

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, March 1, 1899, by Frank Tousey

No. 266.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 26, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND BLACK JACK?

OR, TRACKING THE NEGRO CROOKS.

By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE



As Black Jack fell, Harry went down upon him, and put the handcuffs on instantly. Madly he fought and raved. But the Bradys quickly had him helpless. At last the great criminal had been run to earth.

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The Bradys and "Black Jack"

OR,

Tracking the Negro Crooks.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST CLEW

"Look here, Harry," said Old King Brady, the famous detective, as he looked up from a newspaper he was reading, "here is an opportunity for us. As I live, I believe this advertisement covers a crime."

"What's that, Governor?" exclaimed Young King Brady, tilting back in his chair.

The two famous detectives were at the moment in their Park Row office.

They had just finished a forgery case, and had the first few hours of rest and idleness granted them in many months.

Harry Brady took the paper as handed him by Old King Brady.

It was a copy of the New Orleans Picayune.

In the advertisement column the old detective had marked the notice which claimed his attention.

Thus it read:

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD!

For the arrest of Jack Croon, better known in negro criminal circles as "Black Jack." The above reward will be paid by me in cash.

Two thousand dollars will be paid for his dead body. He is wanted for the waylaying and murder of my brother Clark, at Low Bottom, Magnolia Township, La., on the 23d day of last September. Address all communications to James Cleeman, Pine Plantation, Low Bottom, La.

Harry's face showed great interest.

He studied the advertisement a moment.

"I say, Governor," he said, "I believe there is a layout for us."

Old King Brady smiled grimly.

"Let's deduce a little from the advertisement," he said.

"Black Jack Croon is a negro murderer. Last September he murdered a man in Low Bottom, La."

"Yes."

"Very good. It was in February that the first of the mysterious crimes that have terrorized the people was committed in New York."

"Just so!"

"Since that time there have been four foul murders, twelve holdups, several assaults and robberies, and in all these cases a burly negro is described."

"That is so!"

"It is easy to assume, then, that this notorious Black Jack may have come to New York, and he may be the very fellow whom we are now looking for."

Harry sprung up.

"By jove!" he exclaimed, "he is the chap."

"Wait!"

"What?"

"He is not the only one."

"No."

"I believe he is merely the ringleader of a hard gang of negro crooks who have headquarters somewhere in Sixth or Seventh avenues."

"Without a doubt!"

"Black Jack is our man!"

Old King Brady opened his desk and took out a handsome Colt revolver.

He placed it in his pocket.

"Arm yourself, Harry," he said. "There is going to be desperate work before us. We have dealt all our lives with white crooks, but I believe these colored crooks are the worst in the business."

"All right, Governor. We shall invade the negro colony to-night, then?"

"Yes."

Harry also placed a revolver in his pocket. Then he brought forth a card.

"Read this," he said. "It may give us a clew."

The old detective glanced at it.

"Raffle at Moses White's! One dollar a ticket! Object to be raffled is a fur overcoat. The winner takes it. Be on hand to-night."

Old King Brady smiled.

"That is a regular coon trick," he said. "Whoever would think of raffling away an overcoat in June?"

"That's right," laughed Harry, "but you may be sure all the darkies in the locality will be on hand."

"No doubt! Let me see—haven't we heard of Moses White before?"

"I believe he is a negro saloonkeeper and a prizefighter. His place is in upper Sixth avenue."

Old King Brady took a small book out of a pigeon-hole in his desk.

He ran his eye up and down a column of names.

"Moses White," he repeated. "Oh, yes! Here he is. Ex-champion of the featherweight class. He is a colored boxer."

"Like all other champions, he essays the keeping of a saloon."

"That is it!"

"But he has not a dollar of his own money invested in the place, very likely. Some shrewd wholesaler has used his name as a drawing card by paying him a dividend."

"That is the usual case. Moses White's is a favorite resort of the colored crooks of Gotham?"

"Yes."

"We ought to strike Black Jack there, if anywhere in New York."

Convinced of this, the Bradys decided to visit Moses White's place. In other words, they proposed to participate in the raffle.

It was certainly a venturesome undertaking to invade a den like Moses White's.

White men did occasionally turn in at Moses' place, but they were not made very welcome, as a usual thing.

However, the Bradys were determined to find Black Jack, if they could, and to that end were willing to accept any kind of chances.

But they knew very well that it would never do for them to present themselves at White's in the guise of the Bradys.

It was necessary to use a disguise.

So the two detectives made up as sports, out to do the

town. With evening dress, and carrying canes, they sallied forth.

But they did not proceed at once to Moses White's place.

They sauntered up and down Sixth avenue and made themselves conspicuous in the vicinity.

Then, seeing an opportunity, Old King Brady accosted a rather flashy looking coon who stood on a street corner.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said, "are you acquainted with this neighborhood?"

The coon answered rather curtly:

"Ah reckon ah is, sah!"

"Where can two chaps out for fun find a good joint where a little game can be played?"

The negro turned and looked curiously at the Bradys.

Then he grinned.

"Yo' is lookin' foh trouble, eh?"

"Well, yes; if you want to put it so."

"Has yo' got any money?"

"Yes, a few dollars."

The coon grinned again.

"Ah don' know much about New York. Ah's a Virginia nigger. But I hear tell ob a hot time at Moses White's to-night."

This was just what the detectives wanted.

"Moses White's? Where's that?"

The coon opened his eyes wide.

"Yo' must be strangers in New York," he exclaimed.

"Yo' don' say yo' nebber heard ob Moses White's place?"

"Well, you see we don't know much about the city."

"Well, yo' just go up this street one block an' you'll see de sign. Jes' walk right in. Dere's goin' ter be a raffle dere to-night, an' dere'll be quite a game after that."

"Poker?"

The coon rolled his eyes.

"Anythin' yo's a mind to play, from craps to fan-tan."

"That's the place we are looking for!" cried Harry. "I say, you wouldn't like to steer us, would you?"

The coon scratched his head.

"Don' see as yo' needs any steerin'!"

"That's all right; but we are strangers, and we don't like to go where we are not welcome."

"White folks is allus welcome in Moses' place if dey has de stuff."

"See here, my friend," said Old King Brady, with a jerk of his thumb, "you wouldn't object to earning a tenner, would you?"

"Ten dollahs?"

"Yes."

"Hub! Yo' kin just bet I'll do anything foh ten dollahs. Let's see de money!"

Old King Brady pulled out a ten dollar bill and placed it in the fellow's hand.

The coon examined it deftly, rolled it into a ball, and thrust it into his vest pocket. His eyes glittered.

"Ise yo' huckleberry," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

"What's your name?"

"Pete Smith."

"Well, Pete, we want you to take us into Moses' place and go sponsor for us."

"What's dat?"

"Go surety for us. Introduce us. You understand?"

"Yas, I see!"

"Will you do it?"

"Of course I will."

"All right. You must stick by us for the rest of the night; do you understand?"

"Yas, sah!"

"Is it a bargain?"

"You kin count on me."

"All right. Let's get on."

Pete Smith turned and led the way up the street for a block. Then he paused.

"Look here, gemmens," he said, with sudden thought. "Hab yo' got yo' razors along wid you?"

"No," replied Old King Brady. "Is there need of such a thing?"

Pete's hand went down into his pocket.

When he drew it out he held a keen razor aloft. He drew the blade deftly across his finger nail.

"Yo' can bet dat's a mighty fine razor," he said, with a grin. "Ain't no cheap coon goin' ter fool with Pete Smith."

"You must be a sport, Pete."

"Well, you bet I cuts a good swath, I does. I'se nobody's monkey. Now, I done tell yo' dere am some tough mugs dat follers Moses White. Just you keep along with Pete an' you'll hab no trouble. But if you tries anything on yo' own hook dere's no tellin' what kind ob a cut yo' might get."

"All right, Pete," agreed Old King Brady. "We'll stick by you. We're not fools."

The coon seemed satisfied.

They now approached the door of Moses White's saloon.

A number of flashily dressed negroes were lounging about the entrance.

If one had listened to their talk it would have been discovered that it related almost entirely to pugilistic matters.

A great many of the colored fistic stars hung about the resort.

The detectives, in tow of Pete Smith, entered the place. At a glance it was seen to be a typical colored barroom.

The bartenders were coons, and nearly all the habitues of the place were blacks.

But one white man lounged at the bar.

He was a thick-set, brutish-visaged fellow, such as one sees at the pugilistic ringside.

The Bradys knew him in a moment.

He was Rockford Hall, and he was a backer and promoter of boxing matches.

Behind the bar was a powerful-framed, though light-weight negro youth. He was Moses White, the colored champion.

Both looked curiously at the Bradys.

Pete Smith stepped up to the bar and called out:

"Three good whiskies! Yo' can't make 'em too good, boss."

CHAPTER II.

A GAME OF CARDS.

The Bradys instinctively shivered at the thought of drinking the quality of whisky to be procured in the place.

But policy forbade a refusal.

So they managed to swallow some of the stuff with difficulty. All the while Pete kept up a lively conversation with the bartender.

Moses White and Rockford Hall had kept a close watch on the Bradys.

Now Hall called out:

"I say, Smith, what's on for to-night?"

"Eh? What's dat, Mister Hall? Ise goin' ter git that overcoat. Ise got der right ticket."

"Oh, you have, eh? Pretty warm weather for fur overcoats."

"Huh! What comes after summer? Don' you think winter'll git here some time?"

"I don't know. It may not come to some of us. I'll bet you ten to five that you don't win the raffle."

"Oh, sho', now! Yo' don't want ma' good money dat way. If it just was an honest game ob poker now, I could gib yo' odds."

"Is that the game?"

"It am. Dese am my frien's from de South. Mistah Brown an' Mistah Jenks. Allow me to introduce you to dem."

The Bradys shook hands with Hall, and also with the young colored boxer.

Then the conversation became general.

The detectives played their part well.

They kept up their characters as sports, and soon had Hall and White "on a string," as it were. Hall seemed to take a great fancy to the detectives.

Pete Smith grew exuberant as the whisky began to flow.

In fact this gave the Bradys some apprehension. But it was unfounded.

For in less than an hour Pete was dozing in a chair, and the detectives were left with Hall and White.

Then the young colored boxer said:

"Gents, I'd like to have you remain and join me in a social game after the raffle."

It was noticed that Moses was an educated negro, and used good English.

"That'll suit me all right," said Hall. "What do you gents say?"

"I'm sure it suits me," said Old King Brady. "How is it with you, Jenks?"

"I am agreeable," said Harry.

"Very good. We'll call for the drawing at once," said Moses.

With which he rapped on the bar. Silence at once ensued.

The hundred or more anxious coons crowded forward to hear what was said. Moses leaned over the bar and declaimed:

"Now, gents, the tickets for the raffle are all sold, and we're ready for the drawing. The man who holds the lucky number will get the overcoat."

A cheer went up.

The negroes all crowded forward. Big Hall mounted the bar and held up a hat.

"In this hat, gents," he cried, "are numbers corresponding to those on the tickets sold. Let one of you step up here and draw a number. The man who holds the ticket with that number on gets the overcoat."

Again the negroes cheered.

Then a tumult ensued.

Finally a man was selected, and he stepped up and drew a ticket out of the hat. He held it up.

The result was called out.

"Number forty-eight wins!"

Instantly there was an uproar. The result did not seem to please the majority of the company.

Perhaps disappointment had something to do with this.

Cries went up:

"It's a clean swindle!"

"Ah wants ma money back."

"Dar ain't no other number in dat hat!"

The surging mob of coons crowded up to the bar. Some of them were thirsting for blood.

Razors were flourished, and things looked dubious. But Moses White leaped over the bar and right into the crowd.

He sent his fists right and left and cleared a space about him.

Then he yelled:

"If any of you want to fight, step up and have a go with me. But the man who says that drawing wasn't square is a liar. Now let the man who holds that ticket come up and get the prize."

In response to this a young colored man, who looked as though Fortune had never touched him with her wand, came forward.

He grinned with delight from ear to ear.

"Ise de man!" he said, eagerly. "I has dat number."

"Who are you?"

"Mah name is Andrew Jackson, sah."

White glanced at the ticket.

"Well, Mr. Jackson," he said, brusquely, "you're the lucky man. Step up and get the overcoat."

At this a great bellowing voice was heard:

"Don't you give dat suckah dat overcoat! I'se got de ticket myself. He am an impostor, an' he forged dat ar ticket."

Down into the circle came a hulking big negro.

He was puffing and blowing like a porpoise. His eyes were like moons.

He held up a bit of pasteboard.

Moses White saw that the number on it was the same as Jackson's. Here was a pretty state of affairs.

One was a counterfeit.

Which was it?

"Mah name is Bill Stanton," cried the big negro. "Ah am a square man. Dis fellow Jackson am a cheat."

In an instant the meek Mr. Jackson became transformed.

Out came his razor, and he danced into Mr. Stanton with blood in his eyes.

"Dar can't no nasty, no-'count nigger call me no such name as dat!" he snarled. "I'll jes' cut his gizzard out! Huh!"

Mr. Stanton had to dodge to escape the slash made at him.

In an instant the room was in an uproar.

Razors were flashing and blood was flowing. What might become wholesale murder was averted in a shrewd way.

Some one shouted "Police!"

If there is anything that a colored man fears it is an arrest. In an instant there was a stampede.

The place was emptied of its mob in a few moments. A grand rush carried them into the street.

Seeing that the danger was averted, Moses White turned to the Bradys, and said:

"The danger is over. Let's get out of this and have our game."

The Bradys were willing.

They followed White and Hall into a sideroom. Pete Smith still slept.

The four sat down at a green table.

The detectives knew that they were now pitted against two of the keenest gamblers in the metropolis.

But they did not shirk it.

It could not be denied that the Bradys knew something about poker themselves. But it was necessary in the present case.

Hall threw the cards down.

"Cut for deal," he said. "It's my turn. Ace up, I win!"

Then the cards were dealt.

Just then the door opened, and a tall, dark-featured negro entered. He was of a quite unusual type.

While his skin was coal black, there was a regularity of features which bespoke Caucasian blood.

He was dressed in a check suit, and carried a cane with a big crystal set in the head.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, in a smooth and musical tone, "I hope I do not interrupt you. I see you have a game started."

Moses and Hall stared at the stranger, for such he was to them.

Then Hall glanced at Moses, and then both looked at the Bradys.

"That's all right," said Hall, putting a chunk of tobacco in his cheek. "If you're looking for fun, come in. We'll give you a sitting if you've got the stuff."

The newcomer's face lit up.

"What is your limit?" he asked.

"No limit."

"That suits me!" he cried, with a grin. "You can count me in, all right. That is, if I am not intruding."

"Nobody here objects," said Moses. "Deal up, the cards, Rocky. My name is White."

The tall coon with the elegant manners bowed, and said:

"Glad to meet you, Mr. White. My name is Sam Bright. I am just from Richmond, and I mean to stay in New York for a few weeks. Have cigars, gentlemen."

The newcomer flung a cigar case upon the table. Then, the reserve being broken, the talk became general.

Meanwhile the game began. Soon all became so deeply interested that little else was thought of.

The Bradys speedily found that they were up against a slick hand.

Hall and Moses White seemed to collaborate, and they apparently knew well all the tricks of the game.

Each player would seem to win on his own deal. This was suggestive enough.

But it so happened that once Mr. Sam Bright won on Hall's deal. The promoter of fistic events was so astonished to find his sequence offset by four jacks that he stared at Bright suspiciously.

The tall negro, however, was so urbane and matter-of-fact that he could not be accused of cheating, so the game went on.

And with three kings and a pair of tens Moses bet a stack of chips representing several hundred dollars.

Old King Brady and Harry dropped out.

Hall did the same.

It now lay between the tall coon and Moses White. The latter was confident.

"Mr. Bright, you're bluffing," he declared.

But Bright smiled.

"Do you think so?"

"I believe you are. I am going to raise you a blue chip."

"I'll see you and raise you four!"

Moses gasped and looked uneasily at his hand. He hesitated a moment.

"Well," he said slowly, "I know I'm beaten, but I'm going to call you."

Bright laid his cards upon the table.

They represented three aces and a pair of eights. The hand was a shade higher than that of the young boxer.

"You win!" said Moses, with a sickly smile. "I say, but you do carry hands, don't you?"

"Well, I don't know," said Bright, carelessly. "I happened to be a bit lucky just then."

"I should say so!" blurted out Hall. "You finger the cards easy."

For a moment Bright sat very still, and it seemed as if he would not resent this blunt insinuation.

Then he turned and looked at the speaker in a blank gaze. There was no expression in his face or eyes.

"Pardon me! You are not serious?"

"I don't know!" said Hall, savagely. "Cards seem to run your way."

"I came in here to play a square game of cards," said Bright. "But you are disposed to question that fact."

"Something in your style of play that strikes me as very familiar," said Hall.

Bright arose like a flash and seized the fat promoter by the throat. Before either the detectives or Moses White could interfere he was pulled over the table and hurled across the room.

Bright then strode to the door.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, for intruding," he said, with a cold smile. "I see that I am not welcome here, so I will take my leave. Good-night."

He passed out of the room.

Moses White turned to Hall, and his eyes fairly bulged in their sockets.

"I say, Rocky, you had a close call. I thought I had seen that coon before."

"Why didn't you give me a lift?" roared Hall. "Would you stand there and see a man handle me in that way? I don't care who he is. I'll lay for him."

"Lay for him?" gasped White. "Well, you'd get laid out if you did. I didn't know him at first."

Both Harry and Old King Brady were interested. Old King Brady asked:

"Who is he?"

"He is from Louisiana, and his name is Jack Croon. They call him Black Jack down there, and there is a price on his head. He has killed more men than you can count on the fingers of both hands. I tell you, Rocky Hall, you'd better let him alone."

"Black Jack!" gasped Old King Brady, as he flashed a glance at Harry.

The detectives were startled.

They were also discomfited.

The bird they sought had been right in their hands, only to slip away in the most elusive fashion.

As it was, they were tempted to give him instant chase. This, however, would betray them, so they refrained.

The next time, they felt sure, they would know him.

CHAPTER III.

A DARK CRIME.

It was indeed a rare disappointment to the Bradys that Black Jack had slipped them.

Hall seemed now deeply impressed with the revelation afforded by White.

He rubbed the finger mark on his throat, and said:

"So he is Black Jack, eh? Well, he'll drop into the net of the New York detective force if he goes fooling around in this fashion."

"Is that so?" said Moses, with a grin. "Well, you bet he won't. Jack Croon is too keen for any of the detectives of this city."

"Confound him! I wish I had shot him!"

"Shut up, Rocky! You know you would have been scared to death if you had known who he was."

Hall mumbled dire threats. But there was truth in White's declaration.

"Well, he seems to have broken up the game, gentlemen," said Old King Brady.

"He took all my money," declared Moses.

"I'm dead broke," growled Hall. "Let's call the game off. See here, Moses, aren't you going to train any for that fight with the Denver Kid?"

"I'm going in to do a little training now," said Moses. "Won't you come into my quarters, gentlemen?"

The detectives were anxious to get away and give chase to Black Jack.

But they knew that no excuse could be well offered just now, so they replied:

"We shall be pleased to!"

Moses opened a door to an inner room. He turned on the lights.

It was an apartment fitted up with gymnastic apparatus. A punching bag and other devices were there.

This was where the trim little lightweight champion did his training.

He at once stripped to the waist.

It was seen that he was of muscular build and splendidly developed. The detectives watched him go through his stunts.

He punched the bag in a very clever manner. Harry was interested, and finally said:

"I box a little myself. What do you say if we have a friendly go?"

"I'm yours," agreed Moses. "I need a good workout. Put it on me as hard as you can."

"I don't know that I can make it very interesting for you."

"I don't know about that. You look pretty strong."

Harry donned the gloves and the two squared away. Moses was adroit and clever and almost instantly made a lead for Harry's face.

But the young detective parried and then countered

lightly on the chin. Moses swung for an uppercut, and Harry just avoided it by a sidestep.

Then the young detective swung and missed his nimble antagonist.

At this Moses bored in, and there was a pretty give and take exhibition of in-fighting. But suddenly Moses' feet flew up in the air, and he went down like a feather.

He bounded to his feet and rushed.

Harry stepped lightly aside and swung for the head.

Then he uppercut to the jaw, and again the coon went down.

This time, when he got up, surprise showed in every line of his face.

He fought with caution, and Harry easily held him at long range. Hall tapped the bell for the end of the round.

"Great crickets!" gasped the fat promoter. "You're not in that guy's class, Mose! Why, he can dust all around you."

"I'd like to give him another go!" grinned the coon. "He fooled me that time, sure."

"See here," said Harry, quietly, as he removed his gloves. "I'm no boxing teacher."

"Well, you can teach me," declared White. "I wish you would learn me that sidestep and swing."

Harry laughed at this.

"I'm not a very good boxer," he disclaimed, "but when is this fight coming off?"

"To-morrow night, at the Arcade club."

"Where is that?"

Moses looked at Hall.

Both laughed in a quiet way.

Then Hall took a couple of pasteboard tickets from his pocket. He gave one to Harry and one to Old King Brady.

"Six Round Bout! Arcade Club. No. — Seventh Avenue. Tuesday Evening. Moses White, the colored champion, vs. the Denver Kid. Also, same hour and place, Burton's unknown will challenge any 160 pound boxer present for fifty dollars a side. Tickets two dollars."

"Needn't buy if you don't want to," said Hall. "But if you attend you must be sworn to secrecy."

"I am delighted!" cried Harry, tossing a five dollar bill into Hall's hand. "I am very fond of boxing. We will surely go. Eh, partner?"

"Well, you bet!" agreed Old King Brady. "There's nothing I like better myself."

White began to remove his gloves.

His black face shone with a curious light.

"I've got an idea!" he cried.

"What's that?" asked the others.

"Why not put Mr. Jenks here against the unknown Burton has produced?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Hall, giving Harry a critical glance. "He isn't up to weight."

"What is your weight, Jenks?"

"One hundred and forty," replied Harry. "I see the unknown is marked at one hundred and sixty. Too heavy."

"That's too bad!" cried Moses. "I think I know th

game well, but you can make a monkey of me. I'll bet you could beat the unknown, even at the weight."

"No, no!" said Old King Brady. "That's too great odds."

"That's right," said Hall. "Twenty pounds is a good deal. But if Mr. Jenks wants to try it, I'll back him for a thousand at that."

"Gentlemen, you are very flattering," said Harry, modestly. "But I hardly think I will try it. But we will be at the boxing match."

"I say," exclaimed Old King Brady, as he turned to Hall, "do you think Black Jack will be there?"

Hall dropped an oath.

Moses White laughed.

"You bet he will; but Uncle Rocky won't stir up any more trouble with him. Gents, come out and have a drink on me. Then I'm going to bed."

"Same here," declared Hall.

They went back to the barroom.

A few colored sports were lounging about the place. The detectives pretended to drink with their two companions.

Then Moses took his leave.

Hall followed a little later.

The Bradys were left in the saloon. Old King Brady whispered:

"What do you say, boy? Shall we hang around here any longer?"

"No use, Governor."

"So I think."

"Our work is done for to-night."

"Let us go home, then, and get some sleep. We have rubbed up against Black Jack. We didn't get him, but we will next time."

"You bet!"

The Bradys left the place.

They made their way to their lodgings.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

They did not delay, but at once sought their bed in slumber. It was long past the morning hour when they awoke.

Then they went out for their breakfast and later started for their office.

But as they alighted from the car and turned into Park Row their gaze caught a newspaper bulletin.

Both detectives halted.

On the bulletin was something which gave them a thrilling start. Thus it read:

"The Work of Black Crooks! Another strange crime. Detectives hot on the trail of negro crooks!"

"Harry, do you see that?"

"Yes."

"Buy that paper."

The young detective did so. The two detectives rushed into their office. They proceeded to read a thrilling account.

"Last night between the hours of two and three Patrolman Benson, of Central Park West, was walking his beat when he saw two dark-featured men glide out of an area under the great Regal apartment house.

"This is one of the finest private hotels in New York, and is occupied by wealthy people. The patrolman's suspicions were at once aroused, and he accosted the men.

"They at once attacked him and knocked him senseless into the gutter. When he had recovered himself they had vanished.

"Just then there was an uproar in the hotel, and a couple of porters came rushing out, calling for the police.

"Benson at once rushed in. He was conducted to the apartment of Senor Antonio Almeda, a member of a Spanish exporting house, of Madrid, and who lived in princely style at the Regal.

"Senor Almeda lay across a divan in his chamber, bathed in blood.

"He was quite dead. A knife thrust between the shoulder blades told the story.

"Senor Almeda had been alone in his apartment. His wife was in Washington on a visit. A window leading to the fire escape of an inner court was open.

"There were blood marks on the iron ladder, which showed that the murderers had escaped in that direction. Their object had no doubt been robbery, for everything in the place had been overhauled.

"It is the opinion that it was the work of a gang of negro crooks which has been so extensively operating in the city lately. This is substantiated by Patrolman Benson, who says the men he saw were negroes."

For some moments after reading this the Bradys sat in stunned silence.

Various emotions were theirs.

"Harry," said Old King Brady, finally, "we are almost criminally responsible ourselves."

"That's right, Governor."

"This deed was committed after two o'clock, and after we met Black Jack at Moses White's place."

"That's true."

"If we had followed him then, and nabbed him, as we should have done, we would have hit the mark."

"And averted the crime."

"Yes."

"Well," said Old King Brady, with a grim set face, "there is one thing we can do. We can devote our best energies to preventing further villainous work by the black crooks of New York."

"And to do this we must wind up the career of Black Jack."

"Yes."

Hardly had these words been spoken when the door of the office opened.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VEILED WOMAN.

As the door opened the Bradys looked up in surprise. A man stood on the threshold.

He was a stranger to them.

But at a glance the detectives saw that he was a Southerner. His tall, slim figure, bronze complexion, as well as his style of dress showed this.

When he spoke it was confirmed.

"Howdy, gentlemen! Is this the office of the Bradys?"

"It is, sir," replied Old King Brady.

"Are you the Bradys?"

"We are."

"I've heard a heap about you 'uns. They say you never failed on a case of crime."

"We have been fortunate."

"Well, I've got a job for ye. Will ye undertake it?"

"Really, my friend," said Old King Brady, "it will be necessary to know what the job is first."

"I'll tell ye in quick time."

"Very good. Have a chair."

"Thank ye."

The Southerner sat down.

As he did so he laid a bit of pasteboard on the desk. Old King Brady glanced at it.

He gave a start.

"James Cleeman, Low Bottom, La."

"What!" he exclaimed. "Are you the man who offers a reward of five thousand dollars for the negro Black Jack?"

"I am," he replied.

Old King Brady looked closely at the Southerner.

"What has brought you to New York?"

"The scoundrel himself."

Cleeman spoke in low, set tones. His face was hard in its lines.

"I understand," said Old King Brady, "you are on the track of this black fiend."

"That is true," declared Cleeman, "and I will never leave it while he is alive. I mean to hunt him down to death."

"Or justice!"

"That depends. I do not wish to cheat the law, if it will deal justly with him."

"There is but one fate that can befall a murderer."

"And that is——"

"Electrocution in this state."

"It's too merciful an end. Moreover, he committed the crime in Louisiana."

"That crime, perhaps," said Old King Brady. "But it is not the only one."

"There are others."

"Indeed, yes. I believe that at least six murders in the city of New York can be traced to Black Jack."

Cleeman's eyes glittered.

"Then you must agree with me that electrocution is too merciful a fate."

"Ah, but it is the law. We cannot go up against the law. It must be deferred to."

The Southerner's face relaxed.

"I hope you will not misunderstand me," he said. "I am a law-abiding man myself. I am willing to defer to the law."

"Very good," said Old King Brady. "Then it may be possible for us to assist you."

"That is what I want. I have been informed that you are familiar with the inner circles of crime in New York."

"At least we have dealt much with that side of New York life."

"Just so. Then you can assist me. I followed Croon to this city. But here I have lost track of him."

"How long have you been in New York?"

"Several months. I am aware that Croon has no doubt been the factor in all the mysterious crimes committed here in that time. But I have been utterly unable to get sight of him. I have come to you for assistance. I am willing to pay well for it."

"We are glad to assist you all we can. In fact, we already have a clew."

Cleeman was interested.

"You have?"

"We think so."

"What is it?"

With this the Bradys detailed their experiences in Moses White's place.

Cleeman listened intently.

"Capital!" he cried. "Your scheme was a right smart good one. But I never dared to invade any of those nigger dens, because I would be spotted."

"Ah, I see!"

"So you saw Black Jack?"

"Yes."

"It's a pity you didn't get your hands on to him."

"So it was; but we hope to do that yet."

"I hope so. Then you will attend that boxing match, will you?"

"We shall."

"Whew! I wish I could also. You think that Croon will be there?"

"We see no reason why he should not. He is quite likely to be there."

Cleeman rose and paced the floor. His eyes were like stars.

"That is to-night?"

"Yes."

"On my word—if I dared risk it I'd go up with you."

"We have a better plan."

"What?"

"Better than to attend the boxing match. Wait outside. If Croon comes out, you will have a chance to nab him. We will be on hand to help you. We would not attempt

to make an arrest in the place, for it would make a riot, and these black scoundrels with their razors could make a lot of trouble."

"Indeed they could," agreed Cleeman. "I believe your plan is a good one. At least I can accompany you to the door."

"Oh, yes!"

"All right. Where shall I meet you this evening, gentlemen?"

"Indeed, that is hard to say," replied Old King Brady. "We cannot tell where we may be in the interim. On the whole, I think it would be better for you to meet us at the door."

"You will describe the place to me?"

"We will give you the number on Seventh avenue."

"Thank you! I will be on hand."

Cleeman took his leave a moment later. When he had gone the detectives were silent for a time. Old King Brady went back to his notebook.

After a time he said:

"Harry, let us pay a visit to the scene of this latest crime."

"I'm with you, Governor."

"I think it will pay us."

"Of course it will."

It did not take the detectives long to get ready after this decision. They left the office and were soon on their way uptown.

They proceeded at once to the Regal, in Central Park West.

They had no difficulty in gaining admittance to the apartment of the murdered man, upon showing their badges.

The coroner had left an officer in charge of the place.

Just as the detectives were about to enter the apartment this officer appeared in the doorway.

Behind him was a tall woman, so deeply veiled in black that her face could be seen only in outline.

The woman gave a start at the sight of the Bradys.

Then she pushed past them and entered the elevator.

The detectives gave a critical look. Then they turned to the officer.

"We are detectives," said Old King Brady, sharply. "Who is that woman?"

"Ah, gentlemen," replied the officer. "She claims to be Senor Almeda's sister."

Old King Brady gave a start.

"His sister?"

"Yes! She has been here twice since the murder. She will soon come and take charge of the effects here. She is his only heir."

"Queer," muttered Old King Brady. "I was not told that he had a sister."

"And, indeed, gentlemen, I have only her word. She came here with such authority that I could not refuse to let her enter."

"What was the authority?"

"A letter from the chief of police.

"Have you got the letter?"

"No."

Old King Brady whistled.

"A forgery," he said. "It was a cunning game to fool you. This woman is some schemer, some impostor, who may even be responsible for Almeda's death."

The officer looked crestfallen, but he was exceedingly dogged.

"I don't believe that," he said. "I'm no chicken: I don't get fooled so easy."

"Look here," said Old King Brady. "I'll bet you two to one that you have been humbugged."

"I'll take you on that," cried the officer. "I'll bet the order she had from the chief was straight."

"Why do you think it was straight?"

"I know his handwriting."

Old King Brady smiled.

"Is there a telephone in this building?"

"Yes."

"Let us call up the chief and ask him."

"All right."

In the meantime Harry, at Old King Brady's whispered instigation, had gone flying down the stairs to intercept the veiled woman.

In an adjoining room a telephone was found, and Central Office was quickly called up. The call was answered by a clerk.

"Is the chief there?" asked Old King Brady.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Ask him to step to the telephone. Tell him that Old King Brady wants him."

"All right, Mr. Brady."

A moment later the bell jingled.

"Hello!"

"Hello! Is that you, Brady?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"See here, chief, I am at the Regal, where that strange murder was committed. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes! The Almeda murder."

"Yes."

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"I want to ask if you have signed an order to allow Senor Almeda's sister to enter his apartment and remove his effects?"

"Eh? His sister, you say?"

"Yes."

"I never knew he had a sister."

"Well, did you sign an order for any other female to come here and enter his apartments? Did you give any woman such authority?"

"No! Most decidedly, no!"

"That is all!"

"Wait! Hello!"

"Well?"

"Has a woman been there representing such a thing?"

"Yes."

"Did she gain admittance?"

"She did."

"That is most astounding. Who is the officer in charge?"

"I think his name is Page. He was deceived by the forged order."

"It was stupidity! Send him to the telephone at once."

Old King Brady handed the receiver to Page, who was white and trembling.

What passed over the wire the old detective never knew, but Page turned, and said:

"It's hard luck! I'm fired. Another man has got my job."

"I'm sorry for you," said the old detective. "A little perspicacity would have made a sergeant of you. That woman who so cleverly hoodwinked you was no doubt connected with the crime. If you had only guessed the truth and arrested her you would have got there with both feet."

Poor Page groaned in despair.

"I am a fool!" he muttered. "I will never make a success."

Old King Brady now entered the apartment and carefully examined things.

He saw that the secretary had been opened and despoiled of private papers. No doubt these were of great value.

CHAPTER V.

SMITH'S CONFESSION.

The veiled woman had certainly played it low down on Officer Page.

There was no denying this.

Old King Brady then began a minute search of the room.

He crept on hands and knees over the carpet, looking for any object that might furnish a clew.

He found nothing there.

Then he examined the bed.

This had been left in the state in which it had been found by the coroner.

The sheets and the mattress were blood-soaked. The old detective turned them over with great care.

Then he gave a start.

In the folds of the sheets he saw an object. It was a horn button of peculiar design, such as is used to fasten a cuff.

The old detective gasped.

It was familiar to him.

The night he had played cards with Jack Croon in White's place Black Jack had worn a cuff button of the very same pattern.

In the other cuff the setting alone remained. Better proof of Croon's guilt could not be desired.

Old King Brady called Page.

"See here, officer," he said. "Bear witness that I have found this button in the bed. Do you understand?"

Page looked curiously at the button.

"I understand," he said. "The owner is the murderer."

"Yes."

Old King Brady left the Regal.

He carefully preserved the horn button.

As he left the apartment house he looked about for Harry.

But the young detective was nowhere to be seen. A thrill of hope seized Old King Brady.

Harry's protracted absence could only mean that he had a clew and was following it up close.

Perhaps by this time the young detective might even have a hold on the veiled woman whom the old detective believed had much to do with the crime.

Who she was he could not imagine.

He decided not to wait for Harry's return.

There were other important matters to attend to, so he went back to the office.

He performed some routine work there, and was preparing to go out to lunch when a messenger entered.

He handed a message to the old detective.

Old King Brady read it with amazement.

Dear Brady: There is a patient in my ward, a colored fellow, brought in an hour ago with a desperate razor cut in his neck. He wants to see you badly, as he has an idea that he is going to die, and he wants to tell you something of importance.

In my opinion there is not the least chance for him. He may live through the day, so I would advise you to come at once.

Yours,

Bellevue Hospital. THOMAS LARKIN, M. D.

Old King Brady read the message twice.

For a moment he was puzzled.

Then he arose and donned his hat. He left the office and took an uptown car for Bellevue hospital.

When he arrived there he sent in his card to Dr. Larkin.

The doctor, whom the old detective knew well, responded at once.

"Ah, Brady!" he cried as he entered. "I am glad to see you."

"I got your message."

"Yes; well, I am glad you came so quickly. I am giving the fellow stimulants. I think we can hold him for awhile."

"Let me see him at once."

"Come with me."

Old King Brady accompanied the doctor through the different wards. They entered a room, and on a cot bed

the old detective saw a negro, whose neck and head were bandaged.

"Pete Smith!" gasped the old detective. "Is it you?"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Brady," said the dying negro, feebly. You didn't know that I was on to you and your partner that night at White's. Well, I knew yo' 'in spite of yo' disguise. But I jes' reckoned on helpin' yo' just the same. But I done reckon Pete hab played his las' game of poker."

"Don't say that," said Old King Brady. "I never dreamed that you knew us."

"Well, I did, sah, fo' a fac'. But I didn't gib yo' away. I was gwine to help yo' catch dat Black Jack. But fo' de Lor', he was too cute fo' me, an' I done got caught mahself."

"How was that, Pete?"

"Yo' know I left yo' dat night, an' I agreed to meet you to-night at the prizefight?"

"Yes."

"Well, I jes' reckoned I'd do a little detective work ob mah own. I knowed Croon was out on some kind ob a job. I know dat it was de murdah at de Regal.

"So I jes' laid fo' him at a place on Seventh avenue, where I know'd he'd show up befoh mornin'. It am a bo'ding house kept by a colored lady named Prue Chase. I waited dar fo' Croon, an' he came in about four o'clock. But afore I could get my grip on him I got a razor in the neck, an' dat was all I know'd till dey brung me in here."

Pete gasped and grew faint, but the stimulants once more revived him.

His countenance assumed a pinched appearance, and the stamp of death was there.

Doctor Larkin gave Old King Brady a significant glance.

Then he leaned over Smith and said:

"If you have anything of great importance to tell the detective you had better tell it at once."

Smith's eyes were fixed a moment inquiringly upon the doctor.

Then he whispered:

"I know. I'se done fo' dis world, an' it's de work ob Black Jack. I mus' tell you, gemmens, dere's a gang ob dem black crooks. Dey'll be at de fight to-night. Dere'll be a heap ob bettin', an' yo' bet Black Jack will be in it. If Moses White ain't licked they will lose, an' if he is gettin' de best ob de fight dey'll do him up. Dat's straight! Den here's somethin' that I grabbed out of Black Jack's pocket when I tussled with him."

Old King Brady gravely took the object from the dying negro's hand.

It was a strip of pasteboard.

On it he saw inscribed, as with a marking pencil, the following:

M. 6. D. 9. H. R. BREEZE. Cooley.

To the old detective this was at present an enigma. He did not attempt to solve it at once, but put it in his pocket.

He bent over the dying man.

"Smith," he said, in low, earnest tones, "you have done a good deed, and it will count in your favor before your Maker. You are soon to meet Him. But I know you are a brave fellow."

Emotion showed in the dying man's face.

"Dat's—a'right, Mr. Brady," he whispered. "I—is—satisfied! Good-by."

A few moments later the doctor held up his hand.

"He is gone," he said.

Old King Brady arose.

"It is a sad case," he said. "He is only one more victim of Jack Croon's villainy. See that he has proper burial, and I will be glad to bear the expense."

Old King Brady left the hospital.

He at once took a car downtown.

He went back to his office.

He had hoped to find Harry there. He wished much to learn what success the young detective had met with.

But Harry was not at the office.

Old King Brady was disappointed.

But he sat down, and taking the mysterious card from his pocket, began to ponder over it.

It was a strange cipher:

M. 6. D. 9. H. R. BREEZE. Cooley.

The old detective puzzled over it long and earnestly.

He groped for a key, but it was not easy to find. It was a complete enigma.

Old King Brady knit his brows and pondered long and deep.

Then he glanced at the clock.

It was the hour of five, and no sign of Harry.

"What can it mean?" muttered Old King Brady. "I fear something has happened to him. He ought to be here."

For the first time apprehension seized the old detective.

Surely, it was very strange that Harry had not returned.

Of course there was a possibility that he was on a long trail. Perhaps Black Jack had led him a hard chase.

On the other hand, the dread fear seized the old detective that the cunning black murderer had lured Young King Brady into some death trap.

A cold sweat broke out upon him.

He arose and went to the window.

A surging crowd was crossing City Hall park on its way to the bridge. Old King Brady gazed at them a moment.

Then he donned his broad-brimmed hat.

"Something has happened to that boy," he muttered.

"I am going to find out about it."

He strode grimly to the door.

Just then he paused.

A sound caught his hearing.

Footsteps sounded on the steps beyond. He listened intently.

They came nearer and nearer, and a hand was laid on the door latch.

Old King Brady stepped back. The suspense seemed about to be relieved. Then the door opened.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SCENT.

When Harry Brady left the Regal apartment house in pursuit of the veiled woman he never dreamed that adventures such as he experienced were in store for him.

He managed to reach the ground floor just after the elevator had opened and the occupants had emerged.

The hallboy stood by the door.

The young detective glanced at the elevator and then at the door.

"The veiled lady?" he asked. "Where did she go?"

The boy stared at the detective.

"Do you mean the woman in black?"

"Yes."

"She's just gone out on the street. I think she turned to the right."

To the right was downtown. Harry went quickly out of the vestibule.

He was just in time to see a figure in black turn the corner. At once he quickened his pace.

When he reached the corner he saw the woman in black step into the area of a house and disappear.

Harry a moment later was on the spot. The house was of brownstone, and the windows were heavily shaded.

"Humph!" muttered the young detective. "Here is a go! I wonder what sort of a place this is, anyway?"

He stood a moment at the curb, carelessly looking down the street, but from the corner of his eye he was taking in everything about the house.

It was evident that the veiled woman had entered by the basement door.

High steps ascended to the front door, and he would surely have seen her had she ascended them.

The young detective hesitated only a moment. Then he stepped boldly into the area.

He was accorded a surprise.

The iron door was ajar.

The young detective could look through and see the corridor beyond. A murmur of voices came to him.

Harry was not the one to hesitate.

He stepped boldly and without a tremor of fear into the basement. At the far end were stairs.

A door was ajar just this side of the stairs. Voices came from the room.

The young detective took a chance.

He saw that a barrel, or large ash can, stood near the foot of the stairs and directly opposite the open door.

Like a shadow he crossed the passage.

Silently he dropped behind the barrel.

Then, peering around it, he beheld a startling spectacle.

Four negroes sat at a table.

Three of them were back to the door. The other was in profile.

And this one wore a woman's dress of black. The veil had been removed, and Harry gave a little gasp of surprise.

The veiled person whom he had followed was not a woman at all.

It was no other than Jack Croon.

Black Jack himself it was who, masquerading as a woman, had visited the apartments of the dead Spaniard in the Regal.

"Well," thought Harry. "Here is a go! I wish the Governor was here."

But he was not.

Old King Brady at that moment was wondering much what had become of Harry.

The other negroes were unknown to the young detective. He had never seen them before.

Croon had removed his hat and veil and wig. His black face was contorted with curious emotions.

He was talking volubly.

Every word he uttered came plainly to the ears of the young detective.

"I tell you, it's got to be done," he was saying, excitedly. "Things will be getting hot for us in New York before long. We've had some fun here, now we'd better change quarters, do you see?"

"A'right, boss!" declared one of the coons. "I'se goin' to do jes' what yo' say."

"That's right, Washburn. Now, Cooley, how is the yacht?"

"It's all right, Jack," said a square-shouldered negro. "Everything is snug aboard. Here's Billy Williams. He can tell you the same. We can make the African coast in four weeks."

"That's the talk. We'll squeeze all the stuff we can out of these white trash. It's not our fault that we're here to-day."

"That's right," chorused the others.

"Think of it, boys!" cried Croon. "We will have millions in the hold of the Breeze. Once on the coast of Africa we'll lay the foundation of a black empire. We will redeem our people. We have the brawn and the sinew—the education and the brain will develop. When our cities are built, our army assembled, and our navies afloat we will reckon with the powers of the world.

"A skeptic might laugh at this apparently hair-brained scheme. But it is the dream of my life, and I shall win."

"Aye!" cried the others, "and you shall be our emperor."

But Croon raised his hand.

"No," he said. "I want no sceptre. I simply want to be the friend of my people, who through all time have

been oppressed and down-trodden. Why should these white-skinned people think themselves superior to us? Is it because we are black? Then we will show them that the black man is God's creation, as well as the white."

"Bravo!"

"Listen, my friends. I feel that I have been named a savior of my people. Just as soon as our standard is planted in the land of our fathers we will have all the educated blacks in the world flocking to it.

"But to bring this about we have had to secure money. And money in millions which could be secured in no other way than by the acts of reprisal we have made use of. Why should not the white race pay the score?

"Only a few more days, friends, and we will have finished our work. Then we sail, as representatives of the Black League. Mr. Johnson, pass up the glasses, and let us drink to the success of the league."

A bottle was opened, and glasses filled with liquor.

The negro councillors drank and repeated toasts of various kinds.

To all this Harry had listened with the most intense astonishment and interest.

He saw now the chimerical purpose of the negro crooks in full. It was a most surprising one.

The wonder was that Croon could find so many credulous dupes.

It was a revelation to him that the gang had a yacht called the Breeze, and that in her they intended to sail for Africa.

It explained fully the fiendish bent of Croon in blackening his soul with so many dark and dreadful murders.

The money was sought by the villain to carry out his visionary scheme of a black empire in Africa.

After drinking repeatedly the negro crooks again fell into conversation.

It was plain that the one named Cooley was the skipper of the yacht.

The others were criminals of the worst type, and many a dark crime was to be charged to them.

"To-night," said Croon, "we are to attend the boxing match. We ought to pull in a few hundreds there, and then——"

The king of the black crooks started up.

"What is that?" he exclaimed, huskily. "Is that outer door open, Johnson? I thought I heard some one enter."

The negro named Johnson arose and went into the corridor.

He closed the basement door.

He passed close enough to Harry to be easily touched. The young detective felt a thrill.

He was shut in the basement with the murderous foe.

The young detective cowered behind the ash can, hardly daring to move.

In doing this he made a mis-step which precipitated a great calamity. The heavy iron can, for some reason or other, tottered and rolled over with a crash.

In an instant every eye was upon the young detective. The tableau was beyond description. The negro crooks stared at the young eavesdropper.

Croon was the first to recover.

His features had a wicked expression as he yelled:

"There he is, blast him! I knew some one had sneaked in. Kill him! Don't let him escape, or we are lost!"

Harry was for a moment so petrified with horror that he could not move.

But when he saw the keen razors in the hands of the coons, and that they were rushing upon him, he acted quickly enough.

With a leap he reached the stairs.

He knew not where they led to.

They furnished the only avenue of escape just now. That was all.

He flew up them like a flash.

The negroes were hot after him.

He knew that to be overtaken was death. At the head of the stairs was a door.

Harry had time to raise the latch. He dashed against it and went headlong into the upper hall.

The heavy front doors were at the end of this. He knew that he could not break his way through them.

So he dashed on up the stairs to the next floor. On he kept until he saw the skylight above him. A ladder led up to it.

Up this he raced, and lifting the skylight, he escaped to the roof.

Here he paused.

Wrenching the heavy frame from its hinges, he hurled it down the skylight. It struck the first coon on the head, and he went crashing down the ladder.

Then, as Harry waited for the next to appear, he saw a man come across the roofs toward him.

"What's up?" cried the newcomer. "What is going on?"

"Oh, I say!" cried Harry. "Call the police, quick! I am a detective, and there are crooks in this house! Do not delay!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, hurry!"

The fellow sped away. The young detective, with a heavy stick in his hand, waited for the crooks to appear.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGE CIPHER.

But they failed to do so.

All was quiet below.

Harry did not at once venture to look down, for fear of a bullet. But a sudden thought struck him.

He rushed to the edge of the roof and looked down into the street.

He beheld a startling sight.

The crooks were rushing from the house and scattering down the street. They were making their escape.

The sight caused Harry a great surprise.

There was no longer need of remaining on the roof. It was necessary to act quickly.

He did so.

Down the ladder through the skylight he quickly went. He ran down the stairs and burst out into the street.

Just as he did so he saw blue-coated officers turning the corner.

They were responding to the alarm sent in by the man Harry had seen on the roof.

This individual had done his duty well, indeed.

The officers came rushing up. The young detective met them.

The sergeant accosted Harry.

"What's up here? Who sent for us?"

"I did!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"Did you meet some negroes down there at the corner?"

"Yes."

"Well, they are Black Jack's gang, and we must get them."

"Black Jack!" gasped the sergeant. "You don't mean it!"

"I do!"

"Who are you?"

Harry showed his badge.

"I am Brady, of the Secret Service."

"Whew! Young King Brady!"

"Yes."

"All right, Mr. Brady. We are under orders. Tell us what to do."

"Leave two men to take charge of this house. It is a gambling joint, and rendezvous of crooks. Send half of your men around the corner. You and the others come with me this way."

Harry led the way.

The sergeant and half a dozen of his men followed him.

Thus they went in quest of the crooks. For an hour they scoured the vicinity.

It was of no use.

Not a clew could be gained.

The negroes had disappeared effectively. In vain Harry tried to track them.

They were seen by many shopkeepers and loungers; but nobody could tell just where they had gone.

So they gave up the quest.

With the sergeant Harry went back to the house. An inspection proved that what the young detective had said was true.

The place was fitted up as a gambling den and resort for crooks.

Much stolen plunder was found there.

Leaving the sergeant in charge of the place, Harry took his leave.

He went back to the Regal.

The elevator boy told him what Old King Brady had said.

"Mr. Brady says for you to go down to the office. He will see you there."

"All right," agreed the young detective.

With this purpose he went back to the street.

But as he struck the sidewalk a sudden idea came to him. He recalled the conversation of the crooks regarding the yacht Breeze.

That yacht, he had no doubt, was lying in some of the waters about New York.

But where? This was the question.

It did not take Harry long to make up his mind to find out. He at once set out for the shipping offices at the Battery.

He visited the Maritime Exchange, the Custom House, and many shipping offices.

The name Breeze occurred frequently.

There were sailing vessels and yachts, as well as a steamer of that name.

But he found none that satisfied him as being the one he sought.

Until the evening hour came he was occupied thus. Then he decided to abandon the project for the present.

He remembered that Old King Brady had left word at the Regal for him to call at the office.

Perhaps the old detective had hit upon an important clue.

The young detective was determined to learn. He at once set out for Park Row.

Harry climbed the stairs and opened the office door.

Old King Brady, pale and anxious, stood before him. He drew a breath of relief.

"Well, boy," he exclaimed, "I have looked everywhere for you. Where have you been?"

"I've been on the track of Black Jack!"

"The deuce!"

Harry nodded and sank into a chair.

"Yes, and I am tired. I made a big bid to get him, but he slipped me."

"Ah! Then the woman——"

"The veiled woman was no other but Black Jack cleverly disguised."

Old King Brady brought his hands together forcibly.

"Hang the luck!" he cried. "One more chance gone. I was sure that we would get him the next time we met."

"Well, we didn't, and I am afraid we won't."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the scoundrel and his gang are just on the point of leaving the country."

"The deuce you say!"

"It is true."

"How did you learn it?"

With that Harry told his story.

Old King Brady listened with interest. When Harry had finished he was thoughtful.

Then he gave a great start.
 "Eh? How? What did you say? Did you mention the name Cooley?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"One of the gang, and really the captain of the yacht Breeze."

"Ah! I have it! That explains it."

"Explains what?"

"This."

Old King Brady drew from his pocket the card with the mystic cipher.

He handed it to Harry.

"What can you make of that?"

The young detective glanced at it.

M. 6. D. 9. H. R. BREEZE. Cooley.

"It is an enigma to me," said Harry. "Where did you get it?"

Old King Brady described the circumstances under which he got it.

Harry again examined the card.

"Let me see!" he said, musingly. "Breeze is the name of the yacht. Cooley is the name of the negro captain. But the numerals—let me see! M. 6. D. 9. H. R."

He mused over the cipher a long time.

"I believe there is a great clew there," said Old King Brady. "I would not be surprised if it should give us the inside track. Ah, how is this?"

The old detective wrote on the fly-leaf of his notebook:

"'M. 6.' may mean the sixth month, this is June, and 'D. 9.'—oh, what if that is true! The ninth day! That is Friday next."

"Governor, you've got it!" cried Harry. "The ninth day of June; and 'H. R.' means—let me see! Hudson River—"

"Or Harlem River."

"That is it. Now we have it. Ah, Governor, I see the whole thing. The yacht Breeze is to sail on the 9th day of June, and she is at present in the Hudson or Harlem river."

Old King Brady sprung up.

"That's the whole thing!" he cried. "Harry, we have it. Now, we're fools if we don't get the whole gang."

"You're right, Governor."

The two detectives had arisen, and stood facing each other excitedly.

The impulse had been upon them both to start at once for the Harlem river.

But second thought caused Old King Brady to say:

"Not yet, Harry. This is only the third. More than that, after dark we could hardly hope to locate the yacht."

"Just so, Governor. And besides, there is a chance to nab the gang at the prizefight."

"That is right. We will now go out and get a good dinner."

The detectives accordingly went out to dinner. They were much improved in spirits.

After dinner they went back to the office, and smoked and chatted.

It was of no use to go to the boxing match until a later hour.

But finally midnight came, and they set out for Seventh avenue.

They were made up in their respective characters of Brown and Jenks.

They easily found their way to the doors of the Arcade club.

This was the swell sporting club of the colored four hundred. The detectives drew near the door.

Suddenly a tall man stepped up.

"Pardon me!" he said, in a low tone. "I knew you by your walk. Can't you take me in?"

It was Cleeman.

The Southerner spoke in curt, measured tones. It was plain that he was in a very much excited state of mind.

"Cleeman!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "You are still after Black Jack?"

"I am, and I mean to have him."

"You must promise to make no demonstration if you see Croon. He is our game, and he must be dealt with by the law."

"Will you guarantee his electrocution?"

"I think we may!"

"Then I'll agree to your terms," said Cleeman. "All I want is revenge for my brother's cowardly murder."

"We will guarantee you that."

Cleeman was much pleased to think that the detectives would take him into the place with them.

All three now advanced to the door.

A dapper colored sport glanced at the pass, and they went in. Up a stairway with a great crowd of white and black men they went.

The stage in the Arcade club hall was roped off, and the crowd was seated about it, waiting for the boxers to appear.

The Bradys, with the Southerner, got good seats near the arena.

First a couple of announcers appeared. One stated the terms of the mill between Moses White and the Denver Kid.

The other announced the challenge of Burton's unknown to meet any man in the place at the weight of 160 pounds for a bet of from fifty to five hundred dollars a side.

"Who is the unknown?" whispered Harry.

"I don't know," replied Old King Brady. "You know Smith thought it was Black Jack himself."

Just then the referee leaped into the ring.

Then over the ropes clambered a bull-necked negro lad, with four seconds and attendants. The Denver Kid stood in the ring bowing to the plaudits of the multitude.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BOATHOUSE.

The crowd cheered the Denver Kid madly.

But the applause was nothing, compared with that which followed when Moses White, lithe and trim, sprung over the ropes.

For a time pandemonium reigned.

Then the principals took their corners, and the referee stepped to the center of the ring and held up his hand.

Silence at once ensued.

"Moses White against the Denver Kid. Bout of twenty rounds for a decision," said the referee. "Marquis of Queensbury rules!"

He stepped aside and waved his hand.

Into the ring leaped the two boxers. They gripped hands.

Then they squared away.

A terrific battle ensued.

So lightning-like were the blows that the eye could not follow them. The two colored lads fought like demons.

Round after round they clinched and fought, ducked and sparred, until both were drenched with sweat.

Then, in the eleventh round, the end suddenly came, and in a startling way.

Moses had fought the Kid to a standstill, and he was just getting up from a knockdown. One more rush would mean a knockout.

A loud voice in the crowd yelled:

"A foul! Kill him!"

An object came hurtling through the air and struck Moses in the shoulder. A jet of blood spurted, the little fighter reeled, gasped, and went down in a heap.

The horrified spectators saw a heavy-bladed knife protruding from his shoulder.

It had been thrown with wonderful precision and skill by some one in the crowd.

An uproar followed.

Pandemonium reigned in an instant.

It was with difficulty that the police could hold the mob back. The little fighter was carried from the ring.

But Cleeman clutched Old King Brady's arm and whispered.

"That was Black Jack's work. He is an expert at knife throwing."

The Bradys scanned the crowd, but could see nothing of the villain.

It seemed certain that a riot would ensue. The Bradys and Cleeman found themselves in great danger.

"I think we had better get out of here, Governor," said Harry.

"So do I!" agreed Old King Brady. "But just how are we going to do it?"

The blacks were like a parcel of irresponsible lunatics, shouting and fighting in a grotesque way.

Not until a great mob of police had charged into the place and cleared it out was there any semblance of order.

Then the Bradys managed to get into the open air.

"Well, I can swear that I am glad to get out of that," declared Cleeman. "It's the toughest place I ever got into."

"Ditto!" agreed Old King Brady. "I don't see that we are any nearer to getting our man, either."

"Nor I!" cried Harry; "but I think there is a way to track him down."

"How?"

"By means of the cipher."

Old King Brady understood. The two detectives looked at each other.

Then Old King Brady said:

"Well, Mr. Cleeman, I fear we shall have to take our leave of you. We wish you good-night."

The Southerner was astounded.

"Eh? How is that?" he demanded. "You have a new scheme?"

"Well, it is possible we have."

"I see. You don't want me along," said Cleeman, testily. "Well, that's all right. I've got a clew of my own."

"We are glad to hear that, Mr. Cleeman."

"You don't seem to have any better luck hunting down Black Jack than I do."

"It would seem so!"

"Good-night."

The Southerner shook hands with the detectives and left them. The Bradys walked on up Seventh avenue.

On every street corner were knots of colored men discussing the fiasco of the boxing match. They were much excited.

"There hasn't been so much stir in Darktown for a year," laughed Harry. "That was a hard fight, eh, Governor!"

"Well, that's right, Harry; but now let us decide upon a plan."

"All right. It is past two o'clock. It will soon be morning."

"Yes."

"Now, my plan is to proceed to Harlem and scout along the river for a sign of the gang, or their yacht Breeze."

"I think it is all right," agreed Old King Brady. "We will do that."

So the two detectives took an uptown car.

They alighted at One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street and walked to the river. Not far from the street was a line of boathouses.

Here, in the daytime, a host of rowing enthusiasts were sure to gather.

Anchored in the stream, also, were any number of small yachts.

The Breeze might be among them.

But which one the Bradys could hardly venture to guess. It was dark, and only the outlines of the boats could be distinguished.

"Well, Harry," whispered Old King Brady, "it is like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"That's right."

"If it was daylight we might inquire at some of these boathouses. Hello! There is one with a light in it!"

This was true.

One of the boathouses, built high on piles which extended out into the river, had a light in the window.

The Bradys decided to call upon the early riser in the boathouse and inquire of him, if possible, about the Breeze.

So they crept out along the walk and finally reached the boathouse door.

Old King Brady tapped lightly on this.

There was a movement inside. Then the door opened on a crack.

A gleam of light shot out.

In this light a black face was seen. The coon, for such he was, stared at the Bradys.

"What yo' want?" he asked.

The detectives were somewhat surprised at stumbling upon a black man thus.

Was this a rendezvous?

"What's your name?" asked Old King Brady.

"Mah name?" sputtered the coon, rolling his eyes. "Ah ain't tellin' yo'. Jes' go along an' mind yo' bizness."

He would have slammed the door, but Old King Brady thrust his foot into the crack and held the door.

"Hold on, my friend," he said, resolutely. "You can't evade questions so easily. We want to know who you are?"

The darky began to tremble and roll his eyes.

"I'se jes' a poo' nigger, an' mah name is Samuel Adams. But everybody calls me Sam."

"All right, Sam," said Old King Brady, quietly. "Where are the rest of the boys?"

"Ah don' know what yo' mean, sah."

"Oh, yes, you do. I mean the gang that you are one of—the Black Jack gang."

Sam Adams gasped and began to roll his eyes again. He protested mildly.

"Ah ain't nebber had nothin' to do with dem," he declared. "Ah am an honest nigger. I knows you now. Yo' is detectives."

"Well, perhaps we are. It will be all the worse for you if you lie to us."

"Mah goodness! Ah won't lie, gemmens. I tole you de whole truff."

"Open the door and let us come in."

"It am ag'in mah ordahs, sah."

"Open the door!"

Old King Brady pushed it open, and the two detectives entered the place.

They saw a long room, with a loft overhead, where oars and rowing paraphernalia were stored.

The room was furnished with wicker chairs, a long table, and against the wall was a small library of novels.

In all respects it conformed to the living room of many another boathouse on the river.

The detectives saw no trace of the gang, nor anything to indicate that they had been here, or that this was their rendezvous.

The floor below was for the boats. There was nothing else there.

The detectives exchanged glances.

To both it was plain that they had made a mistake. But Old King Brady was bound to make the best of the situation.

"Sam," he said, in a softer tone, "you seem to be an honest fellow, will you give us a little information?"

"Massy Lordy! I'll tell yo' eberyting I knows," declared the coon.

"Very good. Tell me what you know about Black Jack."

The little coon rolled his eyes.

"Mah goodness!" he gasped. "Dunno nuffin' much. Our people talk about him; I nebber saw him but just once in mah life."

"Where was that?"

"Dat was at de cakewalk in Madison Square Garden. A frien' ob mine showed him to me, dat's all."

"Now look here, Sam."

"Yes, sah!"

"You like money?"

"Ah does, sah."

"Very good. There's a good round sum for you if you will tell us where we can find Black Jack. Five hundred dollars!"

Old King Brady drew out a roll of bills.

The coon's eyes glittered.

"Mah goodness! Ah wish ah did know."

"Tax your memory."

"No, I kain't do dat, fur I don' know."

The detectives were satisfied. They knew that the little negro spoke the truth.

But a sudden thought came to Old King Brady.

"Oh, see here," he said. "Do you know all the boats out here in the river?"

The coon nodded.

"I know de most ob dem, sah."

"Just so. Do you know one bearing the name of Breeze?"

"Yas, I does. It's a schooner yacht, an' she's been anchored out here fo' a month. I reckon the cap'n is a colored man."

The Bradys were elated.

"That's it!" cried Old King Brady. "That's what we want. Do you know where she is anchored just now?"

"I does, fo' a fac', sah."

CHAPTER IX.

A CLEVER RUSE.

The Bradys were mightily elated with this clever revelation.

"Well, Sam," said the old detective, "I may as well tell you that we are anxious to get on board that yacht."

"A'right, sah! I think I can take yo' out to her all right."

"Do so, Sam, and here is ten dollars for you. You have a boat?"

"I has, sah! I done take you out all right."

"Good for you!"

Sam sprung downstairs to the boatroom. The Bradys followed.

The coon opened the front doors and pushed a boat out on to the ways.

In another moment he had the oars in place.

"All right, gemmens," he said. "Jes' yo' step right in."

The Bradys did so.

The boat was now in the water.

Sam followed, and taking up the oars, pulled out into the current. The lights flashed from all sides across the dark surface of the water.

They passed the dark hulls of craft anchored in the stream. Sam rowed with an easy stroke.

Suddenly he held up on his oars.

He looked about him in surprise.

"Don' see nuffin' of dat yacht now," he said. "Do yo' reckon she am gone away?"

"I don't know," said Old King Brady. "You said you knew where she was."

"I sho'ly did," asserted Sam. "She was anchored here, jes' off dat reedy point. It am very funny."

"Perhaps she has been removed to some other anchorage," said Harry.

This seemed logical.

So they proceeded to row about at random. This was most disappointing.

They had counted much on finding the Breeze, and perhaps winding the net about the birds.

They had failed.

Yet they were not discouraged.

The Bradys were not the sort to give up in face of a setback. With grim determination they were bound to keep right on.

So they ordered Sam to row back to the boathouse.

Arriving at the boathouse, they helped Sam pull in the boat. Old King Brady paid him, and the detectives took their leave.

They made their way back to the street.

"Well, Governor," said Harry, "we are surely in a hard streak of luck."

"It looks like it."

"Where can they have that yacht?"

"That is a conundrum."

"If we are to depend on the cipher, the Breeze was to remain in the Harlem river until after the ninth of the month."

"No, not so!"

"Why not?"

"The cipher simply mentioned the date and the initials 'H. R.,' which could stand for anything else. Or it may be that the Breeze is to be in the Harlem river on the ninth."

Thus the Bradys made deductions.

But all that could be summed up from these was the incontrovertible fact that the Breeze had departed from her moorings and had gone no one knew where.

And the Bradys were wholly at sea.

They had not a clew.

Truly, Black Jack was the most slippery crook they had ever come across.

"There is one thing about it," said Old King Brady. "If the gang has skipped out and set sail for Africa ahead of time we are beaten."

"I can't believe that."

"I am loath to believe it."

"I see but one thing for us to do."

"What?"

"We can go home and get a little sleep. Surely we can do nothing more until daylight. It is now three o'clock. We will rise at eight, and hire a tug and scour the rivers and bay for some sign of the Breeze. If we find no trace of her we will do the next best thing."

"What is that?"

"Turn up to-night at Moses White's place and see what we can learn from the habits of the place."

"A capital idea! For myself, I am very willing to secure a nap."

So the detectives proceeded to carry out this plan.

They went to their lodgings and turned in. They slept soundly.

At eight o'clock, as Harry had suggested, they arose and went out to breakfast.

The few hours of sleep refreshed both very much, and Old King Brady said:

"If we do not succeed in finding the Breeze I shall begin to feel discouraged. It would indicate that the gang have slipped us."

"I don't see it that way," said Harry, obdurately. "I don't believe the crooks will leave New York until their work is done."

"But they know that we are hot on their trail."

"I don't care if they do. They hold us cheap. I tell you that Black Jack cares little for us. He has the belief that he can outwit us."

Old King Brady pulled his hat down lower over his eyes.

"It looks to me as if he was dead right," he said. "I must admit that, first and last. He has played with us."

"That's it!" cried Harry. "And he knows it. For that reason he does not fear us."

"All right," said the old detective, grimly. "We will give him cause to think otherwise."

"That means that we are to go ahead on the assumption that the gang is still in New York?"

"Yes."

The detectives now went downtown to the Barge Office, at the Battery.

Here they were able to procure a tug, with which they proceeded to continue the quest for the Breeze.

This proved a long and tiresome job.

Up the Hudson river they went first. Every anchorage, every dock and wharf was visited.

Then they turned their course into the East river.

All day the quest was continued.

But to no avail.

No trace of the yacht could be found.

It was very disheartening.

The Bradys landed. Early in the evening the old detective said:

"Well, Harry, we didn't find her."

"No."

"Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think that Cooley has taken the yacht to some other port. The gang have smelled a rat, and have adopted this course for protection."

"Ah, if we only knew the port!"

"That's right; but I am as firmly convinced as ever that the gang is still in New York."

"We must look out for them!"

"Yes."

The detectives went to dinner, and then to the office.

Here they were rewarded with a most astounding surprise.

A letter, rudely written, was thrust under the door. Thus it read:

To the Bradys:

Gents: I cum down tu see yoo, butt yoo wer out. Thee Breze has bin paupt over another color, an' they call her another name. I am goin' tu tri an' find out thee name.
Yours truly,

SAM ADAMS.

For a moment the detectives were too overwhelmed to speak.

They stared at each other.

Old King Brady whistled softly. Then he bit from a plug of tobacco a small piece and began to chew vigorously.

"No wonder we couldn't find the Breeze."

"We probably went within touching distance of her."

"Yes."

"We are hot fools, Harry; but it makes me feel simple to be as easily deceived."

"Well, Sam has done us a good turn. That ten dollar bill was well invested. What do you say if we run up and see him?"

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"It's not a bad plan. Ah!"

There came a sharp rap at the door.

"Come in!" cried Old King Brady.

The door opened.

A tall, slender man crossed the sill. The detectives sprung up.

"Cleeman! Is it you?"

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I have disturbed you," said the Southerner. "I hope I am welcome."

"You are very welcome," said Old King Brady. "Pray have a chair."

"Thank you."

Mr. Cleeman sat down.

He looked at the Bradys in an inscrutable way. Finally he asked:

"Have you got a clew yet?"

"Well, not exactly," said Old King Brady. "We have been quite near the game, but not near enough to capture it."

"Then you haven't landed your man?"

"No."

"I knew that. Well, gentlemen, I think I hold the keno card!"

"Have you captured Black Jack?"

"Oh, no!"

"What, then, is your keno card, as you are pleased to term it?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"We shall be pleased."

The Southerner smiled blandly. He drew from his pocket a notebook.

"I have been doing a little detective work on my own hook," he said. "No doubt you will be pleased to know that I have discovered the hiding place of Black Jack, and this evening I intend to put my hands on him. Before the hour of one strikes he will be in the Tombs!"

The Bradys were interested.

"This is welcome news," said Old King Brady. "Will you tell us where the place is?"

The Southerner arose.

There was sarcasm in his smile.

"Most certainly not!" he said, tartly.

"Ah," said Old King Brady. "I can see. You wish to keep the honor to yourself."

"No; I am not seeking the honor. I am after vengeance. But you were gracious enough to inform me that my assistance was not needed, and I could not cooperate with you——"

"No, no!" protested Old King Brady. "We told you nothing of the sort——"

"Tut, tut! I know!" said the Southerner, rigidly. "You will not blame me, then, if I keep my affairs to

myself. You will hardly need trouble yourself further in the case, as all necessity for such a thing will terminate to-night."

CHAPTER X.

BAFFLED AGAIN.

The door closed behind Mr. Cleeman. Dumfounded, the detectives stared at it long after he had gone.

Finally Harry exclaimed:

"Well, Governor, we are badly left."

Old King Brady laughed.

"The fellow thinks he has it turned on us all right, don't he?"

"He certainly does."

"But if he slips up——"

"The joke will be on him."

"Yes."

The lights of the city were twinkling, and the evening was well on. A moment later the Bradys were in doubt.

Then Harry said:

"It may be early, but let us go up and see Moses White."

"All right!"

The Bradys proceeded to Sixth avenue, and soon appeared before Moses White's place.

As they entered they came face to face with Rockford Hall, the promoter.

Hall instantly cried out:

"Hello, Brown! How are ye, Jenks? Tough last night, wasn't it?"

"It certainly was," replied Old King Brady. "How is Moses?"

"Oh, he is doing well. He is over in Bellevue, you know."

"In the hospital?"

"Yes."

"Nasty trick, wasn't it?"

"Well, it was. I didn't suppose the Denver Kid had any such following, or I'd never matched Moses with him."

"Then you lay it to the Kid's following?"

"Why not? You don't suppose any of our boys would do such a thing?"

"Oh, no!"

"What, then?"

"Well, we heard a chap say that he knew who threw the knife."

"Who?"

"Black Jack!"

Hall gave a start.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "I wish I knew that for a fact. I'd have the black scoundrel's heart."

The Bradys were not disposed to place much weight in

the threat, in view of the past experience of Hall with Croon.

But Old King Brady said:

"Well, it was a dirty deal, anyway. Seen anything of Croon lately?"

"No—well, yes! He dodged in here a half hour ago!"

"In here?"

"Yes."

The Bradys tried to appear careless. But Old King Brady said, quietly:

"He's not here now?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Hall. "I think so. He went into the sideroom. I say, I wish Moses was well. I've got a chance to match him for five thousand ag'in a Chicago bloke. He can trim him easy, too."

"Do you believe it?"

"I know it."

"Who is he?"

"Little Danny Maloney. He is a game little chick, but Moses can take his measure."

"Well, I hope he will. Won't you have something moist, Hall?"

"Thanks, no! I've been drinking too much of late. Hello! There's Pony Blake. I want to see him. Excuse me, gents."

Hall hustled away.

The detectives looked at each other.

A crisis was at hand.

Beyond the door of that sideroom was the man they had been seeking for so long.

Black Jack, with some crony, was in that room. It seemed as if the game was in their hands.

But how should they secure him?

To rush in and handcuff him? Or would they lie in wait for him to come out?

This was the question.

The two detectives studied it for a moment. Then Harry said:

"I tell you, Governor, we're going to have a tough time getting him out of here. Putting the handcuffs on him is only half of it. We are in a tough joint."

"That's right, Harry; but what other plan have we?"

"I have an idea!"

"What?"

"We will feign not to know that the room is occupied. Walk boldly in, and then make excuses. It may give us an opportunity to get him on a string. In other words, interest him in some project that will enable us to decoy him outside."

"Clever," agreed Old King Brady. "You are all right, Harry. We will try that. But the subterfuge——"

This was the problem.

The detectives pondered a moment. Then Old King Brady said:

"Leave it to me."

He walked boldly to the door of the private room. He raised the latch and walked in.

Two colored men sat at a table.

A bottle and glasses were at the table. Also a large map.

In an instant the two sprang up.

Black Jack himself was one. The other was Cooley, the skipper of the Breeze.

"Pardon me!" said Old King Brady. "I was told that you were in here, Mr. Croon. I have come to see you upon an important matter."

"I am engaged just at present," said the colored murderer.

He glared icily at the detectives. He remembered them as Brown and Jenks, the two men he had played with the night before.

"But this is very important——"

"I can't help that! It must wait! I am very busy."

"Listen! It concerns your life!"

"Eh? What's that?"

"That is true. It concerns your personal safety. A man named Cleeman is hot on your track. If you will come with us outside we will convince you that he is near at hand."

"Cleeman!" hissed Black Jack, with a malevolent scowl. "Curse him! I wish I had a finger on his wind-pipe!"

"That can be fixed, if you come with us."

"Where?"

"Outside anywhere. Your personal safety demands that you leave this place."

Black Jack took a quick step forward. He fixed a hard, penetrating gaze upon the detectives.

"How have you learned all this?" he asked, harshly. "Why do you take such an interest in me?"

"For the reason that we are fugitives of the law ourselves. We do not wish to see you caught."

The negro crook's face softened.

"I am sure that is very considerate of you," he said. "I appreciate it very greatly. Cooley, I think we will have to get out."

"All right, boss!" agreed Cooley. "Where shall we go from here?"

Black Jack made a curious sign with his fingers. Cooley nodded in comprehension.

"All right, boss."

The Bradys did not read the sign. But they saw it executed. They guessed that it meant some other rendezvous.

"Gentlemen," said Black Jack, "I will go with you. Pray be seated one moment. I will go in and get my coat."

With this he started for an inner room.

Suspicion seized Old King Brady.

Stepping before the villain, he said:

"One moment. You must not go in there."

"Eh?" exclaimed Black Jack, in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say! You must not go in that room! Come with me!"

"But—there are papers in my coat——"

"Will you come now? If you don't you cannot blame me for what happens."

Old King Brady's manner was so earnest and impressive that the negro crook could not disregard it. So he said:

"All right; I'm with you."

Harry opened the door, and the four stepped out into the barroom.

Black Jack looked furtively about.

"I see nothing wrong," he said.

"Wait!"

Old King Brady and Harry, feigning much nervous apprehension, made their way to the street door.

A number of the negro crooks in the place glanced curiously at them.

Once outside the place the Bradys believed that nothing could cheat them of their prey.

Harry opened the door.

They stepped out on to the sidewalk.

Then, as they did so, Old King Brady stepped back to be the last one out of the door. This gave him a position directly behind Croon.

Harry looked back, and Old King Brady gave him the signal.

The young detective reached over and threw an arm about Cooley's neck. Black Jack started back, only to fall into Old King Brady's arms.

Out came the handcuffs.

But a wild yell escaped Black Jack.

"Treachery!" he shouted, and clinched with the old detective.

Old King Brady was a powerful man.

But in all his life he had never met with such desperate strength as that now evinced by Black Jack.

Harry could give no assistance.

He was busy with Cooley.

Croon now shouted to the bystanders to help him. A great crowd was collecting.

The appeals of Croon to the crowd did not go unheeded. It chanced that brother crooks were on hand in plenty.

The result was that one of these rushed up behind Old King Brady and dealt him a stunning blow behind the ear.

The old detective reeled, and Croon, with a mighty effort, broke away.

With a yell he dashed into the crowd and was lost to view.

Police now came rushing up; but all too late. Harry had downed Cooley.

But the detectives were thoroughly disgusted, and angry. The man they wanted, the prince of crooks, had escaped.

Cooley was handcuffed and hustled into the patrol wagon.

"Take him to the Tombs," said Old King Brady. "He is one of the negro crooks. Hold him there until I call!"

The police prepared to obey this command, but the Bradys were not satisfied.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURE OF THE YACHT.

Black Jack had outwitted the Bradys once again. But they were not disheartened.

"We'll get him yet, Harry," said the old detective. "He won't fool us always."

"Let us go up and see Sam Adams."

"It is agreed!"

So the Bradys took an elevated train for Harlem. Once again they alighted at One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street.

The light shone in the window as before, and the Bradys rapped.

The door opened.

Sam Adams stood before them.

He grinned, and said:

"I'se glad to see you, gemmens. Jes' come right in. Have a chair."

The Bradys entered and were seated.

Nobody else was in the boathouse. The black caretaker nodded with delight.

"Yo' got mah letter?" he asked.

"We did."

"Yo' kin bet I was surprised when I found out dat dey had changed de name of de Breeze."

"We were surprised as well."

"Dat's jes' what dey hab done. De ole boat was out yonder in der stream all der time, an' we rowed right by it."

"That was hard luck," said Harry. "But you say you have got the right lead now?"

"Fo' a fac', gemmens."

"And is she out in the stream now?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"Dey done took her down to Mott Haven. I rowed down dere this mornin' an' took a sure enough look at her."

"Well, Sam, we want you to row us down there. It is likely that our man may be on board to-night."

"A'right, sah!"

Sam got the boat out without delay. The detectives at once got in.

The lusty young negro gave way strongly at the oars, and the boat sped on.

Down the Harlem they rowed, under the drawbridges, until Mott Haven was reached.

The lights of the city flashed kaleidoscopic-like. They passed huge craft anchored in the stream.

Finally Sam rested on his oars.

He let the boat run softly past a rakish yacht. Lights flashed from the ports, and from the cabin windows.

"Dere she am, gemmens!" said Sam. "Dey call her de Blackbird now."

The detectives regarded the yacht closely.

They could see men moving about the decks, and hear excited conversation.

Smoke and sparks were escaping from her pipe, and it looked as if steam was getting up, ready for a start.

"She is going to pull out of here," said Harry. "You can see that plain enough!"

"Sh! What's that?"

Sam had let the boat drift into the shadow of a pier. From this position they could see any craft passing without being seen.

And from the New York shore a rowboat was approaching.

There were three occupants.

Two men were at the oars. A third sat in the stern. They paused very near the detectives.

To their great interest, she ran alongside the yacht. Then the three men climbed the gangway and went aboard.

The arrival seemed to create some excitement, for loud voices could be heard, and there was renewed activity on deck.

"There you are!" whispered Harry. "I tell you Black Jack has returned. That was him who just went aboard."

"Do you believe it?"

"I do."

"Well, then our course is plain."

"What?"

"We must get the police and capture the whole gang," said Old King Brady.

"Good! But I'll bet it will be a bloody fight. They will surely resist."

"I believe you. We must have a good force. It must be done quickly."

The old detective turned to Sam.

"Now, my boy, we want you to pull us across to the New York side."

"All right, sah!"

"Then you are to go to the nearest police station. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah!"

"Tell the sergeant in charge to send to Headquarters for twenty reserves."

"All right, sah!"

Sam gave way at the oars. The boat shot out into the current.

But they were almost over to the New York side when an unexpected thing happened.

Out of the gloom was thrust the prow of a small launch. Dark figures hung over the rail. A dark lantern was focussed on the Bradys.

A husky voice called:

"Ahoy! Who are you?"

"Hello!" exclaimed Old King Brady, with delight. "It is the harbor police. We're in luck! Is that you, Altman?"

"Eh? Why, hang me, if it isn't Old King Brady. What are you doing here, you old fox?"

The old detective laughed.

"Let us come alongside the launch and I'll tell you!"

"All right."

The boat ran alongside the launch. Then the Bradys shook hands with the eight officers in the launch.

"You see, Altman," said Old King Brady, "we're after Black Jack and the negro crooks."

"Oh, yes! I see."

"Now, they're not very far away at this moment. Their craft is anchored out yonder."

"The deuce! Then they are afloat!"

"Yes; they call their craft the Blackbird. They are making ready to depart for the coast of Africa."

"That is news!"

"I am anxious to detain them until after Black Jack has settled a few of his scores in court."

"A very good plan."

"In order to do this the boat must be boarded by sufficient men to overcome resistance. I was just going to send for reserves."

"No need of that!" cried the harbor captain. "We are here for that business. It will be an honor to capture Black Jack."

"But—have you men enough?"

"I have eight."

"I was going to call for twenty."

"Nonsense! My gang of eight men will handle any gang of bad niggers on this river. We will go out and board her at once. You know the craft?"

"Oh, yes."

"I think, then, that you had better come aboard and let us take your craft in tow."

"All right."

The Bradys, with Sam, leaped into the launch. Their boat was taken in tow.

Captain Altman at once headed his launch for the Blackbird.

She poked her nose rapidly across the bow of the yacht and swung alongside. A startled hail came upon the air.

"Ahoy! Starboard, or ye'll foul us!"

"That's all right!" yelled Altman. "Hard aport, pilot! We're coming aboard!"

"Coming aboard!" yelled the watch. "Who the deuce are ye?"

"You'll find out in a moment."

Then the alarm went up.

The negro crooks to the number of a score came rushing out of the cabin. Some pistol shots were fired.

But the harbor police went over the rail like monkeys. So formidable an appearance did they make that the crooks lost their heads.

They scattered in all directions.

The police hunted them down and manacled one after another.

Several leaped overboard, but were quickly picked up. The Blackbird and her crew were captured with hardly a struggle.

It was a great victory.

The gang of crooks were prisoners.

But the greatest disappointment was in store. The chief of all, the man most desired, was not in the bunch.

Black Jack was not aboard.

The crooks could only say that he had been expected, as had Captain Cooley. But neither had put in an appearance.

It was only another keen disappointment to the Bradys.

The gang made all sorts of confessions, and were taken ashore and sent in a body to the Tombs.

Black Sam was paid off, and taking his boat, rowed away.

The harbor police took charge of the Blackbird. The Bradys at a late hour went home and to bed.

Several days elapsed.

They were days spent in hard work and fruitless search. No trace of Black Jack could be found in New York.

Then a startling thing happened.

The Bradys received a dispatch dated at New Orleans, Louisiana. Thus it read:

To the Bradys:

Come at once to this city. I am in a hospital. I have need of you.

JAMES CLEEMAN.

The Bradys were astounded.

"Whew! What is the meaning of that?" exclaimed Old King Brady.

"It is a surprise."

"Yes."

"What does Cleeman want of us? He says he is in the hospital?"

"By jove! I have it!"

"What?"

"Black Jack has gone back to Louisiana. Cleeman wants to put us on his trail, as he is unable to take it himself."

The Bradys were convinced that this was the truth. They lost no time."

They packed a few effects and took a Southern train. In due time they rolled into the New Orleans depot.

The depot was some distance from the hospital, so they employed a negro driver to take them over to it.

He was a white-bearded, shrewd-featured old chap, with a cunning leer in his eyes.

"I take yo' ober to de hospittle," he agreed. "Dey ain't got nuffin' ober dere but yellar fever patients."

The Bradys paused with a gasp of horror. This was not pleasant news.

CHAPTER XII.

AT LOW BOTTOM.

"Eh?" exclaimed Old King Brady. "Are you sure of that, Cuffy?"

"Mah name ain't Cuffy! Mah name am Samson," said the driver, stiffly.

"Ah, pardon me, Mr. Samson, if you please. Is it true that there are none but yellow fever patients there?"

"It 'am, sah!"

"Well, that is tough. We don't want to get the fever, I am sure."

"Mebby yo' has friends ober dere," suggested the aged darky.

"Yes; we want to see a friend there."

"Yo' am jes' from de Norf?"

"Yes."

"Well, yo' bettah not go out dere. Yo'll git de fever, suah! Mebbe you kin git some one to go fo' you."

"Well," said Old King Brady, "I hardly believe it. We need to see the party ourselves. But is there no safeguard we can wear?"

"Mebbe yo' bettah see a doctah, sah!"

"All right! Take us to a good one."

They got into the coach and were driven to the office of a doctor near by.

The physician looked grave, but said:

"I think I can fix it. I will give you an antiseptic bath and sterilized gloves and face mask. You must not touch the patient."

So when the Bradys entered the hospital they were thus equipped.

Poor Cleeman was tossing on a bed of fever.

He welcomed the Bradys eagerly.

"You have come!" he said joyfully. "I am very glad. I feel sure you will execute for me my vengeance, which I am now unable to complete."

"You refer to Black Jack?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yes. He is here in Louisiana."

"Then he has not left America?"

"No!"

"What does it mean?"

"Well," said the sick man, "with the destruction of his colonization plans by the capture of the yacht and the crew, he came South. He is now in hiding near Low Bottom."

"You don't mean it."

"It is true. I was upon his track, and I would have got him sure, but I was stricken with the fever. Listen." The fevered man raised himself upon his elbow. His face was ghastly white in its deep earnestness. "I want you to swear to execute my vengeance for me, if I am not spared. Will you do this?"

"You may depend upon it!" said Old King Brady.

"Then I will tell you all!"

"That will be necessary."

"Black Jack came South for a very powerful reason. It was the same alluring start that has led many a criminal to ruin."

The Bradys gave a start.

They glanced at each other.

"A woman!" said Harry.

"Yes; a woman."

The sick man had a spasm of coughing. Then he went on.

"This woman is well known in this part of the South. Her name is Cleo La Vigne. She is an octoroon, and it is said that she is only coquetting with Croon.

"He has money, and that is the magnet that draws her. He will ruin himself for her. It is the time to strike."

Again the sick man had a spasm.

The physician held up his hand.

"The interview must be brief," he said.

"Very well," said Old King Brady. "We have but one question to ask: Where shall we look for Croon?"

Cleeman replied, huskily:

"In Low Bottom swamp. He lives there in some negro shack. He goes forth from there at suitable times."

"We will locate him," said Old King Brady, "and we will get him. Have no fear of that. In the meantime we trust you will recover from the fever."

The Bradys left the hospital.

After being thoroughly disinfected, they went to the Planter's hotel and got a good dinner.

Then they took a train for Low Bottom.

When they alighted from the train at that little station it was dusk. The detectives were in close disguise.

Old King Brady was made up as Honorable Mark Small, a New York millionaire looking for a sugar plantation.

Harry was his son Jack.

The Bradys registered at the little hotel of the town and took pains to make their pretended mission known.

The hotelkeeper, a quaint old Southerner named Lafe Otis, elevated his spectacles, and said:

"I reckon ye might buy Jeff Carter's place, if ye want to pay the price. It's a right good farm, and it pans out well for sugar."

"Where is Mr. Carter's plantation?" asked Old King Brady.

"Oh, it's a right smart piece down on the bayou road. Looky here, Richie Barksdale! Can't you tell these gentlemen all about it?"

A tow-headed, lounging young chap came up. He saluted the Bradys awkwardly.

"Reckon I oughter!" he said, "bein's I was born down there!"

"Just so!" said Old King Brady, polishing his silk hat. "You're just the chap we want, Richie. How big a farm is it?"

"It covers a whole section, I reckon."

"Plenty of cane brake?"

"More'n ye kin handle. It's ther best plantation in Low Bottom; but it wants a man that knows sugar to run it."

The youth cast a furtive glance at the detectives, which seemed an inference that this might not be their qualification.

Old King Brady smiled.

"I see!" he said. "Is there a place around here known as White Bayou?"

"That's in Low Bottom swamp, sir."

"Ah, yes! Well, is Mr. Carter's plantation near there?"

"It is. It takes in some of the swamp. That's dead land, but it ain't taxed, so ye kin afford to own it."

"Exactly. I think you understand me very well, my lad. Now, are there any bad characters down in that region?"

The youth shrugged his shoulders.

"Some niggers," he said.

"What's this about a chap they call Black Jack. Does he live down that way?"

The youth's face lit up.

"Oh, yes!" he cried. "He's a right bad one. He killed Clark Cleeman. If we kin git hold of him there'll be a nigger burnin' down here. There's a price on his head."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "It's not very pleasant to think of living near such a desperado."

"Oh, he might not trouble you, sir! He's hidin' all the time."

"If he is a fugitive, why don't he skip out of this region?"

Young Barksdale rubbed his chin.

"I dunno, unless it's Cleo La Vigne that keeps him. They say she can make a fool of him. He's dead in love with her."

"Oh! Who is Cleo La Vigne?"

"She's an octoroon girl."

"Does she live here in town?"

"Yes; that's her home down there by the turn in the Bayou road. She lives there with her mother."

Old King Brady saw a tidy little cottage at the end of the street.

He made a note of this.

"Now, Richie," he said, "will you come around here early in the morning and go down to Carter's plantation with us?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will pay you for your trouble."

"All right, sir."

Old King Brady turned to Harry, while the youth shuffled away.

"We're on the ground, Harry," he said. "I think there will be something doing before morning."

"I hope so."

"Do you see that little house down there at the end of the street?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is where she lives. No doubt Croon comes to see her."

"Exactly."

"Now, he will be likely to show up there to-night. We are dull if we don't happen to be around."

"Well, I should say."

So the Bradys discussed the plan. Then they went to their room.

It was their policy now to keep out of sight. They felt quite confident of their game.

As sure as Black Jack appeared at the La Vigne cabin that night, so surely would he be apprehended.

It was eleven o'clock when the Bradys silently descended from the hotel porch and walked away into the gloom.

It did not take them long to reach the vicinity of the La Vigne cabin.

A light shone in the window.

Harry crept up and looked in.

A thrifty looking colored man sat in a chair by the fire reading. Near him was a woman whose complexion was almost white.

She was the mother of the beautiful octoroon who sat in a chair near the window, engaged in knitting.

She was certainly a beauty, as the Bradys were bound to admit.

Harry's eyes sparkled.

"She is a beauty," he muttered. "Some one might step in and cut him out."

"That is not easily done."

"Why not?"

"Well, these people of mixed blood are exceedingly jealous and distrustful of the whites. I don't think any one would stand any chance."

The Bradys watched Cleo La Vigne closely.

They wondered why Black Jack did not come. The hour was sufficiently late.

Then an unexpected thing happened.

Cleo La Vigne arose, and speaking a few words to her mother, left the room.

A few moments later she emerged from the cabin.

She was not ten feet from the Bradys.

In fact, she passed very close to them. She flitted away into the darkness.

In an instant the detectives were after her. They suspected what it meant.

Black Jack would not appear at the La Vigne cottage. She would keep tryst with him.

This suited the detectives as well.

They followed her silently.

The gloom was intense, and it was not easy to keep her in sight. But she led them out of the town limits.

Into the verge of a canebrake she went. Here she paused.

The detectives crouched in the cane growth and patiently waited.

They had not long to wait.

A low sibilant whistle sounded. She answered it, and a lithe, shadowy figure appeared from the cane.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW PLAN.

The Bradys needed no information. They knew it was Black Jack.

Instinctively each detective clenched his hands and seemed ready to jump out upon their prey, but they waited.

"Well, my angel, you came," said Croon, in a low, passionate voice. "You make me the happiest man on earth."

"Yes, I have come," she said, in a cold voice. "You forced me to."

"Ah, then you feel my power?"

He slid closer and attempted to take her in his arms. But she stepped back.

Something silvery gleamed in her hand.

"Keep away from me," she panted. "I don't want you to put your hands on me. I have no fear. I am well protected."

A growl escaped Croon as he glared at the deadly knife blade.

It was but a toy.

He could have disarmed her. But he did not. He even seemed to cower.

"You are cruel, Cleo. You know how I love you."

"You love me?" she exclaimed, scornfully. "Oh, no! I am not so easily deceived. You are infatuated, that's all. When you tired of me I would be thrown aside heedlessly."

"I swear it, Cleo——"

"Stop! I will not listen!"

"But you shall! I know you love that white-faced sop in New Orleans. I will kill him."

"If you do," she gritted, "I will kill you."

Black Jack laughed softly.

"You are never so charming as when in a rage, Cleo," he said. "I like your grit. You are after my heart. I cannot give you up."

"Wait, Jack Croon! You ask me to marry you. What have you to offer me?"

"Wealth untold! All the money you want. I will make a queen of you——"

"But you can't wipe out the awful stain!" she cried, scathingly. "Murderer! That is what you are! Why should I wed a murderer?"

"It is not murder! It is warfare against the enemies of our race."

"The white people?"

"Yes."

"They are our only friends to-day. They don't forget that we owe them all we are as a nation. The taking of human life is murder. And you, therefore, stand convicted of murder. Oh, no! The stain is too awful! I never want to see your face again."

The detectives had listened to all this with interest. But they believed now that the time had come. They decided to seize their man.

With a quick movement Old King Brady stepped from the canebrake.

He was almost in the rear of Croon.

But in that moment, and just as he was about to leap upon his intended prey, an unexpected thing happened.

The ground beneath his feet yielded. He sank to his armpits.

He had stepped into a bog, and he was instantly made helpless.

The sounds made by this had given the alarm.

Croon gave a backward leap into the canebrake.

The octoroon gave a sharp cry.

"Treachery!" hissed Black Jack. "You have betrayed me, Cleo La Vigne. I'll kill you for this!"

"No, no, Jack!" screamed the woman. "It is not so! Oh, flee, quick, for your life."

Harry had sprung forward to seize Croon.

But the negro had dodged into the canebrake, and the young detective's hands closed on empty air.

Then followed a blinding flash and a crash. The bullet grazed Harry's cheek.

He went down flat for safety.

When he regained his feet the flying footsteps of Croon were dying away in the jungle. He knew it was of no use to pursue him.

So the young detective turned to seize the colored girl. She had disappeared.

"Hang the luck!" cried Harry, savagely. "We have missed again, Governor!"

"Well, you'll miss me, Harry, if you don't come quickly to my help!" cried Old King Brady.

Harry looked about wonderingly.

"Where are you?"

"Here."

"Where? I can't see you."

"I am in this bog hole, and slipping down to China as fast as ever I can," declared the old detective.

"The deuce you are! Oh, I see! Wait a moment, and I'll pull you out."

Harry accomplished this, after some laborious effort.

When the old detective got out of the mire he was a sight to behold.

At least he would have been in daylight.

The two detectives were deeply chagrined.

Once again they had met with defeat. It seemed as if luck was against them.

"Harry," said the old detective, "help me to scrape off some of this mud. I hope it will not be noticed when we get back to the hotel."

"We will sneak in some back door, for it certainly will be a giveaway."

"I should say so!"

Harry assisted the old detective to make himself as presentable as possible. Then he slowly made his way back to the hotel.

It was out of the question to pursue Black Jack into the swamp that night.

Old King Brady managed to gain his room without being noticed.

Then he got rid of the mud, and felt like himself again.

"Do you think Croon knew us?" asked the young detective.

"I don't see how he could," declared Old King Brady. "He could not see us."

"But he may suspect us."

"Oh, I think not."

"We can do nothing more to-night."

"No."

The detectives cleaned Old King Brady's clothes, and a little later turned in for a good night's sleep. The next morning they sat out on the piazza as usual.

Richie Barksdale was on hand early, and ready for the trip to White Bayou.

He had procured a pair of mules and a wagon. The detectives entered it and were driven away.

In due time they reached Carter's plantation. The owner was a typical Louisianan, tall and shifty in his movements, and possessed of native hospitality.

"I'll sell ye the whole place for twelve thousand, cash," he declared. "Thar's a bonanza in it for you un's. It's dirt cheap."

"There's only one thing I object to," said Old King Brady.

"Eh? What is that?" asked the Southerner.

"You're too near the swamp, and there's a bad lot of niggers down here."

"Shoot a few of 'em an' ye'll have no trouble," said Carter.

"Is that policy?"

"Well, it's a necessity. Thar's good niggers an' bad ones."

"Who seems to be the ringleader of the bad ones?" asked the detective.

The Southerner ejected a tobacco quid.

"Thar was a chap aroun' here called Black Jack. He was a bad one. But I reckon he has left for good."

"We have heard that he has returned to this locality and is once more carrying a high hand."

"Yas, I heard somethin' about it; but he'll be rounded up by an' by, you can bet. If it warn't for him an' his gang I could get ten thousand more for my plantation."

"I should think that fact would be sufficient incentive to hunt him down."

The planter shrugged his shoulders.

"You 'uns are new down here," he said. "It's a right peart thing to talk about; but I can't do it."

"You admit that?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Carter, have you any idea where this scoundrel is hiding?"

"Oh, yes! In the Big Swamp."

"Why not surround the swamp and drive him out?"

"Humph! You talk as if it was easy. Why, a thousand men could lose their way in that swamp and never be heard of. Black Jack could keep 'em on the jump in there for a lifetime. There's too many hiding places and death traps. The best way is to let the niggers alone."

"Well, we'll think over your offer for the plantation, Mr. Carter."

"All right."

"Good-day."

The Bradys drove away. Richie Barksdale flicked the mules with the whip, and said:

"I reckon I could show ye how to fool Black Jack."

"You can?"

"I think so."

"How is that?"

"Well, I know the Big Swamp pretty well myself. I have hunted there quite a little. I reckon Croon makes his den on Turkey island."

"Ah, see here, Richie," said Old King Brady. "You're an honest boy. If we tell you a secret, can you keep it?"

"Well, you bet!"

"Do you want to earn a hundred dollars?"

The youth whistled.

"Whew! I could start in bizness up ter New Orleans on that."

"Yes; well, we want to know that we can trust you."

"You bet I keeps my word."

"Good for you, Richie! Now, I want to tell you that we are detectives. We are down here for the purpose of capturing Black Jack."

"Detectives?"

Richie gave a gasp, and his eyes bulged.

"Then ye ain't buyin' a plantation?"

"No."

"An' ye're after Black Jack?"

"Yes."

"Great alligators! Ye've got a hard job."

"I know that, for Croon is a slippery fellow. But we intend to get him."

"I'll help ye!" cried the youth, eagerly. "I can do it, too. You couldn't find nobody that knows more about the swamps than I do."

"I believe you, Richie. Where is this Turkey island of which you speak?"

The boy turned in the wagon seat.

He pointed far out across the lowland.

"It's over ten miles out yonder in the swamp!" he said.

"There's alligators there twenty feet long. No man ever goes in there to hunt, for it's too dangerous. But Black Jack knows the way, an' he know's he's safe."

"Just so! Now, you can take us in there, can you?"

The youth looked at the detectives speculatively.

"I dunno," he said. "I kin try. Are you good on a long trip?"

"I guess we can stand it."

"If you are, I reckon we kin make it. I tell you how we kin do it. We can get a light batteau and carry it over to the Big Bayou. Then we can make our way up from there."

"You think Black Jack has an abode in there, do you?"

"I knows it."

"That settles it, Richie. Take us in there, and you shall have the hundred dollars."

"One hundred dollars!" exclaimed the youth, with glittering eyes. "Cracky! I'd break my neck for that."

In due time they reached Low Bottom, and the Bradys went back to the hotel.

They arrived in time for the evening meal. Richie went away with his mules.

Before he went it was arranged that they was to start the next morning in the batteau for Big Bayou.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH IS THE LAST.

The Bradys were highly pleased with the result of their day's work.

They felt confident now that, with the help of Richie Barksdale, they could corner the fox in his lair.

There seemed to be no surer or better way than to surprise him in his den in the swamp.

After supper the Bradys once more appeared on the hotel piazza.

They sat there chatting quietly and enjoying the balmy evening atmosphere, when suddenly Richie appeared.

The youth was very white.

He trembled with excitement.

"What's the matter, boy?" asked Old King Brady. "You look scared to death."

"Cracky!" exclaimed the youth. "Hain't you heard what has happened?"

"No."

"Well, Cleo La Vigne has disappeared, and her father is out with men and bloodhounds to track her. They think that Black Jack has dragged her away into the swamp."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "That is just like the villain."

"Old La Vigne is crazy! He swears to hunt Black Jack to his death."

"Well, Richie, you're not going back on our plan, are you?"

The boy shook his head.

"No," he replied. "I have the batteau all ready. We will start early to-morrow morning."

"Are you sure you can reach Turkey island by that means?"

"I am," replied the youth.

"But—if that is so, why do not La Vigne and his men try it?"

The boy's shrewd face lit up.

"Do you think they could find their way in there?" he asked. "No, indeed! I think I am the only one in Low Bottom who can do that."

"Then we certainly hit on the right man," said Old King Brady.

"I guess you did, boss. Now I'll go home and get some sleep."

"Good-night."

After the youth had gone the Bradys decided to take a walk down the street to the La Vigne's and see what was going on.

They found things there in a much excited state. The colored part of the town was up in arms over the matter.

An expedition had departed into the swamp after the villain.

But, like many another expedition, it would doubtless result in little return.

The detectives finally returned to the hotel and went to sleep.

The next morning, however, at an early hour they left the hotel.

They made their way cautiously down to the shore of the bayou.

Here, in the batteau, the Barksdale youth awaited them.

The Bradys sprang into the boat and Richie pushed off into the stream.

Through the sluggish black water he rowed the rude craft slowly. Progress was most exceedingly tedious.

But finally, after threading a tortuous creek, they were in the depths of the swamp.

For hours they pushed through the miasma-laden bayous and creeks.

At times it became necessary to haul the rough craft across miry tracts, to re-embark in another body of water.

It was a trip which the detectives never forgot.

The like of it had never been experienced before.

But Richie, filled with the ardor of his purpose, worked like a Trojan.

"It's only a mile now," he whispered, and a grayish pallor came into his face.

"A mile?"

"Yes."

"Then we understand that we shall have reached Turkey island?"

"Yes; those big live oaks over yonder are on the island."

"That is good. But—if Black Jack sees us coming——"

"He will not. We will go ashore pretty soon. He has a cabin in a live oak grove. We can creep up on it. He will never think of a foe coming."

"Just so," said Harry, tersely. "You are a good general, Richie."

Along the island shore they pulled.

After awhile the boy turned the batteau into a little green covered cave. Water lettuce drifted over its surface.

He forced it to the roots of a live oak. Here it was fastened.

Then, leaping from one live oak root to that of a giant cypress, they made their way to the dry land.

Turkey island was covered with dense timber and vegetation. It was hard work forcing a way through it.

The Bradys were able to realize what it meant to have secured the services of their young guide.

They could never have made their way through this wilderness alone.

And it was a secure hiding place for just such criminals as Black Jack.

Surely no ordinary being could have found his way into the place.

But suddenly Richie came to a halt.

He listened a moment intently. Then he whispered softly:

"We are coming into the path that leads to his cabin. We must be careful."

A moment later they pushed through a mat of vines and came into the path.

It was well trodden; and led them to the edge of a little clearing.

Here, under a huge live oak, was a cabin made of logs, and thatched cleverly with palmetto.

It was apparently deserted.

For a long time Richie and the detectives lay concealed in the undergrowth and watched the cabin.

Then a surprising thing happened.

The door opened and a human figure appeared. The detectives, as well as Richie, gave a gasp of surprise.

It was Cleo La Vigne.

Cleo left the hut and walked down to the edge of the bayou.

She sat down on a palmetto log and gazed yearningly across the bayou. Her manner was that of one distraught.

And just then the chuck of oars was heard.

Across the surface of the bayou came a rude boat.

It held a single occupant.

"There," whispered Richie. "There he is!"

It was Black Jack.

The negro crook beached his boat and leaped out. He rushed up the bank.

"Ah, my love, my treasure," he cried. "You welcome my return. You shall love me. You will be reconciled."

But she drew back, and her eyes were like coals of fire. Suddenly her arm went up, and she rushed at him.

"Die, you coward!" she screamed. "I will kill you!"

But he stepped back, and catching her wrist, made her drop the knife. He laughed in a discordant way.

Then he hurled her from him.

Rage seemed to seize him.

"You vixen!" he hissed. "I'll break your spirit, or I'll kill you!"

With this he strode toward the house. And now came the critical moment.

The murderer had to pass very close to the Bradys, in their hiding.

Richie cowered back.

But the detectives crouched, and just as the murderer came within reach, they made a leap for him.

Old King Brady grappled with the giant first. With a

roar like a mad bull, Croon fairly hurled the detective yards away.

Harry was treated the same.

Then the negro made a break for the hut. He was evidently after a weapon.

Richie Barksdale, in some manner recovered from his fright, made a dive for the crook and threw his arms about his legs.

It was as handsome a low tackle as was ever made on a football field.

As Black Jack fell Harry went down upon him and put the handcuffs on instantly. Madly Black Jack fought and raved.

But the Bradys quickly had him helpless. At last the great criminal had been run to earth.

Black Jack's career was ended.

He was dragged into the cabin and secured safely. Then the detectives caught Richie by the hand.

"That was plucky work, my boy!" cried Old King Brady. "You have made your fame."

"I knew we had to get him," said Richie, modestly. "I did all I could."

Cleo La Vigne was weeping with joy.

That night was spent in the negro's cabin.

The next morning the prisoner was placed in the bateau, securely bound.

Then all set out on the return. Skillfully Richie piloted them back to Low Bottom.

A tremendous sensation was created when the detectives appeared with Black Jack.

They had all they could do to hold on to their prisoner, for the people of Low Bottom believed in lynching.

But the detectives held their man and managed to get him on a train for New York. In due season they reached the metropolis and landed him in the Tombs.

Croon died a murderer's death. Some weeks later the detectives received a grateful letter from Cleeman, who recovered. And so ended the case.

It was many a day before the two detectives forgot their experiences with Black Jack. But New Yorkers were much relieved when they learned that he had been rounded up at last.

The Bradys were quickly at work upon another case, and here we will take our leave of them for a time.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS' WILD WEST CLEW; or, KNOCKING ABOUT NEVADA," which will be the next number (267) of "Secret Service."

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