sluice through which it was supposed that the prisoner had escaped.

The detectives followed it down to the edge of a swamp.

And here they were confronted by a dilemma.

The swamp extended over a large area. If the judge had wandered into this the chances were he had gone to his doom.

The detectives pursued their quest for hours.

They followed the verge of the swamp and reached the woods beyond.

On and on they went, but still not the slightest clew was found.

They were defeated.

The villains had slipped them.

What was to be done?

It looked as if it was necessary to begin the case all over again. They were much chagrined.

"I thought we were all right," said Old King Brady.

"But those fellows are slippery!"

"So indeed they are!"

"They have beaten us all right."

"And with ease."

"Sure!"

"Well, what shall we do?"

"Begin over."

The detectives went slowly back to the railroad station.

Darkness was fast coming on.

The only conclusion they could logically form was that the villains had changed their plans and perhaps gone back to New Orleans.

Old King Brady felt sure that they were in a panicky state of mind.

He was fully assured that they would not show a strong hand in New Orleans again.

He believed that Hill's game now was to get together what he could in a brief space of time and skip.

"Back to New Orleans!" declared Old King Brady. "That is our jump."

"Right!" cried Harry. "It will be the theatre of events now."

"I believe you."

The first train to the city had gone, however. The detectives were obliged to wait until long after noon.

This was bad.

But there was no help for it.

No other form of conveyance existed. There were impenetrable swamps between Cypress Mines and New Orleans.

The Bradys therefore chafed and fretted the time away until finally the train came.

Then they were not long in reaching New Orleans.

When the city was reached they at once began to search for the villains.

All the hotels were visited and all the likely places. But not a trace of them could be found.

They were not at Judy Sharp's, nor in any of the haunts on the levee.

All day the detectives pursued the quest in vain.

And three days passed thus.

The Bradys were wholly at sea. They could not find a clew.

Certainly Hill had the best of the situation. But at this stage of the game new developments transpired.

One day the New Orleans papers came out with a startling bit of news.

Thus the glaring captions read:

"A GREAT FORGERY.

"Thrilling discovery of the swindling of four New Orleans banks by the nephew of the missing Judge Benton. The total sum of the forgeries amounts to more than one hundred thousand dollars!"

More of this same sort followed. The effect of this upon the detectives was past description.

"Beaten!" cried Old King Brady. "We are fools, Harry! That young rascal has given us a bad deal!"

"Well, I should say so!"

"We are out of the case!"

"What do you think?"

"He is probably half way to Europe now. It is too late!"

"I don't see how he worked it!"

"But I do! It was the easiest thing in the world. He knew that the game was up for winning Eulalie, so he has given her up, scooped what he could and skipped."

"It is a tacit admission then of his guilt."

"Of course!"

"Then the case is out!"

"Sure!"

"The most we can do is to catch the young rascal!"

"If you can!"

"Well said!" agreed the older detective. "But there must be no such word as fail. We will succeed!"

"I hope so!"

"I know it!"

The detectives at once paid a visit to the different banks. The methods employed by Hill were of the simplest kind. He had simply forged his uncle's name to drafts and checks and deposited them to his own credit.

When the checks, which were all dated back, were presented they were paid and the money passed to Hill's account.

Then he drew out his money and that was the last known of him.

Whether Creole Jack had gone with him or not was not yet known. One thing was discovered.

He had not paid Baxter Gray.

The old pettifogger was dire in his resolution to get square with the deceptive young rascal.

"I have some evidence which I can adduce in court against him," he declared grimly. "I wait my chance!"

But inasmuch as Gray was even a bigger rascal himself, he got very little sympathy from anybody.

Then the detectives paid a visit to Eulalie at Hector.

The young girl received them warmly and said:

"No, I have had no news from father, and I know nothing as yet of his fate. I still cling to the hope that he is alive."

"So do we!" said Old King Brady. "But if alive and at large it would look as if he ought to return."

"Which he would do!"

"Well," said the old detective, "we shall hope for the best, Miss Benton!"

"And you will give me hope?"

"Yes!"

She was very effusive in her gratitude. The detectives took their leave.

Back to New Orleans they went.

There was not a clew to guide them as to the whereabouts of Barton Hill. He had vanished.

But Old King Brady separated from Harry one day and went down upon the levee.

The first place he dropped into was Aunt Judy Sharp's.

The old colored fence treated him with civility and brought him beer. After a while she said:

"Beg pardon, sah, but aren't you de gemman was in here wif Marse Hill a while ago?"

"Yes," replied Old King Brady.

"Den yo' am jes' de man I want to see," said Aunt Judy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING AT JUDY'S.

"What do you want to see me about?" asked the detective. "I paid my score the last time I was here."

"Dat am a'right, sah. I 'membah yo' well. But 'tain't nuffin ob dat kind."

"Ah, what is it?"

"Yo' know Marse Hill?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, he left word here that he wanted to see you, and if you dropped in to hold you."

"All right!" agreed the old detective. "Here I am!"

"I done reckon Marse Hill be here pooty quick now!"

"Well, I'll wait for him."

So Old King Brady proceeded to do.

But as it happened Hill did not show up at all.

Old King Brady sat around the gambling den waiting for clews.

Suddenly the door opened.

Two men came in.

One was a Creole. The other was a black man. It was not a question of gentleman and valet.

But yet there was a discrepancy in their manners and appearance. They were opposite types.

One was Creole Jack, slick and sleek as usual.

The other was Dud Smith.

Creole Jack was dressed in the height of fashion. Dud, however, wore the uniform of a freight handler.

As they entered both recognized Old King Brady as the pseudo cotton buyer. At once there was mutual recognition.

"Howdy, friends!" cried Old King Brady, heartily. "Sit down and have a beer with me."

Though the two crooks did not know it they had been shadowed to this very place.

At that moment outside the door was Young King Brady.

"I don't care if I do!" cried Creole Jack readily.

"Yo' kin count me in," said Dud.

The old detective was secretly surprised at the nerve of these rascals in appearing thus in public.

It was well known that their names had, within a week, been coupled with Hill's in the suspicion of a dark deal.

But they seemed oblivious of peril and utterly careless and free.

Aunt Judy came in with a black bottle and glasses.

Then Old King Brady passed cigars. The crooks drank beer and smoked.

Of course this was all conducive to conversation.

"Huh!" exclaimed Dud Smith. "I neber did see how fings am wukin' agin us fo' de las' two weeks!"

"Eh? Been playing in hard luck?" asked the detective.

"Yo' kin bet!"

"That's all right, Dud!" admonished Creole Jack. "Keep your mouth shut!"

"Yo' kin' bet I won't!" cried Dud stubbornly. "T'se jes' gwine to do some werry good advertising fo' dat Marse Barton Hill."

"What did he do to you?" asked Old King Brady.

"He did enuff, sah!"

"I thought he was a square man?"

"Square? So am de sun square. No, sah! He am de meanest traitor I eber had anyfing to do wif!"

"Same here!" agreed Creole Jack. "He gave us a dirty deal. But it won't do any good to talk about it, Dud!"

"Yo' hol' yo' hosses!" cried Dud. "I'se got a leetle story to tell yo'!"

"What is it?" asked Old King Brady with interest.

"Let's have it!" said Jack.

Dud leaned his elbows on the table and began.

But just at that moment Aunt Judy softly stepped into the room. Dud's words arrested her attention.

And as he went on with his narrative she expressed her surprise by raising her arms in a deprecatory way.

Creole Jack and Old King Brady listened attentively to the narrative of the black river hand.

They did not see Judy standing behind them with uplifted hands.

"Yo' kin see jes' wha' a fool dat chap hab made ob himself," went on Dud.

"He jes' done fo't de debbil was arter him and got skeered. But he was jes' skeered fo' nuffin!"

"Eh!" cried Creole Jack. "Do you know that fer a fact?"

Dud nodded vigorously.

"Yo' kin bet I does!" he declared. "I'se talkin' straight. Dat ole judge ain't dead, though, fo' all dat!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Old King Brady. "Do you know that?"

"Ob co'se I does!"

"Can you prove it?"

"Fo' a suttin' fac'."

"Look here," said Old King Brady. "If that's the case there will be money in it for us all. Why not take hold of it and restore the judge to his friends?"

"Where's the money?" asked Jack.

The same question was on Dud's lips.

"I think Eulalie Benton would give instantly fifty thousand dollars for the return of her father alive and well."

The two villains looked inscrutable.

"Yes, but they'd lynch us if they caught us."

"Den de money wouldn' do us no good," said Dud.

"It might assist your widow!" said Old King Brady. "You're bound to be hung anyway."

At first Dud's eyes flashed, but he instantly became genial again.

"Dat am a'right!" he said glibly. "I'se perfeckly willin'. Dere ain' nuffin so terrible about being hung nohow!"

All this while Aunt Judy had been listening intently. She seemed curiously interested.

But while she was thus engaged another eavesdropper appeared on the scene. Young King Brady became visible at the crack of the door.

"Wall," said Dud, with an indulgent grin, "I done reckon ah might tell you fellers if you'll never tell.

"I will keep it dark," said Old King Brady.

"Count me the same," said Creole Jack.

"Den I'se gwine to tell yo' dat man is a-goner!" said Dud, earnestly. "He's escaped eberything, but dis time I done fink he am done fo'."

"What do you mean?" cried Old King Brady. "Why don't you talk plain?"

"A'right!" agreed Dud. "Den heah goes. Yo' know dat de ole judge he done escape from de mine!"

"Yes!"

"Well, he jest made his way along de road out ob Hector. Pooty quick a fellow jump out ob de bushes an' skeer him. Den he puts on speed and goes on to de nex' town. De next day de doctors done found him away ober in the woods. He didn't know nuffin' nor where he belonged. He am jes' stark ravin' crazy. Dat what am de mattah. He am crazy!"

The effect of this upon the Bradys was most thrilling.

For a while they could not believe it.

But Dud had seemed to tell a straightforward story.

There was no reason to disbelieve it. But Old King Brady asked:

"Then the judge is alive?"

"He am, sah."

"Where is he now?"

"He am in de insane asylum, sah."

This was an astonishing revelation.

"Why have they not notified his friends?" asked the old detective.

"Ah, dat am de trouble. In de 'sylum dey don' know nuffin about who he am."

"But how did you know all about this?" asked Creole Jack in surprise.

"I done heerd tell about de old man foun' crazy in de woods an' I went over to de 'sylum to see him. I'se as sure as youse bo'n it am de judge."

"You are not mistaken?"

"Suttinly not!"

"Whew!" said Creole Jack, exchanging glances with Old King Brady. "Here is a go and no mistake!"

"I should say so!"

"Hill never would have skipped if he had known this."

"Poor old Benton! How dreadfully Eulalie will feel when she knows this. But it will be something for her to know that her father is alive."

Creole Jack's snaky eyes were turned full upon the detective.

There was surprise and something like distrust in them.

"Is that the way you look at it?" he asked. "I am thinking what an elegant opportunity to get that fifty thousand."

Dud Smith's eyes glittered.

"I am in dat deal," he said.

"Sure!" declared Creole Jack. "We are all in it."

"Of course we are," cried Old King Brady quickly. "Shall I go and see her?"

"If you will," said Jack.

"What is de mattah wif me being in dis deal also?" cried a sharp voice behind them.

With a startled thrill all turned and saw Aunt Judy, arms akimbo and regarding them with a shrewd smile and a cunning leer.

Of course a sensation was in order. The plotters were greatly taken aback.

Creole Jack's face contorted with fury and he sprang up.

"What are you doing here, you old hag?" he hissed.

"What right have you to listen to our talk?"

Aunt Judy laughed in a chuckling way.

"Jes' go easy, mah frien's," she said. "Yo' ain' got no bettah fren' dan Judy, an' yo' cudn't hab a wuss enemy."

"What do you mean?"

"I means bizness, strickly bizness. I allus likes to be in dese ere kin' ob jokes. I'se ready to help yo', but I wants mah pahnt ob dat fifty thousand."

"You're not in the game at all," cried Creole Jack. "You get out."

"Ain't I?" said the old fence, placing a hand on Dud's shoulder. "Ax dis gemman here."

The Creole stared at Smith.

"What is she talking about, Smith?" he asked.

The coon hung his head.

"Yo' kin see," said Judy, triumphantly. "All I need ter say is dat I know who killed Tim Harding, an' why his body was put in de cotton press at de Benton Plantation. Dat am all."

Creole Jack was aghast.

He saw the point.

"Great Cæsar!" he gasped. "Everybody will be in this game yet. Dud, you are a condemned fool!"

The river hand's eyes rolled.

"Mebby I is," he said. "But I reckon ah know mah business."

"Did you tell her all this?"

"Yo' kin bet I didn't!"

"How did she know it, then?"

Aunt Judy laughed in a croaking way. She held up a small black image.

"Dere am one way Judy finds out eberyting," she declared. "De voodoo am allus wif her, an' yo' kin bet yo' kain't beat dat."

Dud gave a wild cry of fear.

CHAPTER X.

THE COMPACT MADE.

It was really a voodoo charm which Judy held in her hand.

Among the New Orleans negroes the power of the voodoo is most intense.

It was plain that Judy was one of the best exponents of the dark art. Her name was a watchword among the superstitious black people.

It could be seen that Dud regarded her with fear.

There was no doubt but that he was completely under her thumb.

Both Old King Brady and Creole Jack saw this.

The latter therefore yielded.

"All right," he said. "You are in the ring, Judy. Sit down and we will now talk business."

The colored woman drew a chair up to the table.

Then the plotting began.

Old King Brady congratulated himself upon being a party to it.

"Now let's get down to business," said Creole Jack. "In a nutshell, the whole business is just this: Hill has skipped out with a hundred thousand. We've nothing more to do with him."

"Dat's it," agreed Dud.

"Now we are not especially under suspicion. The only man in the world who could incriminate us is in an insane asylum."

"I should say we were pretty safe," declared Old King Brady.

"You're right. We are sure to be winners if we don't lose our nerve."

"Yo' kin bet dis chile neber do dat," asserted Dud.

"Same here," declared the detective.

"Now for a plan."

"Aye?"

"I should say the best thing for us is to send a representative to see Miss Benton," said Creole Jack.

"A very good idea."

"If she will pay fifty thousand dollars for knowledge of the whereabouts of her father, dead or alive, that money is ours."

"Good."

"Yo' kin bet I'll shut up shop when I git mah share," said Judy.

"I'se gwine to New York when I git mine," said Dud.

"I'll be de only coon on de beach."

Old King Brady laughed.

"I'll bet you'll be a sport, Dud. You haven't got it yet, though."

Creole Jack gave a critical look at Old King Brady. There was just a shade of distrust in it.

He brought his hands down forcibly on the table and said:

"There's one thing about it. If any party to this deal shows the white feather it's all up with him."

Dud stared at him.

"Who' yo' mean?" he asked. "Yo' needn't be afraid ob me."

"Enough said," declared Jack, rising. "Now let's get down to business. Who's going to be the representative to see Miss Benton?"

"Huh!" exclaimed Dud. "I don' 'spec' she would take no stock in me."

"I will do it," said Old King Brady, quietly.

Creole Jack looked keenly at him.

"Is it all straight?" he asked.

"Of course it is."

"All right," said the Creole. "You know the terms. Get fifty thousand if you can. If you can't——"

"Get what I can."

"Yes."

"All right."

"Wait."

"Well?"

"I believe on the whole I'll go with you."

"With me?"

"Yes."

"Well, all right."

"It won't do any harm to send two representatives," said

Creole Jack with a queer grin. "Perhaps she would pay more attention to two of us. You understand?"

"All right."

Old King Brady understood at once what the villain was driving at.

He saw that he was suspected.

But he only smiled.

He still had the upper hand.

Young King Brady, listening at the door, had heard all.

He understood that his colleague had the inside track in a remarkable deal.

He now made haste to get out of the way.

He was satisfied to leave matters now to Old King Brady. And in this he was wise.

When the old detective and his two new-found friends emerged from Aunt Judy's it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

It was an hour's run on the cars out to Hector.

They decided to go there at once.

Dud would wait for them in the New Orleans depot.

If they were successful in making terms with Eulalie then he would lead them to the asylum and they would turn the missing Judge Benton over to his friends.

So the four o'clock train took the party out to Hector.

They found Eulalie at home.

She received them as utter strangers.

In a very guarded and politic way Old King Brady did the speaking.

"You have as yet received no clew as to the whereabouts of your father?" he asked.

"None whatever," she replied.

"Of course it would be a great joy to you to know that he is alive?"

An eager, hopeful cry escaped her lips.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, "you are not jesting. Tell me—is there hope?"

Old King Brady nodded slowly.

"Indeed there is," he said.

"Thank heaven!" she cried. "Oh, this is a happy hour. Tell me where he is that I may go to him."

"One moment, my dear young lady," said the old detective, quietly. "Of course our information is of value."

"To me—yes; the utmost."

"Then you will not refuse a slight reward?"

"Anything—any amount—only return my father to me safe and well."

She looked at the speaker with dilating eyes.

"What sum do you ask?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

There was a moment of silence. Then she said:

"You shall have the money."

Old King Brady turned to Creole Jack.

"It is settled," he said.

But the Creole pushed him aside.

"Not yet," he said.

He addressed Eulalie.

"We must have a full understanding," he said. "You shall be at a certain point with the money at a certain time."

"I understand," replied Eulalie, quietly.

"It is agreed?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said Creole Jack. "We will name to-morrow evening at nine at the railroad station when the train from New Orleans arrives. Your father will be with us."

A few moments later the two men were speeding back on their way to New Orleans.

Events had developed so rapidly and so unexpectedly that Old King Brady had hardly been able to decide upon a decisive plan of action.

He now tried to decide just what it was best to do.

This was by no means easy.

When New Orleans was finally reached Dud was found awaiting them. The coon rushed up to them eagerly and asked:

"Well, what have you learned?"

"It is all straight," replied Jack.

"Golly! An' we gits de fifty thousand?"

"Yes."

Dud turned a handspring.

"Dat am a'right," he cried. "De jedge am out here on de Terre Bonne Poor Farm, an' de authorities will be glad enuff to turn him ober to his relatives. We jes' go out dar an' git him."

"One moment," asked Jack.

"Well, sah?"

"Is he a violent patient?"

"What's dat?"

"Is he violent, or is he simply imbecile? If he is violent we can do nothing with him."

"Don' yo' be afraid," replied Dud. "He am all right. I tole yo' dat straight. He won't do no harm."

"Then he is simply imbecile. Oh, well, it's easy."

With this all repaired to Judy's to have a drink.

They spent the rest of the evening in the place.

Then they separated.

It was arranged to meet the next evening at the same place, Dud agreeing to bring Judge Benton with him.

They would take the evening train to Hector, deliver up their charge, and secure the reward.

Then it would be in order to skip.

So they separated to meet again at the appointed time. Old King Brady struck out for the lodgings which he and Young King Brady shared.

He reached them in due time. The young detective was not there.

But he had left a note.

Thus it read:

"Dear Partner—I heard the conversation in Judy Sharp's place and everything is all right. Go on with the game and I will be around to help you out. I have got track of the James Harding case, and I think Dud Smith is the murderer. I have also a clew to the hiding place of Hill. He has not gone abroad, but is lying low somewhere in Florida.

Yours hastily,

"HARRY BRADY."

Old King Brady was well satisfied with the contents of this note.

"That is all right," he reflected. "Harry knows all and will work with me. It ought to be easy to bag the game now."

Old King Brady with this turned in for a night's rest.

He slept soundly and arose the next morning much refreshed.

Young King Brady had not as yet shown up.

He was doubtless hot on Hill's trail. It was not impossible that he was far on the road to Florida.

Yet when Old King Brady remembered the wording of the message he could see that this could not well be so.

It would be safer to assume that he was yet in New Orleans.

However this was, the old detective knew that it would be of no use to look for him.

There was work enough of his own cut out for him, and this he proceeded to look after.

He set out in close disguise that morning. He had matured all his plans carefully and believed that the solution of the plantation case was a matter of but a few hours.

CHAPTER XI.

RESTORED TO FRIENDS.

Old King Brady decided to take the cars for the asylum in the adjoining town where Judge Benton was incarcerated.

It was a pauper asylum, for the town authorities had no knowledge of the character or identity of the judge.

They had not been able to learn his name or origin.

Consequently he was put in the pauper ward and might have remained there forever had it not been for Dud Smith.

The detective reached the asylum before noon.

He applied at the entrance and sent in his card for the superintendent.

That worthy soon appeared.

He was a thin-featured, spare-looking man, with stoop-shoulders and keen, ferret eyes.

His name was Simpkins.

"I am looking for a missing man," said Old King Brady. "I thought he might have come here!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Superintendent Simpkins; "was he sane?"

"He was when he left home."

"What was his name?"

"Judge Benton, of Hector."

"Humph! I reckon he ain't here. At least I don't think so."

"Well, now," said the detective, "I might as well say that this man left home in a sane condition. Circumstances might have driven him to insanity afterwards."

"Ah, that's different," agreed Simpkins. "Now I don't know Judge Benton, and don't believe you'll find him here.

However, you are welcome to come into the insane ward and look."

"Very well," agreed Old King Brady. "I will do so."

So the detective entered.

Simpkins showed him through the place. From one cell to another he went.

Maniacs of all types were there, men and women.

Finally the detective reached a cell which contained the object of his quest. A white-haired, patrician-looking old man was there.

It was Judge Benton.

He came up to the cell door with faltering tread and looked vacantly, childishly at the detective.

It was easy to see that his reason was gone.

"I want to find my way home," he said. "Can't you tell me the way home?"

"I think I can, my good sir," said Old King Brady.

The demented man stared at the detective and rubbed his brow furtively. Then he muttered something and pattered away across his cell.

It was sad, indeed, to think of the departure of this fine intellect which had departed its earthly tenement forever.

"Then you know him, do you?" asked the superintendent with interest.

"Indeed I do," replied Old King Brady.

"Who is he?"

"He is Judge Benton, of Hector."

"A relative?"

"Not exactly—a friend."

"Well, we shall be glad to establish his identity and have him taken off our hands."

"I will do that," agreed Old King Brady.

"At once?"

"Yes, this hour."

"Who are you?"

"I am James Brady, of New York."

"Ah! Well, Mr. Brady, if you will come into my office I think we can fix up the papers and you can take him away when you choose."

"Very well."

The detective entered the superintendent's office.

There he established his identity and made oath to that of the insane man's. The asylum keeper was satisfied.

The result was that an hour later Old King Brady left the asylum in the company of Judge Benton.

The imbecile man, without demur, followed the detective.

They walked quietly down to the railroad station of Terre Bonne and soon were on a train bound for New Orleans.

There they changed cars for Hector. It was a little after noon when they alighted in this little town.

The moment the imbecile judge alighted from the train he was recognized.

The excitement was intense.

People rushed from the waiting room and thronged the platforms with eager interest.

The return of the man whom all had long believed to be dead was indeed a surprise.

Like wildfire the news spread through the town.

Old King Brady, however, quickly hustled the judge into a carriage and drove at once to the plantation.

At the door he was met by Eulalie. The young girl, with a spasmodic cry of delight, rushed up and embraced her father.

It was indeed a joyful meeting and one which almost baffles description.

The young girl embraced the old man again and again, and wept upon his shoulder.

But he showed no emotion.

He seemed deeply puzzled, and though he was tender with her spoke no word of comprehension.

It was easy for Eulalie to understand that her father was now only an animate lump of clay.

His mind had departed.

That soul of tenderness and love of intelligence and comprehension was gone forever.

It could never be reclaimed.

In nearly every sense he was dead to her. Yet he was alive. It was his face, his figure, his own body.

Therefore she was satisfied. Her life should be devoted to him.

Thus she gayly reasoned, and was thankful for even this morsel of comfort. She thanked Old King Brady and said:

"You did not wait for me to bring you the fifty thousand dollars to the station as you proposed."

"No," replied the detective.

"Well, you shall have it here," said the young girl. "I cannot break my word."

She took from a table a small packet bound in paper. This she would have given to Old King Brady.

But he said:

"No, no, I cannot take your paper, Miss Benton. I am not the man you thought I was."

The young girl was astounded.

"What?" she asked. "Do you refuse such a sum?"

"It does not belong to me."

"To whom then?"

"To yourself."

"Bah, this is foolish sentiment. I promised the money to you. Here it is, and it is yours."

She thrust the packet forward, but Old King Brady pushed it gently aside.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Benton," he said, "but you are mistaken in me. I am not the man you thought me. I am one whose duty it is to save you from this mighty swindle."

"Swindle!" ejaculated the young girl.

"Yes, that is what it is, pure and simple. None of these birds whom I am shadowing shall have one cent from you. I have brought your father home, but that was my duty."

Eulalie was deeply surprised.

"Who are you?" she asked. "You are not like the most of men?"

"I am James Brady, detective," said Old King Brady.

"Mr. Brady, the detective?"

"Well, yes, if you please."

"Good. I have heard of you. But the question most important is the reason for your coming here with that

other man and asking me for fifty thousand dollars only to refuse it when earned."

"The man who was with me," said Old King Brady, "was one of the villains who were responsible for your father's strange disappearance."

Now Eulalie showed her intense surprise.

"Mercy!" she gasped. "Is that true?"

"It is."

"But why did you bring him here?"

"For a purpose which you will some time better understand. It was necessary to entrap him, and this was my only way."

"Well," said the young girl with a deep breath, "the ways of you detectives are past comprehension. But I can only say you have made me the happiest woman on earth."

"For which I am very glad," said the old detective, gallantly.

A few moments later he took his departure for New Orleans.

He ran back to the city on the next train.

By this time the telegraph had conveyed the news of Judge Benton's home-coming all over the country.

Newspaper extras were on the street and everybody was reading about the remarkable incident.

Old King Brady only smiled grimly.

Then when evening came, at the appointed hour, he dropped into Aunt Judy's.

The female crook's face was indicative of the keen disappointment she felt at the failure of their plans.

Creole Jack and Dud Smith soon came in with a dejected air.

Smith had been drinking and was in rather an ugly frame of mind.

"I don' see how in de mischief dey foun' out dat de jedge was at Terre Bonne," he said thickly.

"Who was it took him out of the asylum?" asked Creole Jack.

"Dey say dat it was a New York detective named Old King Brady."

"Humph!"

"I done fink we had bettah git out ob New Orleans jes' as spry as eber we kin."

"Well, I have my passage bought for 'Frisco," said Creole Jack coolly. "I'm going to Australia."

"Golly! I done wish ah haid de money to git to New York."

"I think I can take you to New York with me," said Old King Brady quietly.

Dud looked surprised.

"Eh!" he ejaculated. "Does yo' mean dat?"

"On the whole, though, I think I'll let you stay in New Orleans."

"Quit yo' jokin'," snapped Dud. "I jes' don' feel like foolin' a lily bit."

"Then you don't appreciate a joke?" asked the detective.

"No, sah, not dem kind."

"Supposing I become more serious, then, and declare that you shall remain in New Orleans whether you will or no."

"Props yo' fink I keer fo' dat?"

Smith leered at the detective. Then a malevolent light came into his eyes.

"Fo de lub of life," he gritted, "I done believe, Jack, dat dis cuss am our hoodoo. I don' see no use he has been to us so far. I ain' jes' suah he hab been in our intrust anyway."

Creole Jack blinked.

"I've been thinking that same thing, Dud," he said. "And if he is a traitor now's the time to settle him."

Both villains started up.

CHAPTER XII.

OFF THE SCENT.

Old King Brady saw that a crisis had come.

The villains suspected him.

It was of little use to play a further game of concealment now.

His best and only plan was to precipitate matters and seize the horns of the dilemma at once.

So he threw off the mask.

But first he temporized.

He gazed steadily at the villains and said:

"What are you chaps talking about?"

"We'll show you," hissed Cordley. "I believe you're a snake in the grass."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes."

"What are your reasons?"

"The best. In the first place, how did that detective know where Judge Benton was?"

"Well, you take the cake," said Old King Brady, coolly.

"How should I know?"

"Did you tell him?"

"No!"

"Did you tell anybody?"

"No!"

For a moment the Creole crook was inclined to waver.

But Dud Smith cried:

"Ob co'se he'd deny it, Jack."

"Of course," said the Creole, slowly. "Stay there by the door, Dud. He ain't going out of here alive until he proves that he is straight."

Old King Brady laughed.

He struck a match and proceeded to light a cheroot.

"Well, you fellows are soft," he said.

"I think we must be," said Creole Jack, insinuatingly.

"But we are getting over it. Now tell us where you were all day yesterday."

"That's my affair."

"It's ours too."

"Where were you?"

"Answer my question first."

"I decline."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then your guilt is proven," said Creole Jack in an ugly way, pulling a dirk knife from his pocket. "Confess that you are a traitor."

"If I am I am not a fool," said Old King Brady quietly. "Put up that knife."

Creole Jack crouched like a panther. Fury, hate and fear shone in his eyes.

In another moment he would have sprung upon the detective.

But Old King Brady's hand came up from under the table.

The barrel of a gleaming revolver looked straight into the villain's face.

For a moment Creole Jack was stupefied. His lithe figure quivered and shook and he seemed inclined to leap forward.

But the steely light in Old King Brady's eyes and the deadly muzzle of the revolver held him.

He did not dare it.

Then his swarthy face changed to a deeper and more sickly yellow.

Dud Smith was scarcely less surprised than his colleague.

The coon had bolted the door.

He now made a move to unbolt it. But Old King Brady's cold voice said in chilling accents:

"Nigger, I'm a dead shot, and I'll cut your wrist off with a bullet if you touch that door."

Dud was a natural coward.

He shrank back tremblingly.

"Who are you?" asked Creole Jack in a sickly way.

"Me?" said Old King Brady, nonchalantly. "Well, I am James Brady, of New York."

"Old King Brady?"

"I am called that."

"The jig is up," said Creole Jack, helplessly. "I say, why didn't you pinch Hill? He's the ringleader."

"My partner is on his track all right," replied Old King Brady.

"Young King Brady?"

"Yes."

"You Bradys are devils."

"No, we are only men. But here, Smith, come up here."

Dud advanced tremblingly to the table. Old King Brady threw a pair of silver handcuffs toward him.

"Put one on your wrist and one on his," he said.

"Lively!"

Tremblingly Dud snapped the clasp on his wrist and then on Creole Jack's. The game was up.

Old King Brady put up his revolver.

He arose slowly.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "let us walk down to the police station. It is not very far."

At this moment Aunt Judy put her head in at the door.

She gave a startled exclamation.

"Ah, my good woman," said Old King Brady, coolly, "I might take you along. You are a criminal also, but not so deep in the mire as these fellows. I advise you to change your business."

"Massy Lordy!" gasped Judy, "wha' am de mattah?"

"It's all up, Judy," said Creole Jack explanatively. "We've been betrayed."

"Who am dat man?"

"He is a detective."

This was enough.

With a cry of alarm old Judy fled. An hour later it would have been hard to find her in New Orleans.

Old King Brady took his prisoners down to police headquarters.

He booked them as dangerous crooks and then had a long consultation with the chief of police.

The result was that they were held for a future hearing, which should depend on the result of the quest for Hill.

The arrest was to be held a secret until such time should come.

Then Old King Brady left.

He had now to start forth upon a new trail.

It looked as if the case was very rapidly nearing a solution. It was only necessary to secure Hill.

Then the whole gang would be rounded up.

There was already enough evidence to convict all, and the Benton Plantation case might be placed to the credit of the Bradys as a complete victory.

All this while Old King Brady knew nothing of the whereabouts or the doings of Young King Brady.

He simply knew that the young detective was on Hill's track.

Whether he had met with success or reverse, he had no means of knowing.

But he fancied that he might find word from the younger detective awaiting him at their lodgings.

So he went down there.

He was not disappointed.

Young King Brady had been there and left a message for him.

Thus it read:

"Dear Partner—No doubt you wonder what has become of me. I can say that I have tracked Hill to Memphis, and have learned his hiding place there. He is stopping at No. 54 N— street. By the time you get this I hope to have him safely in custody. I will bring him back to New Orleans with me if I succeed. Yours,

"HARRY BRADY."

The old detective was gratified.

"That is good," he muttered. "Harry will surely get his man and bring him back with him. That will end the case."

He went down to police headquarters and conferred with the chief.

Then he wrote a letter to New York to the Chief of the Secret Service.

He gave him a history of the case and spoke hopefully of the solution.

He looked anxiously for word from Harry at Memphis.

It came at last.

But it was not what the old detective had been looking for or expected.

Thus the letter read:

"Dear Old Partner—I have been badly fooled. In some way Hill got the alarm and skipped before I got here. It is my opinion that he has gone to Jacksonville, Florida, and means to skip to Europe or perhaps South America.

"I congratulate you upon your success in rounding up Jack and Dud. If you have nothing else to do come on to Jacksonville. You may be of assistance to me. Hoping to see you, I am, as ever,

"HARRY BRADY."

Old King Brady read this epistle with varying emotions. It did not take him long to make up his mind, however.

He sent a dispatch at once to the Carleton House at Jacksonville.

"Harry Brady—I will be in Jacksonville by the first train. Yours,

"JAMES BRADY."

It did not take Old King Brady long to get ready. He left New Orleans on an early train.

In due time he reached Jacksonville.

He went at once to the Carleton House. But Young King Brady was not there.

Of course the old detective was disappointed.

But he reckoned that the young detective was away on the scent of his bird.

So he went out to scour the city on his own account.

For two days he remained in Jacksonville on the constant lookout for his colleague.

But he did not succeed in getting a clew as to his whereabouts.

Thus matters were when one day a startling item in the paper caught his eye.

It gave him a thrill.

Thus it read:

"Thrilling escape of a prisoner from the New Orleans jail. This morning Turnkey Davis found that the occupant of cell 49 had sawed the bars of his window and dropped twenty-eight feet to the ground below and made his escape.

"Tremendous excitement was created by this revelation. All the officers of the institution were given an overhauling by the High Sheriff.

"For a long time corruption has been suspected in the jail. The climax has now been reached. The occupant of cell 49 was the noted negro criminal Dud Smith, suspected guilty of the murder of James Harding on the steamer River Queen. The case will be remembered by many of our readers."

Old King Brady was stunned by this bit of news.

It was certainly a setback to his plans. Dud Smith's escape was no light reverse of fortune.

"Humph!" he muttered. "I wish I could find Harry. I wonder he does not send some word to me."

The old detective was now at a loss to know just what to do.

The conviction was upon him that he ought to return to New Orleans and get on track of Dud Smith.

The negro would hardly be likely to go far from New Orleans, as he lacked money.

Somewhere in the swamps or wilds he would doubtless be found in hidin

CHAPTER XIII.

IN FLORIDA.

Young King Brady meanwhile had experienced most thrilling adventures.

He had tracked Hill carefully and most assiduously.

From New Orleans he had followed him to Memphis.

Alighting one day from the train in this beautiful Southern city the young detective had found that the villain had this time dropped from sight altogether.

The house to which he had intended to go was located just in the outskirts of the town.

Young King Brady visited this and found that the villain had been there.

But he had left.

Harry was just too late.

However, it did not take him long to get again on the scent.

Step by step he tracked him from one point to another, even as a hound tracks a deer.

Finally the scent led to the railroad station.

Here Harry found that the villain had bought a ticket to Jacksonville.

At once the young detective did the same. He boarded the fastest train and soon was speeding toward Florida.

In due time the train rolled into Jacksonville.

The young detective registered at the Carleton House. Then he wrote an explanatory letter to Old King Brady.

He searched the city for a clew.

He found it.

Down on the river wharves he found a negro who gave him valuable information.

"Yas, sah! I done reckon I kin tole yo' 'bout de man youse lookin' for," said Uncle Ebenezer.

"Good," said Young King Brady, pressing a dollar bill into the negro's hand. "Let's have your story. What did he look like?"

"He was tall and smooth-faced, sah."

"Yes."

"He had a curious funny way ob usin' his eyes, sah. Sorter sideways, I done reckon."

"Exactly."

Then Uncle Eben described Hill to a dead nicety.

Young King Brady was perfectly convinced that he was the man.

"Very good," he said. "What name did he give?"

"I done fink he call hissef Willis, sah. He done say he hab an orange grove at Middleburg on de Black Ribber."

"The Black River? Is not that a tributary of the St. John's?"

"It am, sah."

"Ah, Middleburg is a small town?"

"It am, sah."

"That is all. Can I get there by rail?"

"No, sah. Yo' jes' takes de little Black Ribber steamer, sah. It takes yo' right dar to Middleburg."

"All right."

As luck had it the Black River steamboat was at her wharf. She was to sail in an hour.

Young King Brady hung about the wharf. He made guarded inquiries of the deck hands of the steamer.

They gave him information which convinced him that Uncle Eben had indeed told the truth.

There was no doubt that Hill had gone down to Middleburg.

It was an obscure little town removed from the railroad and just the place for a man to remain hidden in.

The rascal believed that he had not been spotted and that he could remain safely an indefinite length of time there hidden.

When the coast was clear then he could emerge and make his way abroad with safety.

That he had the hundred thousand secured on the forged checks with him there was no doubt.

Those who gave Harry his information declared that Hill carried a large black bag.

Doubtless the money was in this.

To capture Hill and the money too at one blow would be a feat of which any detective should be proud.

Harry knew this.

He was determined to accomplish the deed.

In his earnestness he forgot all else. It did not occur to him that he should have sent word to Old King Brady of his whereabouts.

The young detective donned a clever and close disguise.

Then he boarded the Black River steamer. It was now afternoon, and the little boat was expected to reach its destination at dusk.

It dropped out into the dead water of the St. John's.

Throughout its entire course there is little or no current in this most remarkable of rivers.

Down the great river the little steamer paddled rapidly.

At length she turned into the mouth of the little river.

It was just dusk when she drew up at the Middleburg landing.

Young King Brady leisurely walked down the plank and up the shore. A large number of negroes and whites were collected there.

It was easy for him to find a lodging place for the night with one of the denizens of the place.

He sat out on the little double-decked piazza after his evening meal and smoked a pipe of good tobacco.

Presently some of the natives began to gather and drew near enough to essay a bit of social converse with the newcomer.

For in these little out-of-the-way towns strangers always excite the interest of the townspeople.

As a result Young King Brady soon had no trouble in drawing out some to him very important facts.

He was very guarded in this.

But he learned that there was another stranger in town. He was stopping out on the Geiger Plantation, and was, in fact, a boarder there. His name was Willis.

He was reputed to be from New York, and was in quest of health.

"It beats all. What a pow'ful heap of them Northerners have the consumption," said the landlord. "An' they don't none on 'em look like it, either."

"It is a very deceptive and insidious disease," said Harry.

"I agree with ye, stranger. We 'uns of the South know nothing of it, though."

"Well, your climate is too equable," said Young King Brady. "That is in your favor. You may consider yourselves very fortunate indeed."

"Yas, I reckon."

"Is this Mr. Willis very far gone with the disease?"

"Bless ye, no. Ye'd never know but he was right smart by the looks of him. I never seen a healthier lookin' man."

"Perhaps he's mistaken."

"Nope," asserted the landlord. "He's got it all right, and bad, too. Leastwise that is what he says."

"You say he is located out at Geiger's?"

"Yes."

"Any hunting out that way?"

"Plenty of it. Good quail shooting. Want to go out?"

"I think I'll get a gun and try my hand at it to-morrow."

"All right. I'll hitch up my horse an' take ye out if ye want to go."

"I will be glad to pay you well."

"Don't want no pay," asserted the fellow. "We Southerners don't do them sort of things for pay."

Young King Brady hastened to apologize, and at the same time to accept the landlord's offer.

That night he slept soundly. He felt sure of his game.

When morning came he was astir at an early hour. The landlord was on hand and had his team all ready.

Soon they were driving out across the sandy wastes and under the great pines on the way to Geiger's.

Young King Brady had borrowed a gun and some shells. All was ready for a good day's hunt.

Several times flocks of quail were flushed by the dogs, and the two sportsmen managed to shoot a few.

Thus they kept on until they finally reached a great cactus-bordered drive which led into the ground of a country estate.

Orange, pear, peach, persimmons and mulberry trees grew in profusion. The lemon and the shaddock lent fragrance to the air.

Geiger's was one of the finest plantations in this part of Florida.

Young King Brady was driven into the place by Smart, the landlord. As they came in sight of the piazza they saw a man sitting there.

He instantly disappeared in the house.

"That ain't Geiger," said Smart, in a puzzled way. He'd never do that. You Northerners have funny ways."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry in some surprise.

"Did ye see that fellow get up and go into the house? Now our people always come down and greet the stranger."

Harry could have explained this lack of courtesy had he seen fit to do so.

But he did not.

He knew that the discourteous occupant of the piazza was no other than Willis or Barton Hill.

The detective did not believe that Hill had recognized him.

Doubtless it was his desire to avoid all strangers, and surely this was discretion on his part.

Young King Brady felt a measure of self-satisfaction at his success in having at once tracked the villain to this out-of-the-way place.

Certainly he was entitled to much credit, for a more safe hiding place apparently could hardly be found.

The carriage rolled up to the door and Smart got out.

At this moment a man in white duck and wearing a wide Panama hat came out.

"Ah, Smart, how are you?" he cried cheerfully. "This is an honor."

"Howdy, Mr. Geiger," said Smart. "A right peart sort of a day."

"Very fine. Hitch your horse and come in. Or perhaps you will stay with me. I'll call Jeff to take your horse."

"I must beg to be excused," said Smart. "I only came out with my friend, Mr. Brown, here."

"Mr. Brown? Ah, glad to meet him."

The introduction was made. Mr. Geiger was all politeness.

"Come right in, Mr. Brown, and make yourself right at home," he cried. "The latchstring is always out at Geiger's."

"Any favors you can show Mr. Brown will be personally regarded," declared Smart.

"Your friend is mine," replied Geiger gallantly.

"He is looking for some hunting."

He couldn't strike a better place. The quail are flushing well. I have some good dogs and I am ready to try the sport at any time."

"Good!" cried Smart. "I'll leave you in the hands of my friend, Mr. Brown. I will call for you."

"Saturday," said Young King Brady.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY DOES SOME CLEVER WORK.

So much for Southern hospitality, which Harry knew well enough he had fallen in with.

So long as he was Smart's friend there were no privileges which he might not enjoy at Geiger's.

This is a spirit which still pertains to the South, and is not met with at all times in other parts of the country.

Young King Brady was at once made to feel quite at home in the place.

Geiger proved to be the most charming of hosts, and his wife a delightful hostess.

Besides, Geiger had two pretty daughters. These could

sing and talk French and play the harp, and were altogether very delightful.

So that Young King Brady felt that he had struck a fine place.

But nothing was seen of the one boarder, the strange Mr. Willis.

He kept wholly by himself and did not seem to care to mix up with the others.

Young King Brady, of course, affected only idle interest in him.

He waited.

He was not yet ready to nab his bird. There was an idea in Harry's mind that he could get track of some new and deeper game if he waited.

He did not believe that Hill had yet consummated all his plans.

He had other schemes.

To find out what these were was the young detective's province.

And he believed this would be possible by playing a waiting game.

So he waited.

He pretended to hunt with Geiger, sat on the piazza and talked with the young ladies and made himself a very welcome guest.

Thus time passed.

Hill did not seem disposed to show himself at all.

But there were times when a meeting was unavoidable, and it was at one of these times that Harry was enabled to force Hill into brief conversation.

After this gradually the villain's suspicions were lulled and he soon relaxed his vigilance and actually joined the little circle on the piazza.

This was just what Young King Brady wanted.

He watched his bird closely, and very skilfully led him into various themes which were conducive to important revelations.

Once the young detective glanced up from a newspaper and said casually:

"Rather queer, that Benton case, eh? I see the old judge has been found in a demented condition.

Hill started and a grayish pallor crept over his face.

"Yes, that was a strange case," said Geiger. "Some people believe actually the old fellow was decoyed from home."

"Don't you, Mr. Geiger?"

"Nonsense. He probably went insane and wandered away himself."

An expression of relief shone on the face of Barton Hill.

"That is my opinion," he put in. "I reckon the old man's insanity caused him to voluntarily leave his home."

"But the queer circumstances," said Young King Brady. "Why should he do it? Why did his nephew abscond with the hundred thousand gained on forged checks?"

"That is easy enough," declared Hill sharply. "He probably did that knowing that his uncle was alive, and that the forgery of the checks would never be discovered."

"Just so," cried Geiger, who seemed always disposed to side with Hill.

"Well, he rather got left," said Harry. "Everybody knows that those checks were forged."

"Indeed that is true," agreed Hill. "But they haven't got the forger."

"They will get him."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"Then they will be smart."

"Well there are smart men on his track," said Harry.

"He is hemmed in. He will never escape."

Barton Hill was deadly pale.

Cold sweat seemed to stand out all over him. His sensations were of an unpleasant sort.

"Well," he said thickly, "I don't know the man. It matters little to me whether they catch him or not."

"Then you don't know the man Hill?" asked the young detective. "Did he never play cards with you?"

"No. I am not even acquainted with the man. But I don't doubt his character."

It was a thrilling moment.

The significant manner in which Young King Brady asked the question did not escape Hill.

In that moment the truth began slowly but surely to dawn upon him.

He saw in the cool, smiling young detective before him his deadly foe.

And yet Hill was powerless.

He sat perfectly still like a victim under the fascinating spell of a serpent.

"Ah," said Harry slowly and insinuatingly, "then you do not even remember meeting the gentleman?"

"What do you men?" asked Hill roughly.

"I mean that you are mistaken."

Hill gave a gasp.

"Eh!" he exclaimed. "Do you know whom you are talking to?"

"I think I do."

"Well."

"It is not difficult for me to recognize you."

Hill's face was ghastly.

"Very good," he said. "You ought to know me, having lived with me in this house for a number of days."

And he essayed a laugh.

It was a poor bluff.

While he was working it he foresaw its failure. But all the while he was looking for a loophole to escape by.

Geiger and his daughters looked blank and puzzled.

To them the situation was inexplicable.

Young King Brady was calm and smiling. But one hand was placed in his coat pocket.

"Mr. Willis," he said quietly, "it is well for you and me to have an understanding."

"Perhaps if you will be a little more explicit we may," said Hill.

"Do you wish me to speak?"

"I wish you would be more plain."

"I invite you to take a trip to Jacksonville with me."

"And I decline."

"You will not go?"

"No."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly. I prefer to stay here."

"Suppose it should become obligatory?"

"I don't believe it will," said Hill, playing a firm hand.

"I am master of my own desires."

"You are clever."

"Well, perhaps so."

"But not clever enough this time."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I mean that your mask is off. I am come for you, Mr. Barton Hill. You are mine."

Hill never moved a muscle
But the light in his eyes became dead and hard.

Geiger and his daughters started up with fear and amazement. Something like a comprehension of the situation had come to them.

Young King Brady drew from his pocket a pair of handcuffs.

He tossed them onto the table.

"The jig is up, Mr. Hill," he said. "Be so good as to put those on."

"So pleased," said Hill with a crafty smile. "Of course I'll accommodate you. But tell me your name?"

"I am Harry Brady."

"Ah, Mr. Brady, I have heard of you before. This is a very clever job which you have done. You have certainly fooled me well."

"I am glad to hear you admit that, Mr. Hill," said Harry affably. "Now a boat leaves Middleburg at three o'clock. If Mr. Geiger will kindly drive us over we can get it."

"I do not understand all this, gentlemen," said Geiger.

"Well, it is simple," said Harry. "I am a detective, and my name is Brady. I have tracked this gentleman here from New Orleans."

"Yes, but——"

"His name is Barton Hill. He is the nephew of Judge Benton, who forged the notes for two hundred thousand."

A sharp cry escaped Geiger as well as his daughters.

It was certainly a startling revelation to them.

"Under the circumstances," said Geiger, "I will drive you over to Middleburg at once, gentlemen."

"Very well," agreed Harry.

The Southerner departed.

The young ladies also excused themselves. Harry and his man were left alone.

Hill smiled in an ironical way.

He did not seem to take his ill luck very hard.

"Well, Brady," he exclaimed, "you have done well, surely. I gave you a good chase, though."

"I admit that."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Take you back to New Orleans."

"And the money——"

"You have it?"

"Yes."

"With you?"

"I have."

"Let me have it."

Hill drew back again and smiled in a crafty way.

"What do you mean?"

"Now come to business. You like money as well as any man."

"I don't understand you."

"Let me make it plainer then. I never saw a detective refuse money. How much do you ask to let me off?"

The young detective stared.

"You unconscionable scamp," he cried. "What do you mean?"

"You won't do business?" asked Hill in a baffled way.

"Come, I'll give you twenty-five thousand. That is more than you will make to prosecute me."

Young King Brady trembled with suppressed rage.

"You fool!" he gritted. "Do you think you can deceive me in that way? Put on those handcuffs."

"But I——"

"Put them on."

The young detective brought his pistol out of his pocket. The barrel looked straight into the villain's eye.

That settled it.

He reached forward and picked up the handcuffs. Slowly he proceeded to place one bracelet on his wrist.

Then, quick as a flash, he plunged forward right under the table.

"Crack!"

The young detective's pistol spoke sharply and spitefully. But the bullet went wide.

The next moment the detective and the table went over on the floor in a heap. The villain himself turned a complete somersault over both.

He rolled over the piazza rail, and when Young King Brady regained his feet he was out of sight.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS THE END.

Old King Brady had received a serious set-back in the escape of Dud Smith.

He was at a loss now to know just what to do.

Not being able to get track of Harry he decided to return to New Orleans and continue his quest for Dud Smith.

The coon had his liberty, but the old detective did not believe it possible for him to go far from New Orleans.

No doubt he was in hiding somewhere in the vicinity.

There were plenty of swamps and out-of-the-way places where he could conceal himself with immunity.

So the detective took up a new line of procedure.

He disguised himself as a white pilot or steamboat man and set out into the interior.

It was an aimless quest.

He was compelled to trust to chance for clues.

From one little interior town to another he went.

Everywhere he kept his eyes open. He visited the negro quarters in every place and guardedly made inquiries.

There were plenty of people who knew Dud Smith.

But none of them could seem to tell anything about his

It was a blind quest.

But despite this the old detective finally hit the scent.

In a small river town on the banks of the Mississippi he met a woman who was practicing the voodoo art among the negroes.

He knew her at a glance.

It was Judy.

At once Old King Brady took her trail. He shadowed her persistently for some days, for he was sure that she was in communication with Dud Smith.

And his suspicions proved correct.

Judy left her lodgings nights and disappeared in the swamps. Old King Brady followed her.

But in spite of his best efforts she always eluded him in the cane brake.

He scoured the region about, but in vain.

He found nothing.

But still he was sure that old Judy was in the habit of meeting Smith somewhere in the swamps.

Thus matters were when one day the little river steamer ran up to the levee and the plank was thrown out.

Down this walked a man.

Old King Brady was standing near.

He stared and then started forward, rubbing his eyes to make sure he was not dreaming.

The next moment he ran up to the newcomer.

He seized his hand.

"Harry," he cried. "It is you."

"Sure," cried the young detective. "But this is a surprise. What are you doing here?"

"Groping for a clew. What has brought you here?"

"The same thing. What have you got?"

"Aunt Judy is here practicing voodoo. I think Dud is in hiding near here."

"That is encouraging."

"But you—I thought you had Hill well in hand."

Young King Brady gave a shrug.

"Ah, he slipped me," he declared. "I don't know how nor when. I had him all safe at Middleburg, but he got away from me, and then I tracked him to Jacksonville. From there I have step by step traced him here."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Whew! that is a bit of luck. Then we can work together."

"Yes."

"But I don't see why Hill lingers in this part of the country. I should think he would go abroad."

"There is some reason for it, and a deep game underneath. That is what I have been trying to get at."

"But you cannot?"

"No."

"All right," said Old King Brady with a sanguine air. "We have struck luck. It looks like a roundup of the game, and we are right in it."

"Certainly the case has reached a crisis."

"If we don't succeed now we never will. But where is your man Hill?"

"As near as I can make out he is in this town at present.

"Ah! then the rogues have all met here for a purpose."

"No doubt."

"We must find out what that is."

"You are right."

Old King Brady had been lodging with a family of respectable white people in the upper part of the village.

He took the young detective there now and secured lodgings for him also.

Then they laid their plans.

In close disguise they walked through the town and shadowed Aunt Judy constantly.

She seemed to be the only one of the gang whom they could sight.

The others were out of sight and might have been out of existence for all the detectives could see.

But this sort of thing could not go on forever.

One day Aunt Judy failed to appear in her customary place as voodoo doctress.

The detectives were at once on the alert. They watched the steamer landing night and day.

But a week passed.

In this time not a sign of the trio was to be found.

"We are beaten," said Old King Brady. "They have skipped."

"Too true," agreed the young detective. "It is what I call hard luck."

"Indeed it is."

"They are a slick gang."

"You are right."

"What shall we do?"

"I hardly know. But there is certainly no use in remaining here."

"Let us go back to New Orleans."

"All right."

They started for the levee.

But at a nearby street corner was an ox cart with a negro driver. He was a half-naked sample of the swamp denizen.

A crowd was gathered about him and he was addressing them excitedly.

"I done tole yo' dat I mus' get a doctah or suah's youse bo'n dey will all die afo' to-morrow night," he cried. "May de good Lor' sabe dere souls."

"What's all this?" asked a well-dressed man in the crowd. "I heard you asking for a doctor. Who is in trouble?"

"Massy Lordy, sah," cried the negro. "Am yo' a doctah?"

"Yes."

"Den fo' de lub of goodness come out wif me to Yaller Creek, sah. Dere am two men out dere all used up, sab, with stab wounds all ober dere bodies."

"Ah, a factional quarrel, eh?" exclaimed the medical man. "Who are they?"

"One ob dem, sah, is a white man an' de ober am a nigger."

"Oh, one is a white man. Well, turn your cart around and I'll go with you. Who did the stabbing?"

"An old woman, sah. I beliebe dey call her Aunt Judy."

The doctor heard this with a thrill.

They exchanged glances.
To them all was plain.
"Did you hear that?" asked Young King Brady. "This is the end."
"Whew! It must have been a quarrel."
"We had better get the depositions at once," said Harry.
"You are right."
It did not take the Bradys long to decide what to do.
They followed on behind the ox cart with its two occupants.

Into the swamps they plunged. Over roads made of fallen cane brake and through swirling creeks and muddy bayous they waded.

It was a long way out there.

But finally they came to a little ridge of high land, or a sort of island in the swamp.

Here were a number of negro cabins whose occupants subsisted on the fish and game of the region alone.

A wretched, miserable handful they were. As the cart drew up to the door of one of the cabins the doctor leaped out.

He entered the cabin.

The detectives followed him.

The scene which they beheld was a sickening one. On a pile of new-cut brakes lay two men.

One was white, the other colored.

They were drenched in gore and their tongues protruded with the horrible fever and sickness of their wounds.

The black man was just alive.

The medical man bent down over him a moment.

Then he said:

"What is your name?"

"Dud Smith, sah," was the faint reply.

"Make your peace with God. There is no help for you."

Then he turned and examined Hill.

"This man will live," he said, and proceeded to dress his wounds. Smith turned his glazed eyes upon the detectives.

Then he beckoned to them.

They knelt down over him.

"I want to tell yo' about it," he whispered. "I'se gwine to die, an' I ain't got nuthin' to keep back.

"I'se de man dat killed James Harding on de Ribber Queen. I makes free confession. Dat am all."

"How came you in this condition?" asked Old King Brady.

Smith looked surprised.

"Don' yo' know 'bout dat?" he asked.

"No."

"It was dat ornery cullud woman, Judy Sharp. She done went clean back on us. When Hill came here wif de hundred thousand dollars in money we planned to all lay low for a couple of months an' den git a steamer for de West Indies.

"But she took it into her haid dat she cud do us up an' git de money all fo' her own. So she done tackle us in our sleep an' lef' us fo' dead, and she am gone, nobody knows whar."

A few moments later Dud Smith was dead. Then Hill was taken to New Orleans. He recovered to stand trial and receive a sentence of twenty years.

Judy Sharp did not go far with the hundred thousand. She was overtaken in New York by the Bradys. The money was returned to Eulalie Benton and old Judy went to prison for a long term.

Judge Benton was tenderly cared for by Eulalie and Leslie Carlton, whom she afterward married. And this brings to a close our story of the Bradys' Plantation case.

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