

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

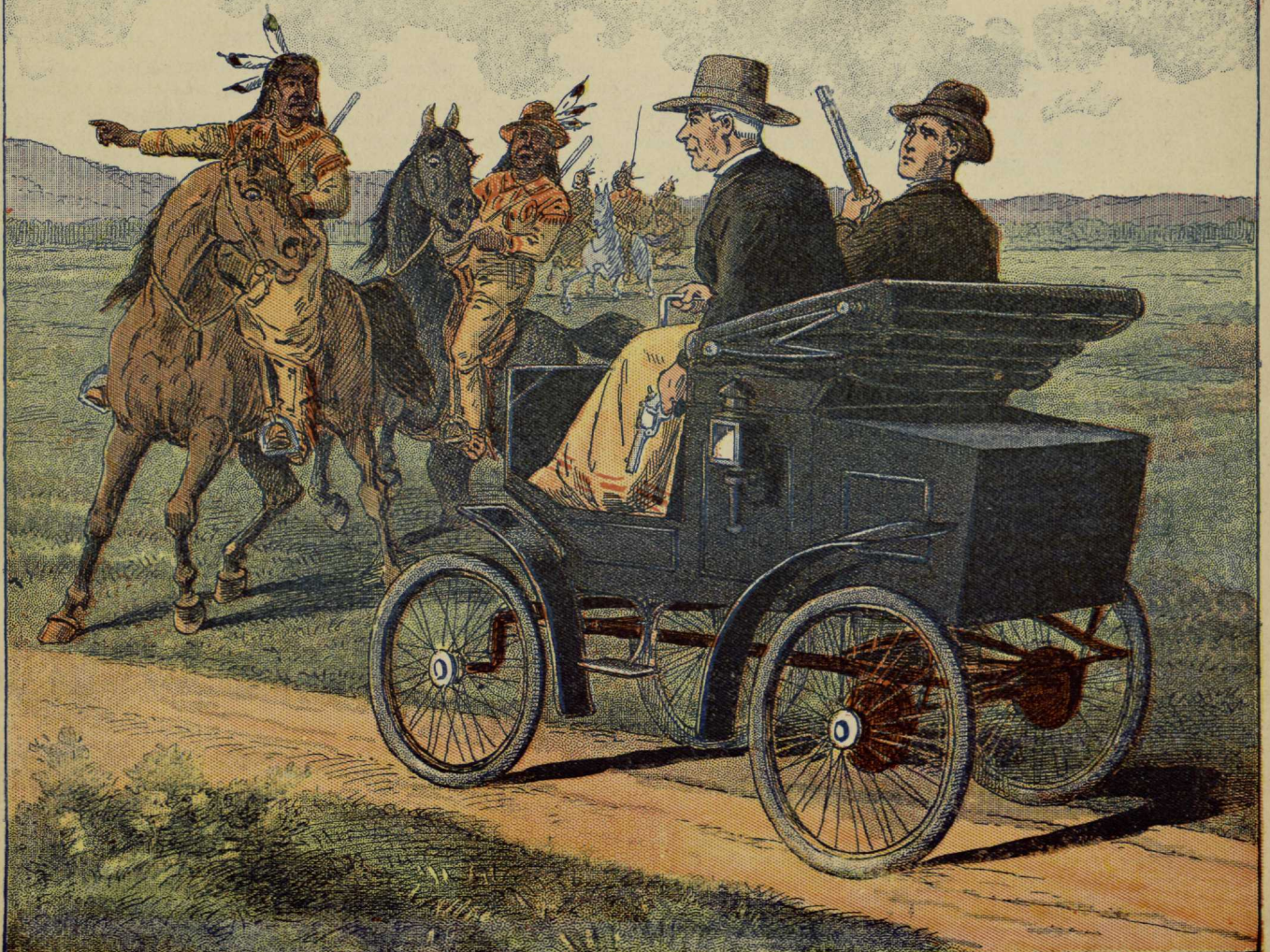
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NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 3, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

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No. 41.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 3, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

The Bradys in 'Frisco;

OR,

A Three-Thousand-Mile Hunt.

A STORY OF DETECTIVE SKILL AND SUCCESS.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

A STATEMENT OF THE CASE.

"How do I arrive at the solution of most of my cases?" repeated Old King Brady, gazing inscrutably at the newspaper reporter who sat before him with pencil and notebook ready to catch every utterance of the most famous of detectives. "Well, that is a most extraordinary question."

"I beg your pardon," said the unblushing newsgatherer. "It may be a little direct, but of course you know a great public is anxious to know all that a great detective will divulge regarding his methods."

"Yes," agreed Old King Brady dryly, "and so are a legion of criminals waiting for the same thing."

"I will modify my question, then," said the scribe hastily, "and merely ask if you employ any regular system?"

"That would be impossible," replied the old detective. "It is not hard to see that different cases require different treatment."

"Exactly," agreed the reporter, making a note of this. "But of course the theories of a detective are always more or less based upon the powers of observation and easy deduction——"

"Observation and deduction lend their forces more or less," replied Old King Brady. "But to depend upon them absolutely would be folly. I have found that hard, persistent shadowing and the commingling with crooks in clever disguise has won the most of my cases."

The reporter hastily made a note of this.

"Exactly," he agreed. "You are not a theorist like Vidocq and other detectives of the class which claim to be literal mind-readers and gifted with more than human prescience."

"Practical hard work, tracing the crooks personally step by step and hounding them mercilessly has always stood me in better stead than any other method."

"Thank you, Mr. Brady. I think I understand you," said the scribe cheerfully. "My card. You will see I am connected with the 'Chronicle.' We are the only up-to-date newspaper on the Pacific coast. You will see that I am the first news representative to interview you."

Old King Brady bowed gravely.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Luke Wells," he said slowly. "But I must request you to refrain from publishing my name or my presence in 'Frisco in your paper."

"What?" exclaimed the scribe, opening his eyes.

"I mean it!"

"But the public——"

"I can serve the public better by remaining incognito. You must see that my reasons are obvious."

"Ah, but I have been commissioned——"

"I don't care if you have. I am in 'Frisco with my partner, Harry Brady, for the purpose of solving the greatest case of crime ever known on the Pacific slope. Now, if you newspaper men persecute me and publish all my sayings and doings, I can hardly hope to accomplish much."

The reporter was silent.

For a time he played idly with his pencil.

"You must see the justice of this," pursued Old King Brady.

The scribe nodded:

"Well, yes," he replied. "But of course my duty demands that I give the best news to the public."

"Is that paramount to principle and the right?" asked Old King Brady sharply. "Will you thwart justice to furnish your columns with reading matter?"

The reporter's eyes gleamed curiously.

"You have come to 'Frisco to undertake the Floyd case?" he asked.

"I have."

"Do you know all the details?"

"I think so."

"Then you know that Lester Floyd, the wild scapegrace son, killed his aged father in a fit of rage, and when arrested for the deed, denied it and fled, after outwitting the officers?"

"That is the story."

"Of course you will track Floyd?"

"No."

The scribe gave a great start and dropped his notebook. He picked it up hurriedly and he looked a trifle white.

"What?" he asked. "You do not believe Lester Floyd guilty?"

The old detective drew out a big plug of tobacco. He bit off a piece reflectively.

Then he replied in the same monotone:

"No."

The scribe made a note of this.

Then he clicked his pencil between his teeth and said:

"Do you know that the evidence is very conclusive against him; that Mr. Carl Ripley, the private secretary of the millionaire, rushed into the room to find Lester bending over his father's body and covered with blood? Prima facie evidence!"

"I am aware of all that."

"And yet you do not believe him guilty?"

"No."

Old King Brady seemed absorbed in a reverie. The reporter's voice was low and insinuating.

"You have a theory, then—some discovery or conclusion——"

"Which will be known in due time," replied Old King Brady quietly. "This is all I can give you to-day, young man."

"I am duly grateful to you," replied Wells, replacing his pencil. "But you have interested me greatly. I cannot think of giving up the case myself, and I am going to follow it with you——"

"Eh?"

"That is to say, I am going to follow behind you and gather all the details. I intend to write a thrilling novel upon the incidents."

Old King Brady bent a keen and searching gaze upon Wells.

"You may find that a difficult thing to do," he said.

The reporter laughed.

"Perhaps so," he said. "But I like difficult things. However, have no fear, Mr. Brady. I will not interfere with your work, and if I cannot assist you, I will at least offer no detriment."

"At least do me the kindness to keep dark."

"Trust me for that," replied Wells eagerly. "I think it likely you may be right in your premise. Perhaps Lester Floyd is innocent, as some of his friends would like to think. If so, then you are the only detective who has thus far proceeded upon that assumption."

A moment later Wells, the reporter, hurried away through the lobby of the great hotel.

Old King Brady sat in a comfortable chair by the great plate glass window with a good view of the street and the passers-by.

People were passing in and out of the hotel in a stream.

Nearby a knot of interested persons who knew the great detective by sight were gathered, throwing glances at him.

Old King Brady's shrewd gaze studied every passing face on the street.

Thus he sat for a long while after Wells left him.

Suddenly a young man of remarkable appearance entered the lobby and approached Old King Brady.

He was almost the counterpart of the old detective, save in years.

Harry Brady was the pupil and protege of the old detective. He was a shrewd and brilliant young man.

Old King Brady was very much attached to him, and wherever the two detectives went they were known as the Two Bradys.

They bore the same name, yet were of no known blood relationship. As Old and Young King Brady they were gaining greater fame every day.

Young King Brady drew a chair up beside his preceptor and sat down.

"Well, Harry," said the old detective pleasantly, "what is the good word?"

"I have a telegram from the chief of the Secret Service in New York."

Old King Brady gave a start.

"Ah! Let me see it."

The younger detective handed him the message. Thus it read:

"OLD KING BRADY, San Francisco.

"Keep an eye out for a third party. Look for the undercurrent. F. may not be the guilty party. You understand. This is a clew.

"CHIEF OF SECRET SERVICE."

Old King Brady read this several times. Then he ejected the tobacco from his mouth into a cuspidor near.

"Humph!" he said. "That is nothing new. We are on that lead already."

Young King Brady laughed.

"The only thing that puzzles me is how the chief got that inside information," he said.

Old King Brady gave a start.

The detectives exchanged glances.

"It could come from no other quarter than 'Frisco," said the old detective slowly. "If we wait long enough all things will come to us, Harry."

"So it would seem. But who has given the chief this tip?"

"The party or parties responsible for the murder of August Floyd, the millionaire."

"His own son?"

"It might be. But I cannot believe him guilty."

"He is at large. Perhaps he is in New York."

"Ye-s," agreed Old King Brady. "But the line I have on the case says no. I believe the young man not guilty."

"But the theory of exclusive opportunity——"

"Exclusive opportunity be hanged! Who is the witness against him? Only one man—the private secretary."

"Carl Ripley?"

"Just so."

"Could he have done it?"

"Most likely not. Time will tell all. But there was plenty of opportunity for others to perpetrate the crime and make their escape. Floyd claims that he found his father in his life blood, but that he had nothing to do with the murder."

"Any murderer would make the same claim."

"Very true. Yet I cannot believe young Floyd guilty. However, we will proceed on that assumption for a while in order to establish other clews. But this Ripley—watch him."

"I will do that while you are looking up the other end of the case."

"Very good. Now I have a desire to visit the Floyd mansion and the scene of the crime."

"We can do so now."

"Very good. Let us do so."

The detectives arose.

To a servant passing Old King Brady said brusquely:

"Order us a cab."

"All right, sir," agreed the fellow, hastening away for that purpose.

CHAPTER II.

PROBING FOR THE TRUTH.

The two detectives were soon being driven rapidly toward Nob Hill in a cab.

The Floyd residence was one of the finest there.

The cab drove into the great yard and drew up at the door. The detectives leaped out and Harry pulled the bell.

At once they were admitted, and soon stood in the elegant reception-room. In a few moments the lady of the house appeared.

Mrs. Floyd was a woman of rare beauty. She had been a great society leader in her day.

The loss of her husband had been a great blow to her.

Her beautiful face showed lines of deep suffering and agony of spirit. She bowed gently to the detectives.

"Madam," said Old King Brady in a low-tone, "you have perhaps guessed the purpose of our visit."

"You are detectives?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Floyd sank into a chair.

"I have had many such callers," she said. "I am at your service."

"We will trouble you with our inquiries no longer than possible," said Old King Brady. "They are necessary to the case."

"I assure you I am only too glad to serve you," replied Mrs. Floyd.

Old King Brady drew out his notebook.

"Your husband's full name?"

"August Floyd."

"His business?"

"Retired."

"Has he many relatives?"

"But few outside the immediate family."

"Who are they?"

"A brother in India, a sister in Denver, two cousins in Texas, and a nephew whose whereabouts we do not know."

"Ah! What is this nephew's name?"

"Percival Dent."

"You know nothing of his whereabouts?"

"Nothing."

Old King Brady made a few notes. Then he continued:

"The immediate family?"

"Myself, my daughter Bertha and my son Lester." Her voice faltered.

"These are all the relatives?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. Now, what are the servants in this house?"

"The butler, James Morris; the cook, Angus McLean, and his assistant, Dean Foster; the gardener, Henry Clark, and his assistant; two second girls, two maids. That is all at present."

"No valet?"

"When Mr. Floyd traveled he took his private secretary, Mr. Carl Ripley."

"Ah! the private secretary. How long has Mr. Ripley been with you?"

Mrs. Floyd's face brightened. The detective noted this.

"A number of years," she replied. "He was a mere boy when he came."

"Where does he make his residence?"

"Why, here with us."

"Ah! I see. A very estimable young man whom you have practically treated as one of the family?"

"Y-yes," replied Mrs. Floyd. "Carl is a very fine young man."

"Mr. Floyd reposed much confidence in him?"

"Naturally."

"He was familiar with all of Mr. Floyd's private affairs?"

"Yes."

"That is enough," said Old King Brady politely. "Now about the crime. Do you feel able to speak about it?"

"Oh, indeed yes. I am anxious to do anything to get a clew to the identity of the real murderer."

"I understand that the evidence points to your son?"

"Preposterous! My boy never could have done such a thing. He loved his father far too well."

"Madam," said Old King Brady impressively, "I feel for you. I am sure that your son could never have been guilty. I think he can be cleared."

A sharp, glad cry escaped her lips.

"Oh, sir!" she cried earnestly, "you have spoken as no other has to me yet. Everybody seems to think Lester guilty. But I know he is not."

"I shall use every effort in my power to unravel this mystery," declared Old King Brady.

"Oh, I feel that you will succeed, and I am happy to know that there is one who does not believe my boy guilty."

She was quite overcome. Until she recovered the detectives conversed in low tones with each other.

Finally Old King Brady said:

"Madam, may we ask the favor of visiting the room where the crime occurred?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Floyd arose and led the way to an arched doorway, protected by portieres. She pushed these aside.

A room beyond was revealed.

And, to the evident surprise of the lady of the house, it had two occupants.

One was a tall, willowy young girl, fair as a dream. Her companion was a straight, fine featured, blonde young man.

"Why, Bertha and Carl!" exclaimed Mrs. Floyd. "I did not know you were here."

"And we did not know you were so near us," cried the young man in an apologetic tone. Then he flashed a glance at the two detectives. Bertha Floyd instinctively drew her girlish figure up.

"These are detectives," said Mrs. Floyd. "They have come to look over the house."

"Oh!" said Bertha, "I do hope they will find a clew!"

"So do I," assented the young secretary. Old King Brady had shot one swift and comprehensive glance at him. His theories seemed to falter.

This namby-pamby youth was not of murderous ilk, so far as could be outwardly judged.

A more innocent, inoffensive chap could hardly be imagined. So the old detective only said in a kindly way:

"You were Mr. Floyd's secretary?"

"I was," replied young Ripley.

"I have a favor to ask."

"Very well, sir."

"Please accompany us to the room where the body was found and explain some details to us."

"I will gladly do that."

Ripley's manner was easy and frank. His clear gaze met the detective's unflinchingly.

Secretly, from the first, Old King Brady had attached some suspicion to the young secretary.

There had been a lurking theory that he was in some way connected with the crime. But this feeling seemed likely to melt into thin air.

Excuses were made to the two ladies, and Ripley led the way to the room which had served as the library and private office of the dead millionaire.

It was a square chamber, with lofty ceiling. Two windows on the east side opened upon a balcony.

In the centre of the room was a large library table. Upon it the papers were yet scattered, as left by the dead man.

As the detectives entered the room they took in all these details.

Ripley stood aside and respectfully watched proceedings. Old King Brady made a gesture to Harry.

The young detective drew out his notebook and pencil.

Old King Brady knelt down beside the desk and examined the carpet.

The blood stains were yet there. The coarse texture of the carpet held them.

"Which way did the body recline when found?" asked Old King Brady.

"His head was toward the door," replied Ripley.

"Ah!" mused the old detective. "He doubtless was sitting at the desk with his back to the door."

"It is likely."

"The attack then doubtless came from behind."

"I should so imagine."

"Ergo! The assassin entered by this door. But, on the other hand, another assumption would show that he might have turned and fallen that way."

"Very true, sir."

Old King Brady glanced at the windows. He walked slowly to them and examined the sills. He raised the sash.

Very critically he examined the balcony and its supports. A trellis led up to it.

Ripley seemed interested.

"The window was open, sir," he said. "Perhaps the assassin came in that way."

"Ah! Then you do not believe that the son is guilty?" asked Old King Brady quickly.

"I do not," replied Ripley. "It cannot be so!"

"Yet you are the witness. You found him with blood-stained hands bending over his father."

"I do not think that proves much."

"It is prima facie evidence."

"Perhaps so," said Ripley, with apparent reluctance. "I don't believe Lester would kill his father, though."

"How did you happen on the scene so opportunely?"

Ripley gave a start.

"Well," he said, readily however, "I was in the inner office engaged in backing letters when I heard a cry of agony——"

"Ah! Did you hear a fall?"

"N-no, I think not. It was Lester's voice I heard. I rushed into the next room to see him bending over his father. He looked up and said, 'Oh, Carl, father has been murdered!'"

"Did it impress you at the moment that this was evasion on Lester's part."

Ripley hesitated.

"I would rather not answer that question," he said.

"But you will have to answer it at the inquest."

"Well, it did look, of course, as if Lester had just stabbed his father."

"What caused Lester to take the alarm and fly? Did it not occur to him that such an act implied guilt?"

"I—I don't know. It was all so hurried. I rang up the police. Then it occurred to us that it might look bad for Laster——"

"Did you suggest that to him?"

"I may have."

"Ah! and he feared arrest and conviction upon this evidence?"

"Yes."

"You advised him to fly?"

"Well—n-no, not exactly. We talked it over, and he decided that he would stand no show at a trial."

"Did it occur to you that this act implied his guilt?"

"No. I was too much excited and flustered to think of anything."

Old King Brady examined the window again carefully.

"There is no evidence that anybody came in here," he said. "In any event, the murderer could hardly have escaped without being seen or heard. This is all you know about the case, Ripley?"

"Yes, sir, all."

Old King Brady bent a sudden hypnotic gaze upon the secretary.

"Do you know, Ripley, that this crime lies between you and Lester? It is up to you to prove your testimony."

Ripley turned ghastly white.

CHAPTER III.

PICKING UP CLEWS.

The old detective's shot had been swift, sudden and startling, as he intended it should be.

Ripley was taken wholly off his guard.

"Me?" he gasped. "Up to me? Why, I had nothing to do with it."

"Previous to the exclamation by Lester which called you into the office, did you hear nothing—no heavy fall or sound of a struggle?"

Ripley shook his head.

"Nothing," he replied.

"That is very odd," said the old detective keenly. "But a few yards separated you from the enactment of the worst tragedy known in 'Frisco for many years."

"I can't help it," said Ripley, with an effort. "I heard nothing."

"You were very busy?"

"Yes, very."

"When you heard the cry given by Lester, what did you do?"

"I entered the room by this door."

"What did you see?"

"I have described the scene to you. Young Mr. Floyd bent down over his father. His hands were covered with blood."

"What was your impression? Did you think he had just stabbed his father?"

"I cannot tell you. I only know that I saw him in that position. I was overcome with horror."

"What words were used by young Mr. Floyd as you appeared?"

"He said, 'My God! Father has been murdered!'"

"What reply did you make?"

"I asked him if he knew by whom."

"And then—what?"

"He answered in the negative. I rang the police signal, and then it occurred to us both that Lester's position was compromising, and——"

"One moment. Who of you mentioned this fact first?"

"I do not remember."

"Go on."

"Both of us decided that the affair would look bad for Lester. I have explained this to you before."

"Very true," agreed the detective, who saw that the two accounts practically agreed. "Now, Lester at once took the alarm and fled?"

"Yes."

"How long was it before the police came?"

"But a few minutes."

"And you remained all this time alone with the body?"

"No; I went into the next office."

"The general conclusion was, then, that Lester Floyd was really guilty of the crime of murdering his father?"

"No other solution of the matter could be even guessed. He and his father were not on good terms. Lester had returned after a long period of dissipation. It was assumed that he asked his father for money, and, being refused, gave way to a fit of anger and struck him down."

"Was this the right way to look at it?"

"I—I do not know. I am not a detective."

"All right, Carl," said Old King Brady lightly. "Don't mind my sharp questioning. It is only a matter of form, you know. We have to do it."

Ripley's face cleared.

"That is all right," he said in his frank way. "I know you cannot suspect me. Yet I do not believe Lester guilty."

"Have you any other theory?"

"None whatever. It is all a most profound mystery to me."

All this while Young King Brady had been making notes.

He exchanged glances now with the older detective, and the latter said:

"All right, Ripley. You may go now. We will look the ground over by ourselves."

The young secretary bowed and left the room. Old King Brady and his young protege then went to work.

The old detective measured the room and the windows and doors. He made a careful diagram of all.

Then he went to the balcony windows and looked out.

Very carefully he examined the coating of dust on the iron rail. He noted the position of the vines on the trellis. Suddenly he gave a start.

"Harry," he said softly, "there are footprints at the foot of the trellis."

This was true.

"The vines are broken in places and a bar from the trellis is snapped. Dust is brushed from the railing right here."

It could mean but one thing.

"The murderer must have come in at this window," said Old King Brady. "In that case——"

"Maybe neither Lester nor Ripley is guilty."

"True enough!"

It was an astounding mystery.

Who was the murderer?

How could he have entered by this window so noiselessly and committed so dreadful a crime and gone out again without attracting the attention of the young secretary in the next room?

Certainly it was very strange.

But the world is full of strange things. Sometimes most inexplicable events occur under our very noses without a suspicion on our part.

The detectives knew this.

There was but one conclusion.

Some unknown fiend had entered the room by means of the trellis, had committed the terrible crime, probably by stealing unawares upon Mr. Floyd, and then had made his escape.

Who was this person?

The detectives must find out.

Old King Brady drew a deep breath. Then he said:

"Come, Harry, let us go. On our way out I must see Mrs. Floyd."

So the detectives went downstairs. In the drawing-room Old King Brady again met Mrs. Floyd.

"My dear madam," he said, "I shall hope in the near future to solve the mystery of your husband's murder."

"I hope that will be true," said Mrs. Floyd.

"In the meantime, I wish to ask of you one thing."

The lady of the house bowed.

"I will grant it," she said.

"It is this: That you will not allow your daughter to marry until after this mystery has been cleared."

Mrs. Floyd was surprised.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "that is a very strange request."

"It may seem so to you."

"I am not aware that my daughter has any idea of marrying."

Old King Brady bowed.

"That is best known to you," he said, as he turned to the door. But Mrs. Floyd stepped forward.

"One moment," she said.

"Well?"

"What has my daughter's marriage to do with this case?"

"Perhaps nothing."

"Will you explain?"

"Not at present. If you are wise you will heed my request."

She looked mystified. The woman's curiosity asserted itself.

"I must have an explanation," she declared. "I demand it! Do you know of any one whom my daughter shows favor to?"

"I have a suspicion."

"Ah! Whom?"

"The young secretary, Carl Ripley."

Mrs. Floyd turned white and her figure became rigidly erect. One moment she stood irresolute.

Then she unbent herself and her dignity and indignation relaxed.

She cast a swift glance about the room. Then, in an earnest undertone, she said:

"My daughter's happiness is very dear to me."

"So I thought," said the detective.

"Do you—have you—any reasons for—thinking—ill of him?"

Old King Brady's gaze met hers. For a moment they looked at each other.

"The private secretary?"

"Yes."

"Only the most circumstantial of evidence. Exclusive opportunity, nothing more. But you understand me?"

Mrs. Floyd drew a deep breath.

"I do," she said. "Your request shall be observed."

"Mind, I do not fancy the young man anything but honest and upright."

"Nor do I."

"I will say good-day, madam."

"A very good-day."

The detectives left the house.

They made their way down Nob Hill and back to the hotel. Not a word was spoken by either until they had entered their room.

Then Harry Brady threw down the notebook and said:

"There is the summary. What do you think of it?"

Old King Brady shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe the young fellow not guilty," he said.

"You do not change your opinion?"

"No."

"Well, you may be right, but, on my word, it looks bad for him. Of course there is a possibility that young Ripley is the guilty man——"

"A probability, you mean?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

The two detectives did not always agree. Harry had a mind of his own just as well as did the elder detective.

Old King Brady rather respected Harry for this individuality of opinion and highly approved of it.

It pleased him that his young protegee had a mind of his own.

Now, however, he felt sure that the young detective was in the wrong.

Personally, he was convinced that young Carl Ripley was concerned in the murder.

Young King Brady could not see how he could be in the slightest way connected with it.

To him the evidence was all against the erring son. He had ample motive for the crime, while not the slightest could be ascribed to Ripley.

"Look here, Harry," said Old King Brady brusquely, "upon what do you base your theory?"

"Apparent motive of the strongest kind and absolute circumstantial evidence."

"Well, we will admit that. But I tell you, you will find that Lester Floyd never killed his father."

"Perhaps not. Can you suggest the least idea as to the identity of any other?"

Old King Brady was staggered.

"We shall see," he said. "Give me a little more time."

The discussion might have been protracted and indefinite had it not been for a sudden interruption.

This was a tap on the door.

"Come in!" cried Old King Brady.

One of the attaches of the hotel stood on the threshold. In his hand he held a letter.

"For Mr. James Brady," he said.

"That is I," said Old King Brady. "Who left it?"

"It came by mail, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

THE REPORTER PLAYS A HAND.

Old King Brady took the letter. He glanced at the superscription.

It was a fair running hand with which he was not familiar.

"Humph!" he said, and then broke the seal. Thus he read:

"OLD KING BRADY:

"I am one of the gang that did the Floyd murder. If you'll give me a chance for my life I'll peach on the others and take you to where they are hiding. I am sick of my part in the whole business. This is your chance. If you will meet me at twelve to-night at the old cabin in the sand lots I will talk with you. Yours truly,

"HARRISON KETCH."

The old detective read this epistle again and again.

Then he passed it to Harry.

"Look at it," he said. "What do you think of it?"

The young detective read the letter. After some thought he said:

"It is queer. Neither of us was right, then?"

"What do you mean?"

"I picked Floyd as the murderer, and you selected Ripley. Both are innocent."

"We are not so sure."

"But this letter——"

"Proves nothing. Both Floyd and Ripley may have been members of the gang."

Young King Brady laughed.

"At any rate," he said, "we are apt to soon get at the bottom of all. Things are certainly coming our way when one of the gang turns evidence."

"Will I keep this appointment, or will you?"

"Why not both keep it?"

"He only mentions me. However, that matters little. He cannot object to you. Well, at twelve o'clock we will be on hand."

As both detectives were somewhat weary, they took advantage of this opportunity for a few hours of sleep.

At eleven o'clock Old King Brady arose and aroused Harry.

It did not take the detectives long to prepare for their expedition to the sand lots.

These were in the outskirts of the city, and at times the resort of thugs and toughs. But both detectives were armed and felt that they had nothing to fear.

They equipped themselves for a night of sharp work.

About their persons they carried several clever and quick disguises, dark lanterns and the necessary outfit of a detective.

They were soon ready.

But there was plenty of time to reach the sand lots. Just as they were preparing to leave the room there came a rap on the door.

The Bradys exchanged glances.

"Who can that be?" asked Harry in an undertone.

"I cannot imagine," replied Old King Brady. "Go to the door."

Young King Brady complied.

The door was opened. A man stood in the dim light of the corridor.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said suavely, stepping into the room. "I have come just in the nick of time, I see."

"Luke Wells!" ejaculated Old King Brady.

It was the newspaper reporter.

Both detectives stared at him. But Wells bowed and smiled and dropped into a chair.

"Ah! pardon me," he said; "I see you are just about to go out. Well, I will not detain you."

"Indeed we are in a hurry," said Old King Brady. "There is nothing new to tell you for publication."

Wells grinned and fingered his notebook.

"Indeed!" he said. "Is that strictly a fact?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the old detective, half angrily.

"I had an idea that something new and important developed within a few hours."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I am not a fool," chuckled Wells. "You must give us scribes credit for knowing a little something. You made a visit to-day to Nob Hill."

"Well, that is our affair."

"Very true. You learned important facts there. But you have not yet found a valuable clew."

The Bradys were getting angry.

This cool assurance, and, in fact meddlesomeness, on Wells' part was certainly wrath-provoking.

"Look here, you contemptible meddler," began Harry. But Wells put up a finger.

"Sh!" he whispered. "Don't get excited or lose your temper. I am still your best friend and ally. I know facts which would be of value to you."

The Bradys looked at each other, and then Old King Brady walked to the door and closed it.

Then he turned upon Wells.

"Look here, my friend," he said, shrewdly, "you can't fool us. We are not going to give you anything for publication. If you try any further funny business we will invoke the law and have you cared for."

Wells laughed quietly.

"That is a serious threat," he said. "You would destroy your best ally."

"Enough of that! Prove to us that you are such."

"Well, I will prove to you that I know more about this case than you do."

Old King Brady was now interested.

"I wish you would do that," he said.

"In the first place, I know that you both visited Nob Hill to-day."

"That is true."

"You gained no clew."

"You are right."

"You differ in opinions?"

The detectives were astonished.

"Are you a mind-reader?" asked Harry.

But Wells only laughed.

"Never mind," he said. "I am only a reporter. I am not a detective. You are seeking criminals and I seek the news. That is all."

"Go ahead!"

"Neither of you is right."

"You speak with conviction," said Old King Brady. "I trust you can support your statement."

"Well, see if events do not prove it," said the cool reporter. "One of you believes Floyd guilty, the other that Ripley is the man."

"How did you know that?"

"Never mind. Am I not right?"

"We will allow that you are," declared Old King Brady.

"Well, neither man is guilty. A few hours ago you received a note making an appointment with some one who claims to know the inside facts of the tragedy?"

Wells grinned and chuckled.

"You may see that I am right," he laughed.

"Yes, you are right. But how did you get your information?"

"In a very simple manner. I saw the party who came with the note."

"Ah!" exclaimed Old King Brady, much interested. "You know him, then?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Ketch. He is one of the most noted crooks in the West. He is one of a gang of murderers and Socialists who have sworn to exterminate every capitalist in America."

"Then that is the motive for the murder of August Floyd?"

"No doubt of it!" cried Wells. "I tell you they're a hard gang."

The Bradys were silent. The keen reporter consulted his notebook and then went on glibly:

"Well, gentlemen, I trust you will see that I am indispensable to you. I can give you great assistance in the tracking down of this gang."

"Mr. Wells," said Old King Brady, "we are deeply sensible of that fact. All we ask of you is that you do not publish any of these things. It is necessary to keep all matters of this kind a close secret. We are very glad to avail ourselves of your co-operation on these conditions."

"Well, gentlemen," said Wells, with apparent pleasure, "I am glad to have an understanding. I am interested in detective work, and I shall publish all these incidents only in my novel, which I intend to write, and which will be the greatest detective story ever produced."

"In that case," cried Harry, "you may be sure we can cooperate heartily."

The detectives gripped hands with the reporter and the compact was sealed.

Together they now left the hotel. In a few moments they were upon the street.

It was already near the hour of twelve. No time was to be lost.

The detectives, with Wells, pushed on toward that part of the city in which were the sand lots.

They did not dream of what the night was really to bring forth.

As they now drew near the outskirts of the city, Old King Brady called a halt.

"I've been thinking," he said, "we must change our plans."

"What do you mean?" asked the reporter.

"Well, you see, if all three of us approach the place of appointment it may frighten our birds away."

"That is very likely," cried Harry.

"Then we had better change the programme."

Both detectives looked at Wells.

The hint was broad enough, and the reporter took it.

"All right," he said, "I'll agree to that. I believe it is proper. What do you suggest?"

"Two of us had better hang back and wait," said Old King Brady.

"I'll tell you," said Wells; "you two go ahead and I'll stay behind."

The detectives looked at each other.

"No," said Harry, finally, "I will stay with Wells."

"All right," agreed Old King Brady. "I will come back as soon as possible. Perhaps I can bring Ketch with me."

But Wells laughed.

"I guess not!" he cried. "You'll find him a fellow who is taking no chances."

"You think he will be fearful?"

"I do."

"Very well. Let him adopt that method if he chooses. I will return shortly."

And Old King Brady slid away into the gloom.

Harry and Wells sat down beside one of the sand dunes to wait. Time passed slowly.

Old King Brady pushed on until he saw a faint shadow ahead, and the dim outlines of a house showed against the sky.

It was a rambling old shanty and long since disused save by tramps and vagabonds who crept in there to sleep.

Old King Brady approached it not without caution.

When a few yards away he emitted a low whistle.

Almost instantly a dark figure stepped out of the door.

A husky voice said:

"Are you a detective?"

"Yes," replied Old King Brady; "I am looking for Harrison Ketch."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes."

There was a brief instant of silence, then a low, constrained voice said:

"There's your man, boys! Kill the blasted sleuth-hound!"

Instantly from the gloom a dozen forms came hustling about Old King Brady.

CHAPTER V.

EXCITING INCIDENTS IN THE SAND LOTS.

Never in his life had Old King Brady faced more deadly peril.

Words are unable to convey a true description of the scene.

A dozen armed foes were closing in with lightning swiftness to do to death America's greatest detective.

The heart of an ordinary man might have failed him.

But Old King Brady was not an ordinary man, as the reader knows. He never once lost his nerve.

He saw and understood the trap at once.

It was a clever bit of deception and had fooled him well. But he was quick to act.

Instead of trying to break through the line and retrace his steps the way he came, he took the opposite course.

To attempt to go back was to meet the foe face to face in close encounter.

This would be fatal.

His only hope was to go ahead.

Pulling out his pistols, he fired them at the foe, and then bolted for the door of the hut.

He was not a moment too soon.

Pistol bullets hissed about him and struck the logs of the cabin.

But none did him harm.

Into the door he dashed. All was darkness within. For aught he knew he was rushing into the arms of death.

But his instant theory that the cabin was empty and the ambuscaders all outside was correct.

No one was in the cabin.

Old King Brady slid down upon his face on the floor and instantly opened fire through the door.

His bullets hissed through the doorway so spitefully that not one of his foes dared enter.

It would have been instant death for any one of them.

On the other hand, they could not locate the old detective to hit him.

The bullets poured in at the open door, but all were too high. Old King Brady remained unharmed.

In the intervals between the pistol firing the air was blue with oaths. The would-be assassins were furious.

"Come out here, ye old fox!"

"Ye can't escape!"

"It's death anyway!"

These were the cries hurled at Old King Brady. But the old detective only yelled back:

"Come in and get me!"

This invitation was not accepted. But now a new idea seemed to have occurred to the villains.

A great cry went up:

"Burn him up in ther cabin!"

"Fire it!"

"Smoke him out!"

The idea seemed to meet with general favor. Old King Brady heard the gang feeling their way along the outside of the cabin.

That they meant to carry out this scheme seemed a certain fact. The old detective's blood grew chilly.

He was not afraid to die.

But just now he was eager to live and outwit this gang of villains.

He wondered what had become of Harry and Wells. Surely they must have heard the rumpus.

The old detective knew that Harry would certainly have come to his assistance were not something wrong.

What could have happened?

But even as this query occurred to him the answer came. Shots and excited cries were heard outside.

This was evidence that his friends were really coming to his rescue.

Old King Brady gained heart.

He crept away from the door. But the pungent odor of smoke now reached his nostrils.

It was true that the cabin had been set on fire.

Tiny forks of flame were darting between the crevices. In a short while the whole structure would be ablaze.

The old detective realized that his position was a desperate one.

To remain in the place was certain death.

To try to emerge from it was just as certain to be fatal.

What should he do?

Never in his life had Old King Brady faced a more trying ordeal. He ransacked his brain for a plan.

Every moment the smoke increased and the flame gained in volume. He would speedily be stifled.

But now he became aware of a sudden fact.

All was quiet outside the cabin. The bullets no longer came whistling in at the door.

Had the foe skipped out? He listened with interest and eagerness.

And he heard distant shots, which indicated that a fight of some kind was going on at a distance away.

The old detective ventured to creep nearer the door, listening warily all the while. Then he became convinced that his surmise was correct.

The enemy had departed.

The reason for this he could not understand. Had a rescuing party come just at the right moment?

But just then explanation came.

Steps were heard rapidly nearing the cabin. A familiar voice called out:

"Old King Brady! Where are you?"

"Harry!" cried the old detective, leaping to his feet, "is it you?"

"Thank heaven you are safe!" cried Harry, rushing up in a breathless way. "Oh, I feared that you had met with certain death. It was a trap."

"Yes, it was."

"How did you escape?"

"By a chance."

Old King Brady told the story of his outwitting the crooks. Then Harry told his story.

"Well, it was this way," he said. "After you went away Wells and I waited and listened.

"Then we heard the shots. Wells got frightened and said he would go after the police. So away he went, and I started to your assistance alone."

"That was brave of you, Harry."

"Pshaw! What else should I do? When I came up and found the cabin surrounded, I fired upon the gang myself from the darkness. It scared them mightily, I can tell you. I ran from point to point and fired to make them think there was a number of the foe. It worked well.

"The result was that they began to fall back. Then four citizens came from a house in the edge of the sand lots and gave me assistance. That turned the scales.

"The gang fled. My friends are pursuing them hotly. But I stayed to look for you."

"Well done!" cried the old detective. "I owe my life to you, Harry."

"No, indeed, you do not," protested the young detective. "But indeed I am more glad than words can tell to find you alive and uninjured."

"But Wells——"

"Ah! he is evidently not a fighting man. He will show up with the police before morning."

"Well, we will be glad to see him if he brings the police. I didn't think he was a fellow of much courage."

"Same here."

"None of the gang are caught?"

"Not one."

"That is too bad!"

"It remains for us to catch them in the near future," declared Harry. "I think the murderer is among them."

"Then we must leave no stone unturned," declared Old King Brady.

They now left the cabin and set out rapidly across the sand lots. Suddenly a dark figure appeared before them.

"Hi!" cried Harry. "Who is there?"

"Found at last!" cried a familiar voice.

"Wells!" gasped Harry.

"That's it, friends!" cried the reporter wildly. "It's Wells, and I've got new and rich material for my novel!"

"Where did you go?"

"For the police."

"Did you find them?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I came back to render you all the aid in my power, and incidentally to seize the opportunity to gain points for my new work."

The detectives looked at each other and smiled. Then Old King Brady said:

"All right! The game has slipped us. We must get out of this. It was all a miserable trap."

"Just as I feared," began Wells.

"Eh?" exclaimed Old King Brady.

"Ah—that is to say——"

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I mean that I know now it was a trap."

"You are a downright coward, Wells," said Old King Brady flatly. "You were afraid to go on with Harry here."

"What?" protested Wells. "Really, I——"

"Oh, pshaw!" interrupted the old detective. "You newspaper men are great bluffs. You have no courage."

Wells affected to be greatly scandalized and made all sorts of protestations. By this time they had reached the edge of the sand lots.

Here they met the four men who had been attracted by the shots.

At once the detectives were surrounded.

"Here are some of the vagabonds!"

"Give it to 'em!"

"Hands up!"

"Easy!" cried Old King Brady. "You are barking up the wrong tree!"

"Eh?" cried one of the men. "Who are you?"

"Detectives!"

"What?"

"That is true," declared Old King Brady, pulling out his dark lantern. "Where are the men you were pursuing?"

"That's just what we'd like to know," declared one of the men, who nursed a shattered arm. "I'd like to see the chap that gave me this bullet."

"This thing has got to stop," cried one of the others. "This neighborhood is fast getting to be the worst in 'Frisco. We need some lynch law here. There is some deviltry going on about here every night."

"I was decoyed here myself," declared Old King Brady.

"What?" chorused the men.

With this Old King Brady told his story. They listened with interest. Then all turned toward the city.

But the gang had made good their escape. Further search for them proved useless.

The detectives announced their intention of returning to their hotel to await daylight.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF FOR RANCH C.

"Then the jig is up for to-night?" asked Wells.

"I fear it is," said Old King Brady.

"And the gang is going scot free?"

"It looks like it."

"That is too bad! Are you going to give them up entirely?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"I think not."

"What will you do?"

"You are too inquisitive. Keep your eyes open and you'll know in time."

"Ah, I beg pardon," said Wells, in an injured tone. "My motives are of the best. I simply wish to assist."

"For which we are very grateful," replied Old King Brady. "But just now we are all right."

Wells took the hint.

"I have some copy to turn in for the comps," he said. "Good night."

"Good night."

They were at the moment in front of the hotel. Wells disappeared down another street.

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Old King Brady. "Now we can do some business."

"Just so!" cried Harry, "that fellow is worse than a leech. What do you propose?"

"That gang is in 'Frisco to-night."

"I believe so."

"They are the people responsible for the murder. Who else is concerned in it, or whether they were the hired tools or not, remains to be discovered."

"That is the whole thing."

"We are not smart if we do not learn."

"Just so."

"Come on."

The detectives glided away down the street.

They had got rid of Wells, and now felt that they were untrammelled. Old King Brady's plan of action was simple.

It consisted of paying a visit to the various saloons and dives of the city, and thus getting track of the gang which had tried to decoy him to death.

They would no doubt be found ere morning in some one of the low resorts.

But the detectives had not reckoned sufficiently upon one factor.

This was the shrewdness and penetration of Luke Wells.

The reporter had not been in the least deceived by Old King Brady's rebuff.

He had simply slid around the corner and then dodged into a doorway. In a few moments he had made a complete change in his personal appearance.

He was a shabby mendicant, and peering around the corner saw the detectives making off down the street.

"Ah!" he chuckled. "I thought so. We will see, my fine detectives. Luke Wells is not the flat you think him."

He glided after them.

The Bradys plunged deep into the slums of the Pacific coast metropolis.

In the verge of Chinatown they came upon a drinking hell of the lowest type.

In this place, beside the barkeeper, were three men, a rough-looking Texan, a Chinaman and a flashy sport.

The detectives saw them through a crack in the door. They were playing cards at a rickety table.

Old King Brady gave a start.

"I know that Texan," he whispered. "I once ran across him in El Paso. His name is Madison Murray. He is a desperate chap. Mad Murray they call him among the cowboys."

"The others——"

"One must be Harrison Ketch, and the Chinaman—well, I can't say."

"They are our birds."

"Yes, you're right."

"What shall we do?"

"I don't believe it will pay to go right in and arrest them. We want to first prove the motive of the crime."

"True enough."

"It will pay us better to shadow them for a time."

"I believe it," agreed Harry. And so it was decided.

They continued to watch.

And from their position they could hear snatches of conversation. From the names given they learned that the Texan was "Mad" Murray, and the other white man Harrison Ketch, a sport and gambler.

The Chinaman, who seemed the slickest rascal of all, was named Ah Quan.

"Ah, I have heard of him," whispered Old King Brady. "He is one of the Highbinders."

"He looks like a bad rogue."

"So he is."

The detectives listened intently.

"By thunder!" cried Murray, as he dashed a card on the table. "I'm going down ter Ranch C and stay thar till this ere bizness blows over!"

"Is there any chance for a card-sharp there?" asked Ketch.

"Heaps of luck! Greasers and cowboys and tenderfeet all the time coming along."

"Then I'll go too."

"Allee samee me go too!" chirruped Ah Quan. "Me findee plenty heap washee-washee!"

The other two villains roared at this.

"Yes, you'll find plenty of thet to do, Quan," they cried. "Ye'll wash out something afore ye're through."

"Where is Ranch C?" asked Ketch.

"Pretty well down at the edge of the Basin in the Shoshone country. In fact, the Shoshones are mighty sore because the ranchmen have located there, as it is a great hunting ground."

"Humph! That is good. We ought to be safe there."

"You bet!"

"It's a cursed shame that old hound of a detective got away."

"Yes, and now that he has thar'll be no safety in 'Frisco fer us."

"Well, we'll git out."

"To-morrow."

"Yas."

"Pretty good! Now let's go to bed."

The three desperadoes arose and drank at the bar. Then they passed into an inner room and out of sight.

The detectives were satisfied.

"They will stay here to-night," said Old King Brady.

"Yes."

"We can do no better than to take a run out to Ranch C ourselves."

"Sure!"

"They will probably go on horseback."

"Yes."

The detectives now went back to their hotel. They made preparations for departure.

As it was a sure thing that their birds would go to Ranch C they did not think of following them. It was only necessary to round up at the ranch.

Now, in coming from New York Old King Brady had carried out a novel idea.

Foreseeing long trips over the smooth plains of the West, and recognizing its complete utility and decided advantage over a horse, he had purchased and shipped to San Francisco a light automobile.

It was one of the latest patents, with an inexhaustible battery, which it was not necessary to recharge. This was now on the cars in the Golden Gate city.

The detectives at an early hour the next morning went down and took it off. It was soon in running order.

It did not take them long to get under way for Ranch C. They were soon climbing the passes of the Sierras on their way to the hiding place of the outlaws.

At times the automobile could travel very rapidly. This was when the surface was smooth.

But in the precipitous, rocky passes, and through the great canyons the progress was slow.

However, the detectives felt that they were progressing as rapidly as their birds, who must travel on horseback.

The scenery in the mighty Sierras was something grand.

Finally, however, the passage of the mountain range was accomplished, and the great plains of Nevada, extending into the great depression called the Great Basin, came into view.

This was the region of sand and sage brush, jack-rabbits and coyotes. It was a wild, desolate region.

But day after day the detectives in their automobile bore away to the north and east.

They felt sure of locating Ranch C from the description they had gained that evening in the slums of San Francisco.

Old King Brady believed that they would find it in some one of the picturesque parks on the Idaho line, and in the Snake River country.

The detectives met with various adventures and experiences on this trip.

Plainmen, miners and hunters were encountered. The automobile attracted great attention in some of the little mining towns.

Day after day the detectives traveled on thus.

They were enabled easily to keep up their supply of provisions at the various towns and outposts where they stopped.

So they suffered no privation.

They were well armed with rifles and revolvers, and did not fear an attack from a foe.

Many evenings they camped in the wilds, far from human habitation. But this only added to the enjoyment of the trip.

They did not attempt to make faster time than the horses of the outlaws would be likely to.

They had no desire to reach Ranch C first. In fact, they would much rather be a day or two late.

"There is one thing," laughed Old King Brady, "Wells is out of this scrape!"

"Yes," agreed Harry. "Won't he be puzzled to know where we have gone?"

"Indeed he will."

The next day they crossed the Idaho line. By inquiring they learned that they were now not far from Ranch C.

But a little mining town lay across their trail in the valley below.

It was near the close of the day, and the detectives decided to pay a visit to the place.

As they hardly deemed it safe to take the automobile down into such a lawless community, it was hidden in a cleft of a wooded cliff.

Then the detectives walked down to the town.

It was called Bad Rock, and contained a population of perhaps a few hundred souls, miners, card-sharps and men of their ilk.

The detectives leisurely sauntered into the one street of the place.

As they did so they saw a great crowd gathered about the door of a pine shanty which bore over its entrance the following sign:

"BAD ROCK HOTEL,
"The Pilgrims Refuge,
"Cy Carkin, Prop."

The crowd before the door of this shanty seemed in a much excited state.

Something unusual was going on.

Two huge forms were swaying to and fro in the circle, while cheers and shouts went up from the miners.

The detectives now saw what was a curious and interesting spectacle.

A huge bear of the mountain species was engaged in a nip and tuck wrestle with a powerful framed man.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVES MAKE A DISCOVERY.

It was a grotesque spectacle. The Bradys at once joined the ring and became interested spectators.

The bear wore a muzzle and a collar, and his sharp claws had been clipped.

His powerful arms enveloped the giant miner, who was stripped to the waist. The muscles of his back and arms were like huge rolls of brawn.

It was a mighty contest.

The owner of the bear, a half-breed Shoshone Indian, sat near with a grin upon his dusky face.

In his hand was a rope which was attached to the bear's collar.

"Go in Samson!"

"Do him up!"

"Toss him!"

"Ah, Pete, that's the time ye didn't do it. Ye're no good!"

"Hooray!"

The air reverberated with these cries, and back and forth swayed and tugged man and beast.

The bear was slow, deliberate and playful. He was powerful though, and hard to move.

The man could at times fairly lift the ten or twelve hundred weight of the bear, but strain as he might he could not throw the beast on its back.

His face was swollen and red with brutish rage.

Indeed, of the two he seemed the greater brute. To such depths can the human mind descend.

A heavy wager was on him, and he was trying hard to win.

But it looked as if he must make a failure of it.

"Go in, Pete. Don't let ther bear beat ye!"

"Give it to him Samson!"

"Two ter one on the bear!"

The detectives gazed with curious interest upon the scene.

Suddenly, though, Old King Brady gripped Harry's arm. "Hist!" he whispered. "Do you see that young man in the crowd opposite?"

The young detective gave a start.

"By Jove!" he gasped.

"It is young Floyd."

It was indeed the young man whom half the country believed the murderer of his father.

Young Floyd was a silent and idle spectator of the wrestling match.

It was plain to see, however, in spite of its dissipated lines, that care and anxiety were upon his face.

There was good reason for this.

He was the fugitive of the country, hunted by the law for a crime of which he was not guilty.

The detectives watched him carefully.

Finally Old King Brady said:

"I want to see and talk with him."

"Good!" said Harry. "Do so."

Old King Brady moved slowly to the other side of the group. He was now quite near Floyd.

Suddenly the millionaire's son separated himself from the throng.

He walked slowly away.

Old King Brady managed to cross his path.

As he did so the detective came to a sudden halt and said:

"Ah, Lester, I have found you!"

The young fugitive gave a gasping cry and started back.

"W-who are you?" he demanded.

"I am a detective."

"You do not know me?"

"Yes, I do. You are Lester Floyd."

At bay young Floyd stood for a moment, as if undecided what to do. Then his hand rose and a pistol gleamed in it.

But he did not aim at the detective.

He pointed the muzzle at his own temple.

"Fair warning!" he said. "I will not be taken alive."

"Easy, my boy," said Old King Brady quietly. "Do not make a mistake. I am your friend."

"You are hunting me?"

"Not you alone, but others. I am your friend."

A puzzled light shone in Lester's eyes.

"Is this a subterfuge?"

"No."

"Who are you?"

"I am a New York detective, and my name is Brady."

"Old King Brady! Ah, I heard that you were in 'Frisco. You mean to deliver me up to the law."

"Not until it is proved that you are guilty."

Lester gave a startled cry.

"Then I am to imply from that that you do not believe me guilty," he said.

"I do not."

He lowered the revolver.

"Heaven be praised! You are, then, the only friend I have on earth."

"Aside from your mother and sister."

"They do not believe me guilty?"

"No."

Lester Floyd broke down and wept bitterly. Old King Brady was silent and respectful.

"I know I have been a wild boy," said Lester finally. "But I was never bad at heart. I could never have done the deed charged to me."

"Have you any idea who did?"

"Not the slightest."

"Well, Lester, I will give you hope. We are even now on the trail of the men who we believe are responsible for the dark deed."

A cry of joy escaped Floyd's lips.

"Oh, is that true?" he cried.

"It is."

"Who are they?"

"Three hard characters, Harrison Ketch, a card-sharp—"

"I know him."

"Mad Murray——"

"A thorough-paced villain!"

"And a Chinaman—Ah Quan."

"The blackest trio in the West. So you are on their track. Heaven be praised! I shall be cleared!"

"I believe so."

"Where are these villains now?"

"They are in this region somewhere, on their way to Ranch C."

"Ranch C. That is only fifty miles from here, and it is the rendezvous of a hard gang of outlaws."

"You know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then you can assist us."

"With all my heart."

"I want to introduce you to my partner, Harry Brady."

"I shall be pleased."

Old King Brady signalled to Harry, who now came up. He shook hands with young Floyd.

Then a consultation was held.

It was decided that Floyd should assist them in locating Ranch C and locating the trio of murderers.

Just at this moment, however, a new incident occurred. The clatter of horses' feet was heard.

Then up the village street there cantered three horsemen.

Into the light from the saloon door they rode.

Instantly the detectives and Floyd shrank back. There was good reason for this.

The three men were no others than Ketch, Murray, and Ah Quan.

They threw themselves from their saddles, and Murray roared:

"Hey there! Send an Injun out hyar to take care of these hosses. Don't ye know old friends, Cy Carkin?"

The proprietor of the joint, a bushy whiskered giant, tumbled down the saloon steps.

With an oath he roared:

"Dang me, but its Mad Murray! How are ye? Come in an' have a shake of whisky."

"You bet I will!" agreed Murray. "An' I kin tell ye it will taste good, fer I hain't got ther alkali dust outen my throat yit!"

Into the bar-room went the three ruffians.

The detectives and Floyd crept cautiously to the door. It was a moment of supreme interest to them.

The wrestling match had ended in a victory for the bear, and the bets were being paid.

The crowd rushed into the bar-room. Only the detectives and Floyd were left outside.

They were of course interested only in three of the occupants of the bar-room.

"Then you have evidence that those fellows are the murderers of my father?" asked Floyd.

"Well, no, not exactly evidence," replied Old King Brady.

"Ah!" exclaimed Floyd in a disappointed manner.

"We simply are certain that they are concerned in it," said Harry.

Floyd's face lit up.

"That is something," he said. "I ask the privilege of assisting you to run them down."

"You shall have it," agreed Old King Brady.

"Thank you!"

"But I want to ask you a few questions. Those fellows can do no harm just now. We will leave them in there for a while."

"Very well," agreed Floyd. "I am at your service."

"Come this way."

They drew back into the shadows on the other side of the street.

Then the detective resumed:

"Did you spend much of your time at home?"

"No," replied Floyd. "I was sent away to school at an early age."

"Ah! Where?"

"First to Stanford University. Then I went to Yale. I got in with a lively crowd and spent money fast. The faculty came down on me hard, and my father was obliged to call me home."

"Go on."

"I was given a clerkship in a mining company's office. I will admit I did not do right. I became very dissipated, and my father threatened to disown me."

"Then you were not on good terms with your father?"

"No."

"When you entered the house that day, for what purpose was it?"

"To ask him for money."

"Did he refuse you?"

"I had no chance to ask him. When I entered the room I saw him in his life blood."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady slowly. "What was your impression when you entered that room?"

"I cannot say. I was stricken with horror. Then I thought only of learning if he might yet be living. I bent down over him, and in feeling for his heart beats I got the blood on my hands."

"What happened then?"

"Carl Ripley came rushing in from the other office."

"What were his first words?"

"To this effect: 'Lester, what have you done? Is your father dead?'"

Old King Brady's eyes gleamed.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

"Are you sure those are the words he used?" he asked.

"Very sure!" replied Floyd.

Both detectives remembered that Ripley had told a far different story. This was noted as significant.

"What is your opinion of Ripley?" asked Old King Brady.

Floyd looked up quickly.

"My opinion of him?" he asked. "I never had anything against him. But he never liked me, because——"

"Of what?"

"I caught him making love to my sister Bertha. I told my father of it, and he would have discharged Ripley but for mother's interference."

"So Ripley ventured to make love to his employer's daughter?"

"Yes."

"Was that not presumptuous?"

"My father thought so. My opinion of Ripley is that he is a cad."

Old King Brady was fast getting at what he was pleased to consider some very important facts.

Already light began to shimmer through the darkness of this great mystery.

The detectives were seeing their way clearer every minute.

The motive they had hitherto been at a loss to find. It is well known that there can be no crime without a sufficient motive.

And this they now began to see.

But just now other matters claimed their attention.

Three men came out of the saloon.

It was easy to recognize them as Ketch, Murray and Ah Quan. At once the detectives were on the qui vive.

The three villains looked up and down the settlement street.

Then they glided away into the gloom.

"Come on!" whispered Old King Brady. "We must follow them."

Harry and Floyd obeyed.

Out of the little town went the trio, with the detectives guardedly following them.

Soon they were in the deep darkness of the mountain side.

Here, beneath the shadow of the trees, they paused. They sat down upon a fallen tree.

The detectives and Floyd crept nearer and gained a vantage point from whence they could hear and see all that was going on.

Ah Quan was speaking:

"Heap debbil in dem detectives. I tellee you," he was saying. "Old Kling Blady he muchee sharp. Me no wantee part of him any more."

"Hang it!" growled Murray. "You think they are dead onto us, do you?"

"Allee same, muchee more!" averred Ah Quan.

"It's a fact thet they are somewhere on the road to Ranch C," declared Ketch.

"We must lay wires to do 'em up in some way. I can't sleep nights knowing they are after us."

"Why not set a trap for 'em at Ranch C?"

"A good idea!"

Then the three villains dropped their voices to a monotone which was indistinguishable to the listeners.

This was a disappointment, for the Bradys would have given much to know what the plans were.

But they were not able to hear. After a while the plotters arose, chuckling and apparently in good spirits.

They started back to the settlement. As they walked on the detectives overheard only one more important thing.

This was uttered by Murray.

"We start at daybreak for Ranch C."

The detectives knew now that their only course was to make Ranch C the next day, although they had no definite plans of procedure after reaching that point.

Back to the saloon the trio went.

This was the last seen of them that night.

The detectives now made plans with Floyd. The latter was to remain in the settlement until the detectives had concluded their work at Ranch C.

Then future plans were to be decided upon. The substance of this decision was simply that Floyd should keep dark until evidence could be procured to clear him.

If he should fall into the clutches of the law, so speedy is the Western idea of justice that his trial might be rushed through and he be hung before his friends could interpose.

So it was extremely necessary that he should keep low.

But nobody realized this more fully than Floyd himself.

With this understanding, all three repaired to a place nearby, where Floyd had lodgings.

Here the night was passed.

At an early hour the next day the detectives were astir and started up into the mountains to the spot where they had secreted their automobile.

They found it all safe, and it did not take them long to get under way.

They found a trail which led around Bad Rock, and so were not compelled to descend into the town.

But for all this their course was not destined to be continued long without the knowledge of at least one other party.

Suddenly turning a bend in the trail, the detectives were confronted with an astounding surprise.

Old King Brady brought the wagon to a complete stop.

There right in the trail was a horseman.

He had pulled up his steed, and sat looking at the detectives with a cool smile of assurance.

The detectives recognized him.

"Luke Wells!" gasped Old King Brady.

It was the newspaper reporter.

"Ah, gentlemen," said the scribe affably. "The pleasure is mine."

"Not wholly," replied Old King Brady. "But where did you come from?"

"From 'Frisco."

"Why, that is hundreds of miles away."

"I don't care if it is. I am on my way to Ranch C."

"Well, you are a good one. How did you get our trail?"

The reporter laughed.

"By my own peculiar method," he said. "You see, reporters have methods as well as detectives. In a certain sense they are detectives themselves."

"I agree with you," cried Old King Brady. "Have you learned anything new?"

"Nothing, except that our birds are in Bad Rock."

"Have you been down there?"

"I was there last night."

The detectives were astonished.

"We did not see you."

"Of course you didn't. I was in disguise."

"Why did you not make yourself known to us?"

"My reason is private. You have given me the slip——"

"Now look here——"

"You know you did. You left 'Frisco without me."

"We reckoned you had had enough of the case after the affair at the cabin in the sand-lots."

"You should know better. Luke Wells never gives up. However, I have no hard feelings. I will be generous."

Wells dropped from his saddle and approached the detectives.

He shook hands with affected warmth. Then lighting a cigar he said:

"No, I have no hard feelings for the slight, as I said before. Now, what are you going to do at Ranch C?"

"We have not decided."

"You have made no plans yet?"

"No."

"So I thought. Now comes my hour of triumph!"

"What do you mean?"

"I hold the key to the situation."

"Will you explain?"

"Certainly. I have an ally who is in the Ranch C gang. By wearing a clever disguise I shall have entree to the ranch when I choose. This will enable me to go and come and get all inside facts."

The Bradys were astonished.

"Wells, you are a keen one," said Old King Brady. "You have missed your calling."

The reporter laughed.

"Ah, you think I ought to be an outlaw?" he asked.

"No, a detective."

"Would I be a success?"

"I think you would."

"Thank you for the compliment. Now I am going to return good for evil by inviting you to participate in the benefits of my 'pull.'"

"Good for you!" cried Old King Brady. "You shall not regret the move. Now we will go along together. Much can be gained if things are as you say."

Wells remounted and rode along beside the automobile.

He told the detectives of his ride tracking the trio all the way from 'Frisco. He had gained much information.

"I learned this," he said. "The gang were well paid for murdering Millionaire Floyd."

"Ah, by whom?"

"Some person in 'Frisco who had ends to gain."

"That will come out later."

"Sure."

The detectives then told of meeting Floyd in Bad Rock. This seemed to have a tremendous effect on Wells.

"You met him there?" he exclaimed. "Are you sure he is there now?"

"Yes."

"Well, that beats all! Of course he is an innocent man!"

"To be sure."

They kept on now until near nightfall. It was only fifty miles to Ranch C, but progress was slow.

It was nightfall when they came in sight of the ranch.

It was a long, low-roofed structure, just at the base of a range of hills and on the verge of a grazing plain of thousands of acres.

A more ideal place for a ranch could hardly be imagined.

The automobile ran down to the verge of the plain. Here a secure spot for a camp was selected.

"Now," said Wells, "you gentlemen remain here and I will ride on to the ranch and get acquainted. I will come back about midnight and report."

This was deemed the best plan.

Wells rode away and the detectives made themselves comfortable. Everything seemed in their favor.

It did not seem as if their plans could possibly fail now. Wells had certainly proved a potent ally.

It was just midnight when the tramp of horse's hoofs was heard. Old King Brady looked out through the foliage and the starlit plain and gasped:

"By Jericho! Harry, we're all surrounded by horsemen. There is treachery here somewhere. Come, quick, for your life!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIANS.

A more startling denouement could hardly be imagined. One glance was enough for the detectives.

They could see deadly peril.

It was true that they were literally hemmed in by a line of horsemen.

That these were the outlaws coming to capture them there was no doubt. The meaning of this could only be guessed.

Had Wells been unmasked, and had they wrung from him a full confession?

This remained to be seen.

For the present all that could be done was to act, and that quickly.

Quick as a flash Old King Brady sprang into the wagon, and Harry after him. They crouched down.

This was fortunate.

Old King Brady turned on the current and the automobile leaped forward.

In an instant loud yells went up, and the crack of rifles broke upon the air.

The line of horsemen closed in and seemed about to overwhelm the automobile. It was a close shave for the detectives.

Why they were not perforated with bullets was a wonder.

The shots struck all about them, even clipping their clothing. But yet they escaped unscathed.

The automobile ran like a deer out upon the plain.

In less time than it takes to tell it, it was clear of the foe.

Out it ran, and the horsemen after it. Mile after mile was covered.

But it was a one-sided race.

It did not take long for the machine to completely outstrip the horses. They were left far behind.

Soon the last of them faded from view. But Old King Brady kept up speed for some while.

Then the automobile turned its course along the shores of a small lake.

Running the machine into a clump of trees, Old King Brady leaped down and cried:

"Whew! That is what you might call action, Harry!"

"Well I should say so!" cried the young detective.

"A pretty hot one."

"By Jove, I thought we were done for at one time."

"So did I!"

"By the horn spoon!" ejaculated Old King Brady, "that Wells must have been the cause of it!"

"Undoubtedly, but do you think he did it purposely?"

"Oh, that cannot be. He is not in league with the gang."

"Then he may have fallen into their hands and been compelled to tell of our whereabouts."

"Of course that is possible."

This was the only conclusion that could possibly be reached by the detectives.

But the night and its surprises was not yet over.

The detectives had stood with their backs to the automobile, which was in the clump of trees.

They had been looking out upon the plain, and had no thought of danger in their rear.

Suddenly, however, a guttural exclamation in his rear caused Old King Brady to turn.

An astounding surprise rewarded both detectives.

Between them and the automobile was a line of stalwart figures. This time they were helpless.

For one swift instant the detectives thought of the outlaws.

Then the light proved sufficiently strong to convince them that these unknown faces were not the outlaws.

Their tufted heads and blanketed forms revealed their true character. They were Indians.

In this region were many roving bands of Shoshones.

These had undoubtedly been in the clump of timber, and seen the detectives come up.

For a moment a tableau ensued. The detectives stood aghast and silent.

The Indians were immovable. They made no speech or action.

Finally, however, Old King Brady ejaculated:

"Whew! What does this mean?"

"Indians!" exclaimed Harry.

Then one of the redmen spoke:

"Ugh!" he grunted. "White man no fear. Injun friend."

"Is that so?" cried Old King Brady. "Well, I am glad to learn that."

He stepped forward and turned on the electric lamps of the automobile.

This made the vicinity as clear as day, and showed the faces of all.

The chief of the Shoshones, a tall, commanding fellow, advanced and held out his hand in token of friendship.

"Heap glad to meet good white man," he said. "Heap bad white men all around."

Old King Brady gave a start.

"You are right, my red friend," he declared. "There are a lot of bad white men around this region."

"Come from Great Father in the land of rising sun?" asked the Shoshone chief.

"No," replied Old King Brady. "We came from 'Frisco."

The red chief's face fell.

"Heap bad white men there," he said.

"Yes," agreed Old King Brady. "But we are not that kind."

"Drive Injin away. These his hunting grounds!"

"By the way," asked the detective. "Do you know anything about Ranch C?"

The chief's face lit up.

"Big ranch? Out so?" pointing to the west.

"Yes."

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, heap bad white man there."

"You know that? Well, you are right, they chased us here."

The chief seemed surprised.

"No catch you in little fire wagon?" he asked.

"No, they couldn't catch us."

"Heap lucky."

"Yes, we were. But we are going back there to-morrow. We are officers of the law. If we can find good men enough in this region we shall arrest those fellows and see that they are punished."

The Shoshone chief's form trembled eagerly.

"Ah, that is good!" he cried. "Bad white man, hate Injin. Me no like. See? Injin ought to kill. No do so. Tell Great Father off there."

"Yes, I know," agreed Old King Brady. "You have promised the Great Father at Washington to keep peace."

"Yes, white man."

"Well, that is what you want to do," advised Old King Brady. "You will get your rights. Good white men are coming to clean out the bad men."

The chief was delighted.

He shook hands again.

Then he spoke guttural words to his followers. Ponies were led out of the timber. The chief gripped Old King Brady's hand.

"White man, good by," he said. "Injin remember! Ugh!"

Then he leaped onto a pony, and the savages, a score in number, rode away. The detectives were left alone.

"Well," exclaimed Harry, "I am glad we had no trouble with them."

"You are right."

"They evidently have grievances against the gang at Ranch C."

"Yes, and there'd be an Indian war on here if I hadn't advised that chief just right."

"What shall we do?"

"There must be men enough in this part of Idaho to form a Vigilance Committee."

"I should think so."

"To-morrow we will scour the region and organize an armed force."

Having reached this conclusion, the detectives sat down to wait for daylight.

They took turns sleeping, and in this way the night was passed.

The next morning the sun broke clear and bright over the prairie. Old King Brady had the automobile ready when Harry awoke from his nap.

It did not take the detectives long to get ready.

Soon the light carriage was speeding away over the plain back in a westerly direction.

This was really in the direction of Ranch C. But the detectives had no intention of visiting that ranch.

They bore away more to the southward after a while.

The run across the plain took a few hours.

Then the hills beyond began to show up. The purpose of the detectives was to run for Fort Bridges, one hundred miles or more below.

There they would be able to enlist U. S. troops in their behalf, and thus become assured of wiping out the gang of cutthroats effectually.

The automobile reached the forest at the base of the hills. Here Old King Brady looked for a pass or cut.

But none was to be seen.

Just at this moment Young King Brady gave a sharp cry of surprise.

"Look!" he shouted.

Far above along the verge of the plain a horseman was visible galloping toward them.

The detectives gazed in surprise.

He was waving his arms to them as if in signal.

Nearer he drew rapidly.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the old detective. "He acts as if he wanted to speak to us."

"So he does," cried Harry.

"Let's wait for him."

"All right."

Nearer drew the horseman. Then a cry of recognition escaped Harry.

The rider was familiar to both.

"On my word!" cried the young detective. "It is Luke Wells."

It was indeed the reporter.

A grim light came into Old King Brady's eyes. The detectives exchanged glances.

"Well," exclaimed Harry, "what do you think of it?"

"We shall see."

Up dashed the reporter. He threw himself breathlessly from his horse and rushed up eagerly.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Well, of all things! I have hunted the country over for you."

"You have?" said Old King Brady quietly. "Where have you been?"

"Where have I been?"

"Rather, where did you go that night when you left us?"

"Why, to Ranch C."

"I don't doubt that. Why were we so promptly surrounded by the outlaws of that ranch?"

Wells stared. There was nothing but absolute and innocent wonderment in his face.

The detectives were staggered.

"Oh, I think I understand," said Wells slowly. "You distrust me."

CHAPTER X.

A BIT OF TREACHERY.

It was a critical moment. The Bradys for an instant felt abashed and repentant as they looked into the face of Wells.

There was nothing there but injured innocence and surprise.

"Well," said Old King Brady finally, "you will admit that things looked rather queer."

"In what respect?"

"Why, you left us to go to Ranch C. Sortly after you had gone a party from there descended upon us."

"That is true. But I had no more to do with that than the man in the moon."

"You did not?"

"No."

"You will admit it looked odd."

"Well, perhaps so. When I got to the ranch I was admitted by my friend. There were but a few of the outlaws there.

"Later a large body of them came in. Then I learned that they had come upon you and given you a hot chase."

This was certainly a straight story. The detectives saw nothing but candor and truth in Wells' face.

"Pardon us," said Old King Brady finally. "You will admit that our suspicions were natural."

"But not justifiable. Luke Wells is not that kind of a man!"

"We are convinced of that."

"I hope you are."

"Now that matter is disposed of, what did you accomplish?"

"I learned all the secrets of the place. I have free access and can come and go as I choose."

"Good!"

"I think the most vulnerable part of the ranch is a stockade gate on the north."

"Yes."

"In case of an attack you would be sure to force an entrance there. Now what were you going to do?"

"We are on our way to stir up the country and raise a band of vigilantes."

"Good!"

An indescribable light shone in the reporter's eyes.

"You expect to meet with success?"

"We hope to."

"I trust that you will. I will endeavor to assist you.

Or, by the way, I have a better plan."

"Well?"

"Being on the inside of the fortress, it will be easy for me to let you in secretly, and thus surprise the garrison."

"Capital!" cried Old King Brady. "Can you do that?"

"I can. But, look here, do you see yonder break in the hills?"

Wells pointed across the plain.

"Yes," replied the detectives.

"Over there you can learn something of great importance. There is an intermediate post-office where the outlaws get their letters from the West. A courier leaves them there every few days.

"Now I will ride over there by a circuitous route. Do you go straight along with your wagon. The coast is clear. I will meet you there."

"All right," agreed Old King Brady. "It is a go."

The reporter galloped away into the timber. The detectives looked across the plain.

The distance was quite a number of miles. It would take some little while to run over there.

But the Bradys got aboard the automobile.

They started across the plain. The coast seemed clear.

"On my word!" said Old King Brady, "that Wells is a smart chap. He would make a crack detective."

"He is beyond me," said Harry.

"I believe he will yet get ahead of us on this case."

"All right, so long as the case is solved."

"Certainly!"

The automobile was running across the plain at full speed. Nearer every moment it drew to the gap in the hills.

Suddenly the detectives received a surprise.

From a depression in the plain a few miles to the north mounted figures were seen to spring.

They came swiftly and rapidly nearer. The detectives gazed at them in surprise, and Old King Brady changed the course of the automobile.

"What is that?" he cried.

"Can it be treachery?"

"No," cried Harry with excitement. "On my word, it is the Indians."

This was true.

The little party of Shoshones were riding down furiously to intercept the automobile.

As they drew nearer one of them came on ahead of the others. It could be seen that he was the chief.

Up he rode to the automobile.

"What can he want?" cried Harry.

The chief waved his arms.

"No go further. Bad man stop you. Kill quick!" said the Shoshone chief.

Old King Brady at once brought the automobile to a stop.

"What is that?" he cried.

"Stop now," cried the Indian forcibly. "No go there. Bad men over there. They kill you."

The detectives were astounded.

"A trap!" gasped Harry.

"Wells is a traitor."

"We have been blind."

"He has followed us all along for the purpose of decoying us."

This was no doubt the startling truth. The amazement and horror of the detectives can be imagined.

But their gratitude to the faithful Shoshone chief was profound.

Old King Brady leaped out of the automobile. He rushed up to the chief's side.

"My red friend," he cried, "name your reward. You have saved our lives."

"Me no see you get killed," said the Shoshone with dignity. "Ah, you see!"

He pointed to the ambush.

A body of horsemen were seen to gallop up.

They headed for the automobile. It was evident that they saw that the trap had failed.

"All right!" said Old King Brady grimly. "I think we can give them a lesson, Harry."

"We will try it."

The chief had summoned his followers. They were not a match for the outlaws, and galloped to a safe distance to the south.

But Old King Brady turned the automobile and set it at moderate speed.

Then the two detectives leaned over the back of the seat and with their repeating rifles they opened fire.

One saddle was emptied and then another. Several of the outlaws' bullets rattled against the wagon.

It was not long before the outlaws saw that the odds were against them.

With this conclusion they abandoned the attack and bore away toward the ranch.

The delight of the Shoshones was unbounded. They galloped up yelling with mad joy.

To them the wonderful fire wagon was a mighty invention.

But the Bradys did not pursue their foes.

It was enough for the detectives to have put them to flight. The next move on the program was to get aid.

Ranch C must be wiped out.

So Old King Brady made the Shoshone chief a present of a repeating rifle. Then he headed the automobile once more to the south.

He knew, as did Harry, that Fort Bridges could be reached in a few hours.

There troops could be procured. Away sped the automobile.

Hours passed. The ground was even and the run easy.

Finally, after a long time, in the far distance a column of smoke was seen.

Then the walls of a stockade and the outbuildings of the fort. A short while later the detectives were shaking hands with the commandant.

There was no trouble at all in arousing his sympathies.

"We have only been waiting for a complaint against that place," he said. "It shall be wiped out."

Fifty troopers were quickly in the saddle.

It would take a day and a half to make the ride. The automobile had covered the distance in a few hours.

But horses cannot compete with electric vehicles.

The party was soon under way, however. Until a late hour that night they rode.

Then they camped in a belt of timber. All the next day they rode on.

That night they were within ten miles of the ranch.

But it was decided not to go on until the next morning.

So camp was made. The Bradys were impatient, but the jaded horses needed rest.

However, the next morning a quick ride was made for the ranch. But long before it was reached a thin column of smoke was seen against the horizon.

"What can that mean?" asked Young King Brady. "Is it a signal?"

"We shall soon learn," said the old detective.

And they did learn a most surprising fact.

The ranch with all its adjuncts was completely wiped out of existence. Only a heap of ashes remained.

The outlaws had taken the wisest and safest course, and burned the place before it could be raided.

Not a sign of the gang was anywhere to be found.

But attached to a post was a placard on which was printed:

"TO THE BRADYS, DETECTIVES:

"We give you our best compliments, but you are dead slow. If you expect to catch this gang you will have to get on more speed. Look for us in Texas, where we are bound.

"THE GANG OF RANCH C."

"Well," said Old King Brady lugubriously, "I am of the opinion that they are right, Harry."

"Yes, we have been dead slow in this case," agreed Harry.

"But we may fool them yet."

"I think so."

The lieutenant of the cavalry company saluted and asked:

"Well, gentlemen, the foe have given us the slip."

"It looks that way," agreed Old King Brady.

"Have you any plan to suggest for overtaking them?"

"None in which you can participate," replied the old detective. "We shall go on after them alone."

"Very well. Then I will have to report to my superior at the fort."

"You are at liberty to do so, and my compliments and thanks to him for his very great kindness."

CHAPTER XI.

SHADOWED.

The cavalry company rode away on their return. The Bradys remained for some little time about the ruins.

Then Old King Brady said:

"Well, Harry, it is a bad outlook for us. It is a pity we could not have cornered the rats!"

"That rascal Wells is responsible for all this."

"Yes, he fooled us greatly. But we must run him down."

"What direction do you think they have taken?"

"It is possible they have gone to Texas."

"I don't believe it."

"What is your theory?"

"They have gone back to 'Frisco."

Old King Brady looked doubtful.

"I don't see how that can be," he said. "It would seem a foolish act on their part. They would simply be placing themselves in the jaws of the tiger."

"Yes, officers are looking for them everywhere there."

"I cannot believe that they will do it. Yet, we ought to make sure before striking for Texas."

"Ought there not to be a trail?"

"We will look for one."

With this the detectives began to examine the ground. They searched very carefully and assiduously.

And not without result.

The prints of horses' hoofs were found leading west. They were easily traced to the pass leading to Nevada.

Old King Brady nodded.

"That settles it," he said. "It is just as I thought."

"What?"

"They have gone back to 'Frisco."

"You believe it?"

"I do."

"Cannot we overtake them?"

"Perhaps so. I would not be surprised if we would find them all now at Bad Rock."

"Then let us go there at once."

It did not take long to bring up the automobile. The detectives set out at once for Bad Rock.

It was fifty miles distant over a tortuous trail. Progress was therefore naturally slow.

But mile after mile was covered and late in the afternoon the detectives came out on an eminence and looked down on Bad Rock.

It was decided to pass around to the other side and secure the automobile where they had before.

This was done.

Then the detectives donned a clever disguise and went down into the town.

It was just in the edge of the evening. The denizens of the place had gathered about Cy Carkin's place for the evening.

The wrestling bear was not on hand, but other attractions were, and the scene was lively.

The detectives mingled with the crowd, and suddenly Old King Brady exclaimed:

"There is that Wells!"

This was true.

The pseudo reporter stood by the bar-room entrance. He was as cool and nonchalant as ever.

It was hard indeed to suspect him as connected with the Ranch C gang. The Bradys regarded him curiously.

He was certainly a cunning and crafty rogue.

"He fooled us all right," said Harry, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And now we will fool him," said Old King Brady.

"Do you think he suspects our presence in the place?"

"Not a bit of it. He would never think of our coming back here. Let us shadow him."

Wells lounged about the hotel entrance for quite a while.

Then he walked away down the street. The detectives followed.

They kept at a discreet distance. They wondered where the other members of the gang were.

But now a genuine surprise was to be accorded them.

Not a trace of the Ranch C gang could be found in the town.

There was no evidence that any but Wells had been there.

Here was a problem.

"It is queer," muttered Old King Brady, "Wells is here."

"That is true," agreed Harry. "But as he is the capper, or silent worker, of the gang, he might not be with them at all times anyway."

"Then they are somewhere else?"

"I think so."

"Our best course, then, is to keep track of Wells. Sooner or later he will lead us to them."

"It looks that way."

Deduction was one of Old King Brady's hobbies.

The more he thought of the matter the better satisfied he became of one very important fact.

"I think I have the whole thing simmered down," he said.

"Ah!" said Harry. "How is that?"

"It is not at all difficult."

"Well?"

"You see it is this way: The trio, Ah Quan, Murray and Ketch, with the rest of the gang, have gone on to 'Frisco."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"We will allow that. What is Wells doing here?"

"He is after us."

"Ah! They left him behind for that purpose?"

"Just so. Heretofore he has been able to openly track us. Now he will do so secretly."

"He cannot know that we are here in Bad Rock?"

"Not yet; but he is looking for us to show up here."

Both detectives agreed on this deduction. They now knew that it was a question of strategy.

"What shall we do?" asked Harry. "We can go on and leave him here."

"Yes, but I don't think that would be the best plan."

"Ah! What is your game?"

"Simply to allow him to shadow us. At all times we will keep him in sight, and thus deceive him. In this way it will be easy for us to keep in touch with our birds."

"Instead of shadowing him then, let him shadow us?"

"Yes."

"But it will be necessary to let him know that we are in Bad Rock."

"Certainly. What could be more simple?"

"That is very true. It is a capital idea and will work all right."

So the Bradys proceeded to carry out this novel plan.

They simply reversed the usual detective method, and instead of shadowing the crook allowed him to shadow them.

The result can be imagined.

The Bradys now went down into the street openly.

They appeared in Cy Carkin's place publicly and made no attempt at concealment of their personality.

Of course Wells at once spotted them. The detectives became aware of this fact and that they were followed.

Matters became interesting.

The Bradys spent the night in Bad Rock. Wells hovered about the place and was always close behind them.

The next morning the detectives took leave of the place.

They made their way up into the mountain where they had left the automobile. And now an astounding discovery was made.

It was gone.

The detectives were stunned. They searched the vicinity closely. Marks of the wheels were found in the soft soil.

These were traced up the mountain trail for some way. It was an unpleasant reflection that some one had stolen the electric carriage.

"Here is a go!" cried Old King Brady. "Who has done this thing?"

"Could it have been Wells?"

The same question had occurred to each detective. But Old King Brady shook his head.

"I hardly think so," he said; "more likely some prowling Indian or hunter found it by chance and was mean enough to take possession of it."

"We are in a pretty fix now."

"You're right!"

"How shall we get back to 'Frisco?"

"There are two ways: by horseback or striking the railroad some hundreds of miles south of us."

"Ugh! I believe the latter is the best plan. Do you imagine Wells is behind us?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Well, let us first make sure that the automobile cannot be recovered."

"Very well."

They pushed on up the mountain trail searching for the tracks. They experienced little difficulty.

Along the mountain they traced the passage of the vehicle. Then they noted a peculiar fact.

This was that the footprints of a man were at times visible. The boot-heels showed that it was not an Indian who had taken the automobile.

"I thought so," said Old King Brady. "Ah! what is this?"

At this moment the trail passed along one side of the mountain where there was a fearful cliff or precipice with a descent of several hundred feet.

The wheel tracks led directly to the verge.

The detectives exchanged glances.

Then Old King Brady snapped his fingers.

"That settles it!" he said, throwing himself down upon his face and crawling to the edge of the precipice.

And it did settle it.

For below upon the jagged rocks lay a mass of steel wreckage. It was the automobile.

Of course it was useless to go down after it. To attempt to resurrect or reconstruct it would be impossible.

Also it was useless to attempt to fathom the identity of the malicious individual who had committed the deed.

The fact was plain that the detectives were deprived of their novel conveyance and must find some other means of transportation.

There was no alternative but to go back to Bad Rock.

This they did.

The next thing was to negotiate for some horses.

Old King Brady was an excellent judge of horseflesh and soon had selected two good, strong animals of the mustang breed.

Procuring saddles, the detectives made their outfit complete and later in the day rode out of Bad Rock.

But new and stirring adventures were before them.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK IN 'FRISCO.

The loss of the automobile was indeed a serious setback to the detectives.

It was necessary for them to ride several hundred miles south to the line of the Union Pacific Railroad.

They rode on until dark and camped on the banks of a creek which was overhung with willows.

Already they began to see evidences of the dry and arid country through which they must pass.

A fire was made and they made themselves comfortable for the night.

While one slept the other kept guard. It was not long after midnight when Harry, who was on guard, woke the old detective up.

"I hear horses' hoofs," he said.

Old King Brady was instantly alert and sprang up.

"You do?" he asked.

"Yes."

"In what direction?"

"Yonder—over the plain."

Old King Brady scattered the brands of the fire.

Then he applied his ear to the ground. He listened long and deep. When he arose he said:

"Yes! A horseman is making his way around to the south of us."

"Who can it be?"

"Do you know what I think?"

"Well?"

"We are shadowed. It is Wells."

Harry whistled softly.

"Why, of course," he said. "There is no doubt of that. He has probably come up with us. Let us take a look out there."

"All right."

The detectives crept out in the shadows and made their

way to the verge of a depression which might once have been the basin of a lake.

They listened again.

The hoof beats were faintly discernible in the distance and finally died out altogether.

"He has gone on," said Harry. "Do you think he has missed us?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Old King Brady. "He knows our course."

"Are there more than one?"

"I hear only one horse."

"What ought we to do?" asked Harry.

Old King Brady shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he said. "Wait for developments. We cannot overtake that fellow even if we wanted to."

So they returned to their camp.

But there was no more sleep that night. Careful watch was kept for fear that the foe might spring some deadly game upon them.

But nothing more was seen or heard until daylight came.

The detectives partook of food which they carried in their saddle-bags, and then rode away again to the southward.

Some distance further on they found the trail of the unknown horseman.

It was impossible, of course, to establish his identity by this. The trail finally became lost in a salt plain.

Days passed and the detectives still journeyed on to the southward.

One day they rode out of the sage brush plains and heard a distant shrill shriek which gave them a thrill.

It was the call of the locomotive, and was music to their ears.

At a small watering station they halted and left their horses at a mighty sacrifice with the keeper there.

Then they boarded a train for 'Frisco.

In due time they bowled down the western slope of the Sierras and arrived in the Golden Gate city.

Their first move was to go to the hotel and seek rest. Both were much fatigued and worn with the incidents of the past weeks.

The next day, however, they were ready for business.

There was no certainty that Wells or any of the gang had yet arrived in the city. But that they would appear later there was no doubt.

The detectives know that the hunt henceforth must be confined to San Francisco and its environs.

The Ranch C gang felt safe in its knowledge of many safe and secure hiding places.

They would make things warm for the detectives. Henceforth the Bradys were to find themselves in hot water.

But this did not disturb them.

They already had their plans made. It was to be a battle between detective skill and villainy. Which would win time was to tell.

Old King Brady at once paid a visit to the Floyd mansion.

He was received eagerly and kindly by Mrs. Floyd.

"What have you gained?" she asked.

"Nothing of great value," replied Old King Brady. "I have been on the track of the gang. But they eluded us."

"Ah, then you do not know where they are?"

"Yes, I think I do. They are at present in this city."

Mrs. Floyd gave a start.

"In 'Frisco?" she asked.

"I think so."

"Then you will be able to track them more easily?"

"I hope to draw the lines about them so strongly that they cannot escape."

"I trust you will."

"But I have a bit of good news for you, madam."

Mrs. Floyd gave a start and looked at the detective with eager, burning gaze.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "What may it be?"

"I have seen him."

"My son?"

"Yes."

A glad cry escaped her lips. She came nearer, with clasped hands.

"He is safe and well?" she asked.

"He is."

"Heaven be praised! Oh, you do not believe him guilty?"

"Certainly not. I hope soon to have the necessary evidence to clear him."

"Oh, you are good and kind," cried the anxious mother. "Heaven will reward you. I know my boy is innocent. Will he not dare to come back?"

"Just now it is hardly safe."

Old King Brady arose to go.

Mrs. Floyd held out her hand.

"How shall I thank you?" she said. "You have done me a greater favor than I can ever repay."

"Ah, but I have not completed my task yet," said the old detective. "Wait until then to thank me."

When he left the Floyd mansion a carriage came dashing up to the door. Two men leaped out.

Old King Brady came face to face with them.

He was given a mighty start. One was Carl Ripley and the other he did not know, but there was something very familiar about him.

The young secretary nodded curtly and spoke to his companion in an undertone. Then they entered the house.

Old King Brady pretended to carelessly saunter away down the avenue.

But a short distance beyond he turned about, and, seeing that he was unobserved, leaped the hedge into the grounds of the Floyd estate.

Shrubby were dense on these grounds and with little difficulty, in their shadow, he made his way up to within a few feet of the windows on the north side of the house.

The old detective had been trying hard to locate the man who was with young Ripley.

He wore whiskers which he could not place. The eyes, the nose and forehead—like lightning all came to him.

"By Jove!" he gasped. "It is Wells!"

Wells, the pseudo reporter, the deep scheming outlaw and villain. What was he doing at this moment, in company with Carl Ripley?

A thousand excited queries flashed through the detective's brain.

Was Wells in collusion with Ripley? Else, why did the young secretary affect his companionship and that when he was the wearer of a disguise?

Old King Brady was well satisfied of one fact.

It was crooked work.

The hardihood of the villains was almost beyond his comprehension. Wells seemed to be the cardinal schemer.

Doubtless Ripley was only his tool. The old detective experienced a keen desire to know what was going on in that mansion behind those windows.

One of them was open and a folding screen stood before it. A balcony extended in front of it.

The faint murmur of voices came from this window.

The old detective became convinced that this was the room in which the two villains were.

He conceived a daring idea.

So deeply desirous was he of knowing what was going on in that room that he decided to take mighty chances.

How he wished it was dark.

But it was broad daylight, and he was therefore handicapped greatly. He drew from his pocket two long slips of rubber.

These he slid over the soles of his shoes to make his tread noiseless.

Then he looked about to make sure no one was in the vicinity.

At the stable far down through the vista of trees the coachman was washing a wagon.

But he was not looking this way. The detective took the risk.

He moved across to the balcony rail.

He reached up and gripped it.

Noiselessly, like a veritable cat, he went over it. He crouched at the low sill of the open window.

There was a space of fully three feet between the window and the screen.

With complete noiselessness the old detective stepped in at the window and crouched behind the screen.

Through a crevice in its joints he saw the whole interior of the room.

Leaning against the mantelpiece, with a cigar in his mouth, was Ripley.

Seated in a chair and looking up into his face was Wells.

Every word spoken by both was caught by the old detective.

Wells was talking.

"I tried to trap those cursed sleuthhounds every way I could. But they dodged me every time."

"That is bad."

"Yes, very bad. So long as they are on earth there'll be no peace for any of us."

"But is there no way—are none of us smart enough to do them up?"

"Well, I thought I was, but I got left. They are pretty keen, I tell you. They got onto me."

"The deuce!"

"That's right, and that's why I wear this disguise."

"Where are the rest of the boys?"

"Scattered all over the city. Some are in Sacramento and three have gone to Texas."

"Well, they are all posted?"

"Sure. Now, about this new job?"

"Ah, yes. You see I thought I had the game all fixed. But, confound it, the old lady now objects to our marriage."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SNARE.

Old King Brady felt his veins tingle. Surely, he was getting valuable matter.

"The devil!" ejaculated Wells. "What does she object to?"

"Up to the day that old detective came here she favored the engagement. Since then, somehow, she talks the other way."

"Do you suppose he said anything to her?"

"He might have. I believe the old hound suspected me."

"Well, that is bad. What can be done about it?"

"One thing is sure," said Ripley, with a frightful oath. "The girl must be won right away or something may open her eyes and kill my chances."

"What will you gain by this marriage?"

"The girl and a million clear."

"Whew! One hundred thousand of that comes to the gang."

"The moment I get my claws on it."

"Then you can count on us to help you. But what can we do?"

"I am going to try one more thing before I resort to desperate means."

"What?"

"Elopement."

Wells gave a low, long whistle.

"The deuce!" he ejaculated. "Will she agree to that?"

"I think she will."

"Are you sure?"

"She has said she would marry me. I will appeal to her warmest nature. That is all I can do."

"And if she will not——"

"Then I want your help."

"Ah, abduction, eh?"

"It is a sure thing. There are plenty of safe places in the Sierras where she could never be found."

"But the money—will you be just as sure of it?"

"In the end. Of course, she will come to terms, as will the old lady, when they find that they have got to."

"Well," said Wells, lighting a cigar. "I wish you luck. Remember, that we are on hand when you want us."

"All right."

"I am off."

"Must you go now?"

"You know I have important work. You know where to find me when you want me."

"Yes."

Wells left the room and a moment later was descending the drive to the street. The detective could see his retreating figure through the window.

But Ripley did not leave the room.

He smoked slowly and nonchalantly. Then he sat down at a desk. He proceeded to use pen and ink.

The detective maintained his position. He was at a loss to know just what to do.

He had gained much valuable information. A more villainous plot could not be conceived.

But just how to make use of his discovery he did not know. He thought of at once springing the trap.

But he remembered that the evidence was weak.

There was nothing as yet of sufficient strength to convict the villains.

It was better to wait.

He had thought of at once leaving by the way he had entered. But second thought impelled him to wait.

He fell to wondering what the villain was writing.

A desire to learn this came to him. He fancied Ripley might soon leave the room and give him a chance. So he waited.

But very differently things turned out. Suddenly the door of the room softly opened.

Ripley sprang up.

The detective was thrilled.

In the doorway was a slight, girlish figure. She stood half eager, half waiting.

"Bertha!" exclaimed Ripley. "Do come in, dear. Ah, this is a pleasure. You have come just in the right time."

"To disturb you in your duties," she said archly.

"Which is more than pleasure to me," he cried.

He took her in his arms and kissed her. The detective shivered.

It was like a tender dove fondled by a serpent.

"You say I came in at the right time," she said finally. "What did you mean, Carl?"

The young secretary drew her to a seat.

"It will take me some little time to explain, dear," he said. "And I fear that what I have to say to you may not meet with your approval."

She gave a start.

"I am sure that could never be," she said.

"We love each other very much?"

"Yes."

"We stand ready to at any time make any kind of a sacrifice?"

Still she wondered.

"Why, of course, Carl!" she said. "What do you mean?"

"This: I fear that there are powerful forces working to prevent our ever becoming one."

A little, sharp cry escaped her.

"Oh, that can never be," she said. "I am true and you must believe me. Nothing shall separate us."

But he shook his head.

"Yes, you know my position. I am only a poor clerk. You are a millionaire's daughter—a rich heiress."

An impatient exclamation burst from her lips.

"You silly boy! I would give it all up in a moment for

you, everything. Why need you worry about that? I will never be another's."

He sighed deeply and shook his head.

"Your mother now has for some reason refused our immediate marriage."

"Well, that is not strange. It would hardly be proper so soon after the awful tragedy of my father's death."

"She will never sanction it."

"I am sure she will. I will ask her."

"No, dearest. It would be of no use. You see, there are unkind people who see fit to cast the shadow of suspicion on me of implication in that awful crime."

"They are mad! You are innocent!"

"You know it. But your friends will always deem it a stain upon me, and then they consider my social position."

"I don't care," said Bertha positively. "I shall never marry any one but you."

"There is one way in which we can make sure of that."

She looked up questioningly.

"What?" she asked.

"Will you trust me?"

"I do."

"It shall be forever a secret between us. We must be united unknown to the world. The tie will be made and then they cannot break it. We cannot be separated."

The old detective's blood boiled. He watched the thrilling scene with a deadly fascination.

There was a long silence.

Then she said:

"Is that honorable, Carl?"

"In the sight of God it cannot be wrong," he declared.

"It is our safeguard to prevent separation. If you love me you will not refuse to trust me in that."

"I—I will think it over."

He started to rise.

"Ah!" he said, bitterly. "Love which will yield no sacrifice is hardly love."

With a little, impulsive cry she drew him back.

"Wait," she cried. "I yield. It shall be so. Oh, Carl, I hope we are doing nothing wrong."

He caught her in his arms.

"Pshaw!" he said. "You are too much afraid. Am I not a man of honor? Will I not give my life for you? You know it well."

"I trust you absolutely," she said.

"Scoundrel!" muttered the detective under his breath. "He is deep in the dye."

Ripley had arisen and held Bertha in his arms.

In terms of tender cajolery he quieted her fears and overcame her arguments.

Soon she had yielded to his persuasive powers and the matter of arrangement was considered.

"To-night at nine," said Ripley softly, "we will be made one. There is an honest dominie out on Sacramento street who will tie the knot for us. Oh, that will be a very happy hour, Bertha."

He kissed her. Old King Brady felt a chill traversing his spine.

"I will be ready at nine," she said.

"Your mother will have retired. The carriage will be

at the side gate. Come and get in. You will pick me up later on the way. You understand?"

"Yes."

"We will be back before any one can ever suspect what has happened."

Further protestations followed, and then the young girl left the room.

As the door closed behind her something like a hiss escaped the villain's lips.

He drew his slender figure up and paced the floor with clenched hands and the veins standing out upon his temples.

"Ah," he gritted. "The game is mine. It cost me something to win it. Honor and soul I have sacrificed. But the game will be worth the candle.

"One million dollars and the sweetest girl on earth. Who would not plot and steal, aye, murder, for such a gain?"

Old King Brady listened with nerves on the qui vive.

The old detective's plans were made.

But he dared not stir as yet. It would mean discovery, and that would be ruin.

So he cowered in the shadows behind the screen as the young villain paced the floor and voiced his passions and plans for over an hour.

Then Ripley went to the table and picked up a bundle of papers.

He went to the hearth and cast them upon the fire.

"That makes me safe," he said, sotto voce. "There is no evidence in existence against me now."

Then he stood irresolute in the middle of the floor.

He glanced toward the window.

"Ugh!" he muttered. "There is a chilly draught here. I did not know that window was open."

He advanced toward the screen. As it was in his way, he gave it a kick, and it collapsed and fell.

At that moment Old King Brady believed that he was discovered.

He could not see how this could be helped. The impulse was upon him to spring to his feet.

Luckily, he did not.

Ripley never gave the screen a glance as he hurled it aside. It fell in a heap upon the detective's recumbent form.

Ripley closed the window with a bang. Then he turned without glancing down at his feet.

The detective's face was within an inch of his heel. It was a close call.

To the mantel Ripley strode and lit a taper at the fire. Slowly lighting a cigar he turned to the door and went out of the room, closing it after him with a crash.

Old King Brady was safe.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHINESE RESTAURANT.

The old detective was willing to admit that he had never had a closer call in his life.

Why the villain had not seen him was a wonder.

In broad daylight it seemed almost incredible. But when one took into consideration that Ripley was in an unduly excited state of mind, an explanation was easily seen.

Old King Brady disentangled himself from the broken screen.

He went to the desk and quietly took a look at the papers scattered there.

But this resulted in nothing.

None of them was of importance or calculated to throw light upon the mystery. Then he opened the door lightly.

The great hall beyond was empty.

He went back to the window.

He saw Ripley leisurely strolling down the drive with hat and coat on. An impulse to follow him seized the detective.

He raised the window gently and looked out.

The coast was clear.

The old detective slid down from the balcony and reached the drive. He kept along in the shadow of the cedars.

When Ripley reached the street he set out down the hill toward the business part of the town.

Old King Brady followed him cautiously. Soon they were in the heart of the city.

Ripley bent his steps toward the slums. He turned into one dingy street and another.

Suddenly he paused before the door of a Chinese chop house.

Over the door was a sign:

"Sing Lee. Chinese Restaurant."

Ripley looked up and down the street and then entered the place.

Old King Brady crossed the street.

As he did so he saw a man glide out of the shadows of an alley opposite.

The man looked up and down.

Old King Brady's face lit up.

He placed his fingers to his lips and gave a peculiar shrill whistle. Instantly the man came across the street.

It was Young King Brady.

"Harry!" cried the old detective. "It is you."

"Of course it is," replied the young detective. "What is the good word?"

"Everything is all quiet."

"I tracked four of the gang over the house tops. I think they are in that building over there."

Old King Brady nodded.

"That is where they are."

"Ah, you know it?"

"I am quite sure of it. I saw Carl Ripley go in there."

"Ripley?"

"Yes."

"Whew!" gasped Harry. "That is a score against him, is it not?"

"I should say so!"

"You think he is in the game?"

"I know it."

"Ah! Any new clew?"

"I should say so."

With this, Old King Brady recited the incidents of the past few hours.

Harry listened with interest.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Will you allow that secret wedding to take place?"

"No."

"How will you prevent it?"

"That is easy."

"Pray, how?"

"Be on hand."

Harry nodded and said:

"At nine o'clock to-night. Have you any idea where the place is?"

"We can easily find out."

"That is true. But for the present why not interest ourselves in the doings over there?"

Harry pointed to the chop house.

"Good! Who were the birds you followed?"

"Murray, Ketch and Ah Quan. It is one of the relatives of the Chinaman who keeps this place."

"Indeed!"

The detectives now discussed a plan of action. The gang with Ripley were undoubtedly all in the chop house.

How were they to gain admission, and how were they to hear all that was going on? An idea occurred to the old detective.

"There is a basement to the place," he said. "It seems to be dark. Do you think it is occupied?"

"Very likely. That is where they always locate an opium joint."

"Let us investigate."

The detectives crossed the street and carelessly strolled by the chop house. They could see that the basement was reached by a series of rotten steps.

It was certainly unoccupied.

The two detectives lounged against the railing. Finally Old King Brady made sure that they could not be seen by any one inside the place.

Then he dropped down into the area, Harry instantly following him.

The basement door was locked, but this was no barrier.

Old King Brady had a dozen skeleton keys which would open it.

This he proceeded to do.

The two detectives entered the place. It was dark and dingy and dirty.

The odor of sewer gas was most overpowering, but the detectives did not turn back.

They kept on until they reached the further room of the place.

They could hear the shuffling of feet and the murmur of voices overhead. Nothing was distinguishable.

"There's where they are," said Old King Brady. "There's only the ceiling and a floor between us."

"If we could remove those——"

"We would be right in it."

"Sure."

Old King Brady looked about. A pile of old packing cases was in one corner.

The place had once been used by a small grocer. The detective piled up a number of these cases.

He stood upon them and applied his ear to the ceiling.

He could hear conversation, but could not distinguish the words.

An idea occurred to him.

The room overhead, he reckoned, was the same size as this one. He studied the ceiling a moment and said:

"I have a plan."

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"Keep cool and you'll see."

In the lower corner of the room the detective piled up the packing cases. Then he climbed upon them.

From his pocket he took a wonderful tool. It was a combination article of knife, chisel saw and auger.

The plastering of the ceiling here was damp and sodden. The little auger easily penetrated it.

Then, noiselessly, the detective picked off the pieces of ceiling from the laths. This was done silently.

Harry assisted by taking the material as it was removed.

In a very few moments quite a space had thus been uncovered. Then the noiseless saw began work on the laths.

In less than twenty minutes an aperture had been made large enough to admit a man's body.

Only the rotten floorings above now remained. The detective's plan was to cut this with the noiseless saw.

The racket overhead was so great that any ordinary sound below would be unnoticed.

The detective's hope was that one of the small boards in the corner of the room could be sawed and removed without being seen by the villains above.

Being in the corner of the room it would likely be in the shadow.

Fortune certainly favored the old detective. He put his hand lightly against the floor-board.

To his surprise he found that it was only a short piece resting from the wall upon the second beam. Moreover, it was not nailed, or, what was more likely, time had rusted the nails to nothingness.

At any rate the small section of the floor yielded.

The detective raised it an inch very carefully. He saw the walls of the room above and part of its interior.

The head and shoulders of four men could be seen. Their backs were toward the corner, or at least the view of any was obstructed.

The old detective hesitated no longer. He lifted the bit of flooring noiselessly and took it down into the cellar.

Then he steadied himself by putting a hand on the floor beam and put his head up through the aperture.

He made a discovery.

A table sat in that corner and he was beneath this. The shadow was so great that he could not be seen, anyway.

And he could see and hear all that was going on in the room.

It was a lucky bit of work and most skilfully executed.

Old King Brady recognized every occupant of the room.

They were Mad Murray, Wells, the sport, Ketch, and Carl Ripley.

The Chinaman, Ah Quan, was not present for some reason.

The quartette was having an animated discussion. Every word was heard by the detective.

"Bluff all you want to," cried Ripley, who seemed to be in a fit of anger. "You can't fool me."

"Who's tryin' to, ye ape-faced dude?" gritted Mad Murray.

"You are!"

"Ye lie!"

"Look here," cried Ripley, savagely, "be careful how you talk to me."

"Bah! I don't care any more for you than I do fer a yaller dog."

"You may before you get through."

"Oh, come off!" cried Wells. "What's the use of all this cheap talk? Let's come to the point at once."

"I've been ready from the first," said Ripley, "but these cowboys think they can bulldoze me."

"Give him a chance, boys," said Wells; "he'll do the fair thing."

"That's all I ask," said Murray; "but we've been fooled long enough. Go ahead with yer proposition."

"Yas, let's have it," said Ketch, doggedly. "If it ain't fairer than the other, then thar's no use."

"I'll always do the fair thing," declared Ripley; "you fellows know that."

"Wall, go on."

"I know that you helped me put old Floyd under the daisies."

"Yas."

"Now, you know that I haven't got my money yet."

"It's time."

"Allow that. I haven't got it and I can't pay off until I get it."

"You kin raise our share someway," growled Murray. "We've got to get out of the country."

"Why so sudden?"

"Them condemned detectives, the Bradys, are hot after us."

"Pshaw," said Ripley, confidently. "Your fears are foolish. I have a plan for taking care of them."

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH ENDS ALL.

Of course, this announcement was of especial interest to Old King Brady. He smiled.

"We've heard a good many plans," growled Murray, "but none on 'em seem to work very well."

"That's because you fellows are too impatient," said Wells.

"Mebbe we are," growled Ketch; "but just give us ten thousand apiece and let us get out of the country."

"Your share is twenty-five thousand apiece," said Ripley.

"Wall, we'll settle for ten and you can have the million and the gal."

"I wish I could settle off with you at that figure."

"Can't ye?"

"I have told you a good many times that I could not.

Again, you claim to have done so much for me. The knife thrust I gave the old man was what killed him."

Old King Brady noted this.

Ripley was the murderer.

"All the same, you've got to stand up to yer agreement."

"I will when the time comes."

"That's right, boys," said Wells.

"Well," said Murray, in an ugly voice, "the time has come. I know that this cuss means to cheat us."

"That's my opinion, too," said Ketch.

"Now, you'll pay us off or you'll foller old Floyd yer-self," and Murray drew an ugly-looking bowie and laid it down on his knee.

Ripley looked a greenish pallor. Wells alone was cool.

"Look here, boys," he said, "don't be fools. Give the lad a chance."

"But we've got to get out of the country," growled Ketch.

"Now or never!" gritted Murray. "Will yer do it or not?"

He leaned forward and drew the glittering blade before the eyes of Ripley. The young villain was plainly in terror.

And in that moment no doubt he faithfully believed that the villain opposite him meant what he said, and that there was no appeal.

The villain was an abject coward.

He had sprung upon and knifed his aged employer while his back was turned. It seemed to him now as if he was also doomed to die by the knife.

And the horror of the thing unnerved him. He committed what proved to be a terrible and cowardly act.

Once more his eyes dilated, his tongue grew thick and cold sweat broke out on his brow.

Then, quick as a flash, a pistol leaped from his pocket and he fired point-blank.

The bullet struck Murray full in the chest.

With a fearful gasp and sickening cough, the fellow lunged forward, partly rose, and pitched forward in a heap. Death was instantaneous.

In an instant all was in an uproar in the place.

The Chinese proprietor came rushing in in a frenzy. The others made leaps for the door.

There was but one thought.

This was of escape.

It was well known that the police would be down upon the place in a twinkling. All would be held as accessories to a murder.

"Fool!" hissed Wells, as he sprang past Ripley. "You have ruined all. Flee for your life!"

With this the pseudo reporter dashed out the sash of the rear window.

He leaped through and vanished in an alley. Ketch followed him. The Chinese were running about and jabbering wildly.

Old King Brady would have given much had the aperture been bigger at that moment.

The detectives might at least have bagged the murderer.

They rushed out of the basement and into the chop house, but by this time it was deserted.

The gang was gone.

The dead body of Murray lay on the floor. A few moments later the police were in possession of the place.

The Bradys knew better than to make a statement of affairs.

They therefore told a simple story to the police and took their departure. The Chinese were arrested.

But none of them save Ah Quan knew who the visitors were, and he, of course, would not disclose the truth.

Such affairs were of not uncommon occurrence, and as the clues were faint, but little effort was made to clear up the mystery.

It was left in abeyance pending the coroner's inquest.

But there were two who were diligently at work.

These were the Bradys.

Leaving the chop house, they separated.

Harry took the trail of the thugs and Old King Brady went out onto the Sacramento road to look for the dominie who was engaged by Ripley to perform a certain marriage ceremony.

Harry scoured the slums for a clew to Ketch and Wells.

Old King Brady started out to find the house of the dominie spoken of by Ripley.

It was already evening, and darkness was fast settling down.

The detective kept on along a dark thoroughfare. He made guarded inquiries as he went on.

"Why, yes, there is Reverend Mr. Parker, of Faith Chapel over yonder," said one passer-by.

The detective crossed the street.

The parsonage was near the chapel. He saw that a light burned in the latter.

He walked leisurely up to the door of the parsonage and touched the bell. A servant appeared.

"Is the Reverend Mr. Parker in?" asked the detective.

"He is, sir," replied the servant.

"I would like to see him."

"Pray, come in."

The detective entered the sitting-room of the little parsonage.

In a moment the minister, a white-haired, kindly faced man, entered. The detective arose to greet him.

"Is this the rector?" he asked.

"I am he," replied the minister. "How can I serve you?"

"I would like to ask the marriage laws of California. Is a secret marriage in anyway binding?"

"Any marriage performed by a regular minister of the Gospel in California is legal."

"It cannot be fraudulent?"

"Not if the minister is an ordained servant of God."

"Do you perform many marriages in your chapel?"

"Quite a good many."

"I am interested and would much like to witness a marriage ceremony. Do you ever need witnesses?"

"Indeed, we are sometimes put to trouble to secure them," he said. "Would you like to officiate as such? I have a ceremony to perform this evening at half past nine. It would give you your desired opportunity to witness a ceremony."

"I will be very glad," said Old King Brady.

"Do I have your name?"

"You may call me Lemuel Simpkins."

"Do you reside in San Francisco?"

"Yes, at present."

"That is all right. At half past nine come into the chapel. I will accept you as a witness."

"By the way, can you tell me the names of the contracting parties?"

"I do not know them personally," replied Mr. Parker. "But I believe I have their names on the book. Yes. Carl Ripley and Bertha Floyd. I presume they are people of humble means, as he haggled over the fee."

"Very likely."

Old King Brady bowed himself out. In the gloom outside he donned a pair of long whiskers.

At half past nine a coach drove rapidly up to the chapel door. A veiled lady, with a gentleman, got out.

They entered the church and stood before the altar. The Reverend Mr. Parker appeared with his marriage testament.

The detective appeared and stood by his side. Also the sexton of the chapel.

"Are you ready for the ceremony?" asked the divine.

"We are," replied Ripley in a low voice.

The divine proceeded to read the service. He reached the responses and had queried:

"Are you prepared to take this woman, Carl, to be your lawful wife?"

"No!" said a deep voice. A tall form stepped forward. The detective pulled his false beard away and faced Ripley.

"Carl Ripley, murderer! You are my prisoner! I am here to save this innocent young girl from a fate worse than death."

Ripley started back with a horrible curse. His would-be bride fainted in the sexton's arms.

What followed was brief and tragic.

Manacled, Carl Ripley was led from the church. The good old minister barely averted an apoplectic shock.

Bertha was placed in the carriage and taken home. Her escape had been most miraculous.

She owed all her future life's happiness to Old King Brady.

The next day the 'Frisco papers had a full account of all. The Bradys were the heroes of the hour.

Young King Brady had succeeded in cornering his men in one of the distant parts of the town. They made a hard fight, but he held them.

Mrs. Floyd and her daughter went into strict retirement. Lester returned home, reformed and became a useful man.

Wells and Ketch received long terms in prison and Ripley expiated his crimes in the hangman's noose.

And this ends our story of the Bradys' case in far-away 'Frisco.

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SHORTY; or KICKED INTO GOOD LUCK BY PETER PAD.



"Go shoot yourself!" replied the boy, at the same time placing his thumb to his nose, and wriggling his fingers in the most comical way. "Oh, the little wretch!" "Oh, the lapsus!" "Oh, the dumbfound-
bus!" Still the boy wriggled his fingers, first to one and then to another of those around the table.

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