

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

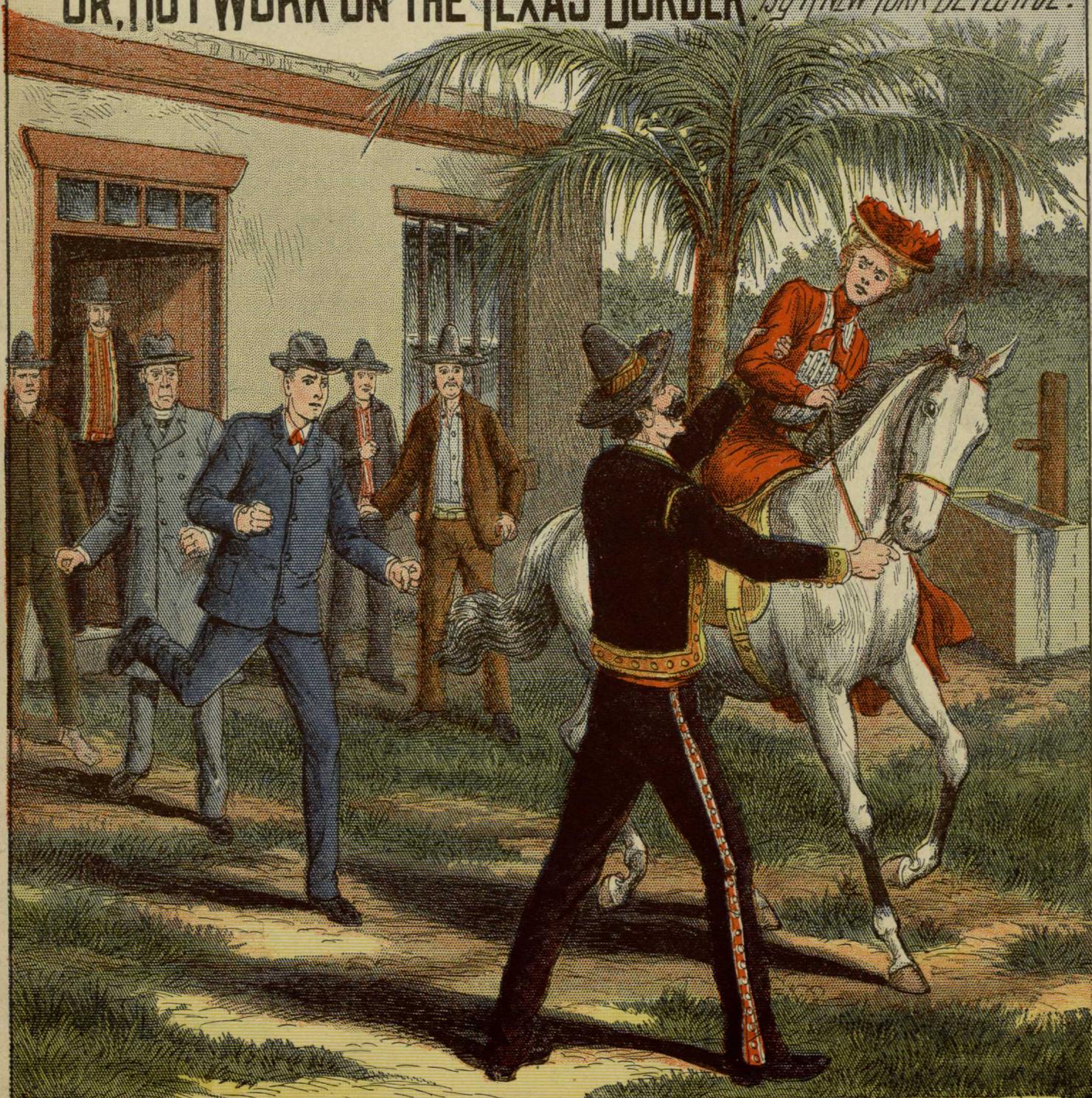
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No. 346.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 8, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND "BRAZOS BILL"; OR, HOT WORK ON THE TEXAS BORDER. *By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.*



"Hold on there! Hands off that lady or you will regret it!" shouted Harry as Brazos Bill clutched the bridle. He ran forward prepared for trouble while Old King Brady pressed close behind. "You git off that hoss!" bawled Bill.

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CHAPTER I.

BRAZOS BILL COMES TO TOWN.

"A typical Texas town, Governor."

"Right you are, Harry. Looks like a bit of old Mexico blown over the border."

"Well, I hope there is something in it for us."

"Let us hope so, Harry. We have come too long a distance to feel much like returning to New York empty-handed, and that's a fact."

The speaker was America's best-known detective—Old King Brady.

Needless to say, his remarks were addressed to his partner and pupil, Young King Brady, or "Harry," as the old detective invariably called him.

If such a thing can be possible for men whose field of action is the entire country, the Bradys were somewhat off their beat, so to speak.

They found themselves on the deck of the little river steamer, Bernal Diaz, running down the Rio Grande at a point twenty miles below Boontown.

This, as is well known, is a dry, barren section; about as poor a country as can be found in the Lone Star State.

At the end of this half desolate region stands the town of Cerro Gordo, named for the more famous Mexican town over the border.

To this place the Bernal Diaz was now approaching.

On the bluff the Bradys could see the low, white buildings, over one of which the stars and stripes was flying.

On the Mexican shore opposite there was not even the trace of a house, nor could any be seen for miles up and down the river on that side.

And yet this section was noted for its smugglers, not only of brandy and cigars, but of Chinamen.

To look across at Mexico as the Bradys saw it that October afternoon, one might have supposed it to be an uninhabited land.

The detectives had attracted more or less attention from the time they boarded the steamer.

This was principally owing to Old King Brady's striking appearance.

As is well known, the old detective affects a peculiar style of dress, and it was thus he appeared now.

He wore a long blue coat, with brass buttons, and a white felt hat with an extra broad brim.

Added to this was his ancient style of neck-gear, a high, pointed, stand-up collar, and old-fashioned stock to match.

Still there are other parts of the country where Old King Brady's make-up would be more out of place than Texas.

As Harry remarked, he looked like an old-time Texan who had lived since the days of the Alamo.

It was a fact that Old King Brady's appearance was entirely in keeping with the town at which the Bernal Diaz now tied up.

The landing was under a bluff so steep that no attempt had been made to build a road.

Goods and people were lifted and lowered by means of an incline railway.

Further down a road existed, but it was seldom used.

Reaching the town the Bradys walked through a broad avenue bordered by oleanders, white on one side and pink on the other, until they came to the Davis House.

This was an old-timer, a long, low, white-washed adobe with barred windows as it fronts the street.

The front was really picturesque, and fitted the scene, but in the rear rose an ugly frame structure which towered above the main building.

This was known as the "new house."

It had been built to accommodate certain summer guests who came down from Houston, San Antonio, and other places, to drink the waters of mineral springs found in the neighborhood.

As for the rest of Cerro Gordo, it consisted of a few other adobes straggling along the main street, and used principally as stores, with a few modern houses on the side and the usual number of negro shacks on the outskirts of the town.

The Bradys entered the Davis House and registered.

They were the only passengers on the steamer, for Cerro Gordo, and it cannot be said that their arrival attracted very much attention.

When Harry wrote "New York" with something of a flourish, the clerk glared at him contemptuously, and asked if they wanted a room with two beds.

"Two rooms with one bed each," replied Young King Brady.

"All our rooms have beds," snapped the clerk.

"Good!" said Harry. "That's the kind we want. Is there any mail here for us?"

"I believe so," replied the clerk, and he threw a letter upon the counter, at the same time summoning a colored bell-boy to show the detectives to their rooms.

Even if the clerk was slightly contemptuous when it came to New Yorkers, he had fixed the Bradys off better than they had hoped for.

Their rooms were in the extension, top story, overlooking the river, where a cool breeze blew.

They were not only well furnished, but had a connecting door.

"This will do very well," remarked Old King Brady, glancing around.

"It is better than I expected," replied Harry. "I haven't forgotten our last uncomfortable experience at a Texas hotel."

"Oh, things are improving on the border," said the old detective. "Now to see what Lady Watkins has to say, for I take it this letter is from her. Hum—ha—'Will try to be in town on the arrival of the steamer.' Didn't know she was out of town. Hopes we will wait for her if she is delayed. Does the woman think we are going back to New York without seeing her? In the meantime we can consult with Col. Tarbox, who is entirely familiar with her business. Who in thunder is Col. Tarbox, I'd like to know?"

Rat—tat—tat!

Somebody was knocking on the door.

"Just see who that is, and what they want, Harry?" demanded Old King Brady, as he restored the letter to the envelope.

But before Harry, who was in the other room, could get to the door, it was opened without invitation and a black head thrust in.

"Gents, Colonel Tarbox to see yo', sah!" was called out.

The door was thrown wider open then, and a stout man, wearing a white duck suit and a hat which rivaled Old King Brady's in the matter of brim, came waddling into the room.

"Your servant, gentlemen," he said. "Cuff, you shut that door and get out. What are you staring at the gents for? Now, then, I am the proprietor of this hotel."

"Just so," replied Old King Brady. "Be seated, please."

"Waal, I ruther think I will, seeing as I own the chair," drawled the colonel, dropping into it, and mopping his forehead. "Warm day."

"Rather. Even for Texas."

"We have our cool days in Texas too, suh."

"Oh, I daresay."

"And Cerro Gordo is noted for them. This is one of the coolest spots in this State, suh, when the wind blows from the northeast."

"I should say it must come from the southwest just at present, then. But to what do we owe the pleasure of this visit, colonel, if I may ask?"

"You may, suh. I am here in behalf of Lady Watkins. You are the detectives, I suppose?"

"We are. I have a letter from Lady Watkins in which she mentions that you would probably see us."

"Yas. She's stopping up to my ranch. I'm expecting her to ride into town to-day. She may be here any minute now."

"We shall be ready for her. Has she heard anything of her husband?"

"Nothing more than she stated in the letter she wrote you to New York."

"Tell me the circumstances under which Sir Archie Watkins disappeared, if you will."

"Well, suh," replied the colonel, sending a stream of tobacco juice out of the open window, "you may say there were no circumstances. He just went back on the desert some five miles or so hunting jack-rabbits, and he got took."

"Took?"

"Yas. Ketched."

"By some gang of badmen?"

"That's what we s'pose. Of course, we can't say for certain, but it looks that way. Here's the letter what was writ his wife. She found it stuck under the door of her room in this house. On'y wisht I knowed who put it thar. I'd make it hot for the feller—yes, I would."

Thus saying, Col. Tarbox handed Old King Brady a letter enclosed in a greasy envelope.

It had evidently been written by an illiterate person, and read as follows:

"To Mrs. lady watkins.—Mam: we got your man. if inglish nobilities kum to Texas a-shoptin' our game they must be made to pay for it. we understand you are rich as mud, so if you want your husband back again you will have to pay us. we give you a week to bring fifty thousand to the old church of San Lorenzo. put in on the alter and we will get it. if you don't kum in a week we shall kum after you, and both you and your husband will be shot. that's so—Say, a word to the wise is 'nuff sed."

There was neither date nor signature to this remarkable epistle.

"And what has Lady Watkins done about the matter besides sending for us?" inquired Old King Brady.

"Nothing," answered Col. Tarbox. "Nothing at all. She hain't got no fifty thousand dollars with her, and she tells me that her husband, Sir Archie Watkins, is by no means a rich man. She says that while she probably could manage to raise this ransom, it would take a month or more to do it. The lady is in a whole lot of trouble. She hain't got a cent to her name. Of course, she can't pay me what she owes. I sent her up to my ranch, five miles back, where she could be quiet. She got so nervous here in town that I thought she would go crazy one time. Seems she had heard her husband speak of you, so she wrote you. I told her you would never come all the way from New York unless she sent you some sort of a retaining fee, but it seems I was mistaken, for hyar yer be."

If Col. Tarbox had but known Old King Brady's char-

acter he would have expressed no surprise on this score. In many respects the old detective is a most peculiar man.

Of the many applications received for his services, at least eighty per cent are turned away.

Old King Brady takes up with such cases as best please him, and money cuts no figure.

As is well known, the old detective is a very wealthy man, and he can thus afford to be independent.

He is just as liable to accept a call from some person not able to pay him a cent as he is to turn down some rich banker from whom he could easily make thousands.

It is not always so, however.

The Bradys have certain regular customers, such as railroad and express companies, for whom they do much work, and such always get the preference.

But when strangers apply it is as we say.

"Yes, we concluded to make the effort to help Lady Watkins," replied Old King Brady. "But tell me, colonel, have you any suspicion as to who the abductors of Sir Archie may be?"

"Waal, I can't say as I have, except in a general way," was the reply. "It might be Brazos Bill and his gang. I'm ruther inclined to think it is, but of course, I can't say for sure."

"Who is this Brazos Bill?"

"Bill Buncombe. He comes from the celebrated Buncombe family, of Buncombe county, Kentucky; no finer folks in the South, suh, than them Buncombes. Yas, that's so."

"Does he have a hold-out around here?"

"Waal, Bill's been doing a little in the smuggling line lately; he used to hang out around the Brazos river country, but he's been hyar quite some of late."

"Is there any other gang operating in this neighborhood at the present time?"

"Not now. Since the Al Taylor gang was druv out thar hain't been much doing in that line."

"But there are plenty of idle fellows hanging about the border who might have gone in for this, I suppose?"

"I suppose thar be if they thought thar was any money in it."

"Listen!" cried Harry, who had himself been attentively listening to this conversation. "What's that?"

Wild yells were heard in the street outside, mingling with the clatter of hoofs.

"Jumping Jerusalem! That ar sounds like Bill now!" cried the colonel, leaning out the window.

"And so it is," he added. "Sure's you live, gents, Brazos Bill has come to town!"

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG KING BRADY DOWNS BRAZOS BILL.

Old King Brady sprang to his feet.

"Come, Harry, we must get on the move!" he exclaimed. "We want to take in this show."

"You'd better keep in doors and mind your own business a blamed sight," said Col. Tarbox. "Bill's kind don't like Yankee detectives so awfully much. Thar's liable to be trouble if you show yourselves on the street."

Old King Brady, without answering, looked over the colonel's shoulder out of the window, which commanded a view of Cerro Gordo's main street.

Down toward the Davis House a band of some fifteen mounted men were galloping, shouting and yelling for all they were worth.

They were led by a man dressed in the fancy Mexican costume so rarely seen in the Southwest in this day.

His followers wore any old clothes, and most of them very few at that.

They were well mounted, and all were armed with rifles.

"That's Brazos Bill," said Col. Tarbox. "If you want to see the fellow thar he is."

"All right. We will watch his moves a minute," replied Old King Brady. "Will he raid your house, think?"

"Not he. Bill and me is very good friends. No; I don't look to see him'trouble me none."

"Does he often come to town?"

"Once in a while. We never interfere with him. He pays for what he gets here."

"Then he don't raid towns and hold up trains, and all that sort of thing?"

"I never heered of his doing anything like that. Bill's business is smuggling. He knows the United States marshall has gone to San Antonio, and that's why he's looked over our way. I don't want to interfere with your business none, gentlemen, but I will say you had better look out for him. Bill is a dangerous man."

"All right. We don't fear him," replied Old King Brady carelessly. "But say, landlord, if you know him so well why don't you ask him if he has got Sir Archie a prisoner?"

"Oh, I wouldn't like to do nothing like that," replied the colonel. "Bill and me has always been good friends. I wouldn't want to interfere with his business in any way."

"Just so," replied Old King Brady, and Col. Tarbox, without further remark, left the room.

Old King Brady and Harry continued at the window.

Here they saw the gang line up in front of a saloon further down the street.

They tied their horses to the hitching bar, and all went into the place but Brazos Bill himself, who walked on toward the hotel.

"I'm going down to have a talk with that fellow if I can get the chance," remarked Old King Brady.

"Would you?" replied Harry. "You'll only be getting in a quarrel with him. Don't you think, Governor, that you run a big risk?"

"Perhaps I do. Still, I will take the risk. It's a chance to begin our work not to be overlooked."

"There is something in that, too. Do you imagine Bill has got this Englishman?"

"Like Colonel Tarbox, my reply must be, 'hard to say.' He seems to be the only professional bad man doing business around here, so it looks very likely. But come on, Harry. I'm going to tackle this Brazos Bill. I think you can trust the old man not to make a fool of himself at this late stage of the game."

So the Bradys went down to the hotel bar-room, where they found Col. Tarbox in friendly conversation with the outlaw.

They had just been drinking together, and the glasses still stood on the bar.

"Oh, how are you, colonel!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "Won't you and your friend join me in a little smile?"

The colonel seemed to fall right in with the scheme.

"Why, certainly," he replied. "Mr. Brady, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Buncombe. Bill, this gentleman is Mr. Brady, of New York, and this young man is his son, I believe."

"Not son—business partner," replied Old King Brady. "Mr. Buncombe, I'm very glad to meet you, sir. Gentlemen, name your poison. What will you have?"

Col. Tarbox allowed that he would have whisky.

Brazos Bill allowed that he would take the same.

There was no handshaking.

The badman eyed the Bradys with a sneering smile.

"He knows perfectly well who we are," thought Harry.

"I only hope the Governor isn't making a mistake."

But Old King Brady very rarely makes mistakes.

If there is a man on earth who knows how to conduct the detective business he is the man.

Glasses were filled, Harry taking ginger ale, for he never drinks whisky.

Col. Tarbox did all the talking which Old King Brady did not do.

Brazos Bill maintained a sullen silence. It began to look as if the interview was destined to end in failure when the old detective took the bull by the horns and blurted out:

"Oh, by the way, colonel, what about this English lord who disappeared from your house a week or so ago?"

The landlord took hold better than Old King Brady supposed he would.

"Well, well! Has the news of that ar reached New York?" he asked.

"It was being discussed in the papers when I left—yes," replied the detective.

"Oh, well," said the colonel, "his name was Watkins. Him and his young wife was stopping with me. He went up in the desert jack-rabbit hunting, and hain't been seen since. That's all I know about it."

"All anybody knows about it, I reckon," put in Brazos Bill.

"I was just going to ask you if you'd heard anything on him," said the colonel.

"How should I hear?"

"Oh, waal, Bill, you know you are knocking about hyar, thar and everywhar. I didn't know."

"Dunno nothin' about him. Heard as how he had been ketched by some gang."

"So? Who was tellin' you?"

"Oh, a feller I met down thar," replied Bill, throwing his thumb in the direction of the desert.

"The wife would like to know that."

"Is she living at your house still, colonel?" demanded the old detective.

The question seemed harmless enough, and one in no way calculated to arouse the ire of Brazos Bill.

"Looker hyar, old man," he burst out, "you can't pull the wool over my eyes none. I know you and the young feller, too. You're the Brady detectives—that's who you be, and you're down hyar in Texas for the very purpose of looking up that ar English lord, if I don't misdoubt."

Here was a bombshell.

Harry wondered what Old King Brady would do.

He might have known.

The old detective boldly accepted the challenge.

"Why, certainly. That's who we are," he calmly replied.

"Gee whiz!" ejaculated Col. Tarbox. "You don't mean to tell me as how you are the famous Old King Brady now?"

"Now and all the time; it is just as Mr. Buncombe says; our business here at Cerro Gordo is to find Lord Archie Watkins—if we can."

"Well put in! If you can!" drawled Brazos Bill. "Now let me tell you something, old man. We don't like Yankee detectives down hyar. We prefer to attend to our own funerals and don't want no Northerner butting in."

"Waal, that's right," assented the colonel.

"Of course it's right," growled Bill. "What's more, it won't be healthy for you two to try no such job, and seeing as how that's the case my advice to you, Mr. Old King Brady, is to go on about your business, and to be blamed quick about it if you want to keep your good health."

The man's manner was as insulting and offensive as his words.

Old King Brady made no reply.

None, in fact, was necessary, as Brazos Bill having thus spoken turned on his heel and left the bar-room.

Col. Tarbox waited till he was out of hearing, and then said in a low tone:

"Say, my dear friend, don't you think you were a little rash?"

"Not at all," replied Old King Brady. "There's nothing underhand about me. I had just as soon everybody in Cerro Gordo knew my business. But who have we here?"

The old detective had turned away from the bar as he made this answer, and stood facing the open door.

Thus he was able to see a good-looking young woman who now came riding up to the Davis House, mounted upon a handsome roan horse.

"Say, that's Lady Watkins!" exclaimed the landlord. He stepped outside, the Bradys following him.

They were just in time to see Brazos Bill make a bolt for the horse, saying some words to the woman in an undertone.

Lady Watkins gave a scream, and drew back with every appearance of fear.

The Texans about the hotel door stood staring.

The next instant the ruffian clutched the young woman by the arm.

This action started the Bradys.

"Hold on there! Hands off that lady, or you will regret it!" shouted Harry, as Brazos Bill clutched the bride.

He ran forward prepared for trouble, while Old King Brady pressed close behind.

"You git off that hoss!" bawled Bill.

So intent was he upon his rudeness, and so certain that none of the men about the hotel door would dare to interfere with him, that he did not see Harry at all.

That he actually meant to drag Lady Watkins from her horse was evident.

But Mr. Brazos Bill missed his mark.

Young King Brady, as it happened, had been practising some Japanese jiu jitsu stunts of late.

Bill got the benefit of them.

The next thing the outlaw knew he was sprawling upon the ground, with Harry and Old King Brady covering him with their revolvers.

Col. Tarbox and his friends now jumped in to the rescue.

Lady Watkins was assisted to alight, and escorted into the Davis House, while a darky boy took her horse in charge.

Meanwhile the Bradys were busy with Brazos Bill.

Contrary to their expectations, the vanquished ruffian never said a word.

He just lay there on his back, staring at the revolvers.

In short, the fellow showed himself to be exactly the same sort of coward as most of his kind.

"Stand on your feet, man," said Old King Brady sternly. "Get up and take yourself out of this without an instant's delay!"

Brazos Bill got up, glaring with rage and hate.

"Say, you Yanks will regret this," he growled.

"We have no quarrel with you, sir, but we don't stand for insults to women, that's all!"

"Go to thunder!" snarled the tough.

He turned on his heel and strode out of the hotel yard, followed by the hooting of the crowd.

CHAPTER III.

GETTING AT THE FACTS.

"You've got yourself into business, all right, Brady," said Col. Tarbox, as the detectives entered the bar-room again.

"My dear sir, we have no fear of that man or his kind," replied Old King Brady. "The fellow must have been drunk to have acted as he did."

"Something of the sort, I reckon."

"What did he say to the lady? Did she tell you?"

"No, she didn't. She was scared half to death. You had better see her for yourself, and ask her. I didn't consider it worth while."

"Did you ever know Brazos Bill to do a thing like that before?"

"Never. He has always been very civil to the fair sex. I think it must be as you say, that he had been drinking before he came here."

Ascertaining that Lady Watkins was then in the parlor of the hotel, the Bradys sent in their business card.

Word came back that they would be received at once.

Upon entering the parlor the young woman arose and came forward in a style decidedly gushing.

"I wish to thank my preserver!" she exclaimed, extending her hand to Harry.

"Young Mr. Brady, I believe," she added. "Really, I don't know how I can ever thank you. And you, sir, I am also very glad to meet. Thank you for responding to my call so promptly. Dear me, when I wrote you that letter I hardly thought you would come. What a dreadful experience! To think of that ruffian ordering me off my horse. Dear me, my nerves are quite shattered. They actually are!"

To all of this the Bradys listened without attempting to reply.

Indeed, there was no chance.

Lady Watkins rattled on, not allowing them to get in a word edgewise.

Meanwhile Old King Brady had sized her up as not the light-headed creature she assumed to be.

He did not take to Lady Watkins at all.

"Yes, I received your call, madam," he said, when the woman finally became silent. "As I wrote you, I am willing to help you find your husband."

"I am so glad. I have heard so much about you, Mr. Brady!" the woman exclaimed. "I am sure you will succeed if anyone can."

She then launched out into further complimentary remarks upon the skill of the Bradys, but the old detective cut her short.

"Really, Lady Watkins, we must get down to business," he said. "It is now many days since Sir Archie disap-

peared. If we expect to do anything it would seem as if there was not a moment to lose."

"I quite agree with you. What would you have me do?" was the reply.

"Tell me the whole story of Sir Archie's disappearance."

This Lady Watakins now did.

The story did not differ materially from that which Col. Tarbox had told the Bradys.

It was simple enough, shorn of its details.

Sir Archie Watkins had gone out alone upon the desert hunting jack-rabbits, and had failed to return.

All search for him had been unavailing.

This appeared to be all there was to tell.

Old King Brady listened and Harry made a few notes.

"I suppose you will want some retaining fee or something of that sort?" Lady Watkins asked.

"No," replied the old detective. "That matter we waive. You can settle after our work is done."

"Very liberal of you, I am sure."

"Not at all. It is quite in our usual style of doing business. Now permit me to ask you a few questions, Lady Watkins, in order that I may get this thing straight."

"Certainly; as many as you wish."

"When did you and your husband arrive from England?"

"It is about a month ago."

"You stopped in New York a few days, I believe?"

"We did."

"At what hotel did you stay?"

"The Waldorf."

"And then you came directly to Texas?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was your object in coming here?"

"Sir Archie had an idea of starting a cattle ranch."

"In this poor country?"

"We were deceived."

"Then he had given up the idea of the cattle ranch at the time of his capture."

"Well, yes; we should not have located here, certainly."

Lady Watkins appeared to grow nervous under the detective's questions. She began fanning herself vigorously.

It was easy to see that she was annoyed.

But Old King Brady paid no attention to this.

"Did Sir Archie have much money with him at the time of his capture?" he asked, continuing his questioning.

"Not very much."

"How much?"

"Really, I don't know, Mr. Brady. I never interfered with my husband's private affairs."

"Was it a matter of hundreds or thousands?"

"Perhaps he had a couple of thousand dollars with him. I couldn't say."

"Just so. Have you a picture of your husband, Lady Watkins?"

"Yes, sir, in this locket."

The lady opened the locket and allowed Old King Brady to study the picture.

Harry also looked at it.

The face was a weak one.

To Young King Brady it did not look at all like the face of an Englishman.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Watkins, "I really hope you succeed in finding my husband, Mr. Brady. I don't know what I shall do if you fail."

"Are you pressed for funds, madam?" demanded the detective, bluntly.

"Oh, no, sir. I have plenty of money. Sir Archie is quite a wealthy man. If you want proof——"

"I haven't asked for any. I am simply trying to get at facts. Now, to end this interview, have you any idea as to what may have happened to your husband?"

"No, sir. I have not. Not the least in the world."

"Do you think it possible that Brazos Bill can have captured him and wrote that letter?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You do not intend paying the ransom demanded in the letter?"

"Why, certainly not, Mr. Brady. It was to avoid that very thing that I sent for you."

"Hum! Ah, yes. I merely asked. Suppose we found it necessary."

"Well?"

"Could you in such a case raise the amount?"

"I could not without crippling me. It would take time."

"I see."

"Have you seen the letter, Mr. Brady? I gave it to Col. Tarbox."

"And he gave it to me. I have it. By the way, I suppose you know that the fellow who attacked you in the courtyard here was the notorious Brazos Bill?"

"I'm sure I did not know who he was."

"What did he say to you before he ordered you to get off your horse?"

Lady Watakins flushed and stammered.

"Really, Mr. Brady, I was so excited that I hardly understood him," she stammered.

"Then you don't know what he did say?"

"No, I don't."

"Why should he order you to dismount? From the way he went at you one would have supposed that the man was acquainted with you."

"I suppose it must have looked that way. I never saw him before in my life."

"Just so. Well, Lady Watkins, we will undertake your case. Where do you propose to remain while we are at work? Here at the hotel?"

"No. I shall return to Col. Tarbox's ranch. I only came here to meet you."

"Very good. And we may report to you there?"

"Yes."

"That is all, then. We will bid you good-morning, and get right to work.

Old King Brady now abruptly withdrew.

Followed by Harry, he walked out into the town.

The horses hitched in front of the saloon were all gone now.

Old King Brady inquiring what had become of the gang, was informed that Brazos Bill had immediately led them out of town.

The detectives walked clear of the town and out upon the prairie before Old King Brady had anything to say.

Indeed, it was Harry who started the conversation then.

"It seems to me, Governor, that you cut that lady very short," he remarked. "Have you some reason for acting in the way you did?"

"I have, the very best of reasons," replied Old King Brady.

"Do you mind telling me what they are?"

"I brought you out here for no other purpose than to tell you, Harry. You looked carefully at the face in that locket, I presume?"

"I did."

"Then look at this."

Old King Brady opened his big wallet and produced the photograph of a man.

"The same person!" exclaimed Tarry, the instant he looked at the picture.

"Undoubtedly."

"Who is he?"

"This picture I got from Hilson & Thiel, of New York."

"Ha! I thought you refused their case."

"I did and I didn't. Nominally I have taken up with Lady Watkins. Actually I am working for the Secret Service Bureau."

"You didn't tell me the details, Governor. I am quite in the dark."

"I did not tell you because at the time I had not the most remote intention of taking up with their affairs."

"Who is this Sir Archie Watkins, then? I take it he is not the man he purports to be."

"You are quite right. He is not an English lord at all, but the notorious Dr. Roundy, diamond smuggler. This picture is a copy of one in the Rogues Gallery in New York."

"I see we are up against a mixed-up mess. Put me wise, Governor, so that I may know where we stand."

"I will put you just as wise as I am myself, Harry, and no wiser, for it is all I can do. It appears that Dr. Roundy has rather lost his usefulness in the matter of smuggling diamonds from Europe, owing to the fact of the custom-house people being on to all his curves. Hilson & Thiel

did not go into details. They merely told me that they had engaged Dr. Roundy to manage some business affairs of theirs at Cerro Gordo, and that they advanced him a large sum of money, the amount they did not care to state.

"They further stated that the doctor was passing under the name of Sir Archie Watkins, and that he had disappeared, and that a ransom was demanded for him. They wanted me to come down here and look for him, but I declined, for I felt sure that the whole business was crooked, and that it was a diamond smuggling affair. I suppose if I had accepted I could have got all the details, but as I declined I got none at all."

"But you got the photo?"

"I will explain how that happened. I returned to the office and found that you had this call from the alleged Lady Watkins. I immediately took it to the Secret Service commissioner. Well, I need not go any further. We are here. I got the picture in some way from Hilson & Thiel, but later learned that they got it from the Gallery."

"And you believe that there are diamonds involved in this business?"

"I certainly do, and probably to such a large amount as to justify both Lady Watkins and Hilson & Thiel in running the risk of taking up with us."

"I see. If you had accepted Hilson & Thiel's offer they would have tried to purchase your silence."

"Certainly. They think I am working for them in a way, as it is. I went back to them and showed them Lady Watkins' letter. I told them I was going to attempt to find the missing man. I told them further that I did not want to know the details of their business, but if we succeeded in getting Sir Archie they would hear from me, and that then they could tell me what to do."

"Did they accept that proposition?"

"Jumped at it. That was the time I got the picture, and learned that it was with the notorious Dr. Roundy that I had to deal."

"And what is your idea of the whole business?"

"Just this. There are diamonds involved. The letter demanding ransom is mere bluff. Lady Watkins thought that Hilson & Thiel would try to get us, and so she tried on her own account. Brazos Bill I now believe to be at the bottom of the whole business, although at the time I did not know who we were going to run up against."

"Now we are getting at facts. And what do you propose to do?"

"Why, what do I propose to do?" laughed Old King Brady. "Simply to go in and win."

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE HAUNTED MISSION.

And thus by Old King Brady's explanation it will be seen that the case upon which he and his partner were now working was not an ordinary badman affair.

During the day the Bradys just hung about the town, spending most of their time at the hotel.

They made no effort to communicate with Lady Watkins again.

Later in the day they saw her ride out of town unattended, just as she had come in.

"A brave woman, suh," Col. Tarbox remarked to Old King Brady. "She don't know what fear means; thar she goes just as bold as if thar wasn't no such person in the world as Brazos Bill. Shouldn't like to be in your shoes, though."

"And what do you mean by that, colonel?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Just that Bill is a feller who don't never forget an injury. He'll square accounts with you, sure thing."

"We are like Lady Watkins," replied Old King Brady. "We have no fear."

The colonel made some further talk.

He spoke in rather a boasting way of the doings of Brazos Bill and his gang.

The Bradys, however, are well used to this sort of thing, having handled many such characters before.

About five o'clock the detectives rather surprised the landlord and hangers-on at the Davis House.

A Mexican half-breed who did some horse-trading in Cerro Gordo suddenly appeared at the hotel with two of his best horses, ready saddled, in tow.

Then the Bradys paid their bill, mounted the horses, and rode out of town.

Everyone was curious to know their destination, and the landlord put the question bluntly.

Nobody got any satisfaction, however.

The last seen of the Bradys they were galloping toward the desert.

Nightfall found them still upon it, riding up along the river line about three miles back from the bluffs, which here overhang the bank.

At about nine o'clock they struck off toward the river.

Having covered about half a mile they came upon a solitary house, or rather hut, standing in a gully which divided the desert from better land beyond.

At the entrance to this gully the detectives drew rein and sat for a moment gazing at the light which burned in the lower window of the hut.

"That must be the place, Governor," Harry remarked.

"It certainly looks so," replied Old King Brady. "I should say that there can be no doubt that we are looking at the hut which that greaser told us about."

"And the owner appears to be at home."

"Looks so. We shall soon know."

They dashed on down into the gully, and drew up before the hut.

The noise of their coming brought an old yellow-faced man to the door.

"Senors, why do you come here?" he demanded. "You

are strangers in these parts, or you would never have come to my afflicted house."

"It is your brother at Cerro Gordo who sent us, Senor Gonzales," replied Old King Brady. "He told us of your misfortune. We know that your wife has leprosy, and that you keep her concealed here; but we do not fear the disease."

"Then you are very different from most people," replied Senor Gonzales. "I am shunned by all; but for the great kindness of my brother my unfortunate wife and I would long ago have starved."

"And yet there is nothing to be afraid of. The best medical authorities have long ago decided that there is no danger of contracting leprosy unless by personal contact with one of its victims."

"It may be so, senor. I have had the care of my unfortunate wife for years and have never caught the disease. Still, others do not think so, and there you are. But what is your pleasure? My brother would not have sent you here without some good reason."

"This letter will introduce us," said Old King Brady. "We merely want you to direct us to the old mission San Lorenzo—that is all."

"That I will do with pleasure," replied the Mexican.

He glanced at the letter, and thrusting it into his pocket, requested the detectives to wait while he saddled his horse.

"I regret that I cannot invite you into my house, gentlemen," he added, "but that cannot be."

"We understand," replied Old King Brady. "We will wait for you here, senor. Do not hurry yourself. There is plenty of time."

Senor Gonzales departed, and soon returned, mounted upon a sturdy little broncho.

"It is only three miles to the mission," he said. "I don't ask you why you wish to go there, and I don't expect you to tell me unless you choose."

"But just the same you are curious to know," returned Old King Brady. "I will be frank with you, senor. I had much talk with your brother, from whom I bought these horses. He told me how you had suffered at the hands of Brazos Bill."

"And indeed I have suffered," replied the old man, bitterly. "That wretch shot my only son, who served on the revenue force. It was no matter of a fight, Mr. Brady, but a deliberate murder. Some day my time for revenge will come."

"It may be close at hand," replied the old detective. "I have determined to tell you my business, senor. You have heard of the disappearance of Sir Archie Watkins, perhaps?"

But Senor Gonzales had not heard.

So secluded was the life he led that the news of Cerro Gordo seldom reached his ears.

Old King Brady told him all about it in a general way.

"I have seen nothing of the man. I never heard of

him," said Senor Gonzales. "Nobody ever comes my way. But you have not yet explained why you want to go to the old mission."

"Because we have reason to believe that the man may be concealed there," replied Old King Brady.

"I cannot believe it," was the reply. "Nobody ever goes to the old mission, and for very good reasons, too."

"Haunted?" asked Harry, who was closely following all this.

"It surely is. You may not believe in such things, but I know."

"What is the story?" asked Old King Brady.

"There is no story," was the reply. "Simply that lights are seen there at night, which are surely not of this world. They may have seen those brothers wandering about. It is no fiction. It is true. Not in seventy years has mass been said at the altar of San Lorenzo by human beings; but ask any of the cowboys hereabouts, and they will tell you that it is said there still."

"This is all very interesting, especially as we propose to spend the night at the mission," said the old detective. "But tell me, senor, "did you ever see anything of this sort yourself?"

"I have seen the lights."

"But never the ghostly forms?"

"No; I never had the chance. Not for all the money in the world would I spend the night within those ruined walls. But there it is, Senor Brady. You can see its tower in the moonlight, standing on the bluff there overlooking the river. That is the mission San Lorenzo."

"What style of fathers used to occupy the place?" inquired Old King Brady.

"They were Dominican brothers," was the reply. "My father remembered them, but they had all departed before my time."

The Bradys looked toward the historic building, which stood sharply defined in the moonlight.

It consisted of two parts, a tower and a long, low building two stories in height, extending away from it along the line of the Rio Grande.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Harry. "There's a light in the tower now!"

"What did I tell you?" cried Senor Gonzales. "Many a time I have seen that. Oh, I know."

Suddenly from one of the topmost of the numerous little windows in the tower the light had streamed forth.

It was toward the river, and could certainly be seen for many miles back into Mexico.

It lasted for only a moment, and then disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

Old King Brady reined in.

"Senor, we will not trouble you to go further," he said. "You have shown us the mission; it is enough."

Senor Gonzales seemed much relieved.

He accepted the five dollar bill which Old King Brady gave him with many expressions of gratitude.

Then with many warnings he withdrew.

"Do we go on, Governor?" demanded Harry, for Old King Brady did not seem disposed to make a start.

"No," was the reply. "That is, not directly toward the mission. Wait until that man is out of sight, and then we will make for that grove of live oaks behind it. There we will leave our horses and do the rest of our journey on foot."

Upon reaching the live oak grove the Bradys dismounted and hobbled their horses.

"Why do we go there?" demanded Harry, for Old King Brady was in one of his uncommunicative moods, and had given no hint as to his plans.

"It comes out of my talk with that half-breed horse dealer, Harry," was the reply. "He told me a lot. He believes that the mission is haunted, same as everybody else. I happen to differ with him as to the cause of these mysterious lights. That is why I am here."

"That light we saw was a signal, fast enough."

"Of course it was, and intended for smugglers on the other side of the river, if I know anything. We will just put in the night here, and I have no doubt it will bring some result."

"By jove, there goes the light again, and on this side now," Harry exclaimed.

"Exactly," said Old King Brady. "Before these tenants of the old mission, whoever they may be, were signaling someone over in Mexico. Now they are doing the same thing with someone back inland."

"You are going right ahead?"

"Certainly. The only reason I did not ride directly up to the door is because I didn't care to make a demonstration. We will sneak in and go on the watch. Take my word for it, Harry, before morning there will be something doing, and we shall be lots wiser about the mission San Lorenzo than we are now."

Passing out of the live oak grove the Bradys entered an old orchard now.

It was sadly overgrown, but even in the moonlight the detectives were able to see what it had been.

Here were olive trees and the hundreds of peach trees, many of them dead.

The remains of a wall built of blocks of rough limestone skirted one side, and here stood a line of pepper trees whose spreading branches had a beautiful effect.

A little beyond the orchard they came to a fountain which bubbled up out of a huge circular trough which appeared to be one solid block of stone.

The old mission now rose close before them, but all lights had disappeared long ago.

Surrounding the fountain was a dense thicket formed of overgrown oleander trees, the perfume from whose blossoms was decidedly stifling.

"We will stop here and go on the watch," said Old King Brady. "If we want to find out anything it won't do to go inside there."

They came upon a rustic bench, and here they seated themselves, peering out from among the oleanders at the mission.

They could scarcely have selected a better place, and in a very short time their patience was rewarded.

"Great Scott! Governor! Look there!" Harry suddenly whispered.

He pointed to the pillared outside corridor, which ran along the side of the old building.

The moon shone full upon this corridor, and the Bradys could see a form in the peculiar dress of a Dominican brother walking slowly along.

It was an old, gray-haired man with a shaven ring or tonsure on the top of his head.

From the waist hung a big crucifix, and his bare feet were enclosed in sandals.

With bowed head and hands folded across his breast, the figure advanced along the corridor till it reached the end.

Then it was seen to turn and had gone but a few steps when suddenly without the slightest warning it disappeared from view.

CHAPTER V.

STRANGE DISCOVERIES UNDER THE BLUFF.

"The ghost!" cried Harry.

"Hush! Hush!" breathed Old King Brady. "Don't raise your voice so, please."

"They never could hear me over there," protested Harry, in a whisper.

"Over there? Over where? Who was telling you that the watchers over this smugglers joint, if that is what it is, are in one place more than another? We want to keep strictly on our guard."

"All right, Governor. I'll be good. Where did the old fellow go to, though?"

"More than I can tell you. I am inclined to think, however, that the appearance bodes no good for us."

Harry was silent.

Old King Brady is not without a tinge of superstition in his mental make up, which fact his partner is perfectly well aware of.

For the moment Harry thought that Old King Brady believed that they had actually seen a ghost.

The next words of the old detective disabused his mind of that idea, however.

"It is like this," said Old King Brady. "That exhibition was prepared for somebody's benefit sure, and I am inclined to think that it was for ours. We have probably been seen."

"Perhaps not. They may be only rehearsing."

"That's an idea, too. I never thought of that. Wait! Don't I hear horses?"

"I don't get it."

"Listen."

"Yes, yes. I hear now. There is someone coming."

"One horse—no, two on the other side of the mission. Confound the luck! I wish we were around there."

"Never mind. We can see right through," said Harry. This was true enough.

The main building of the mission had long been roofless.

Where the roof had tumbled in about the center of the ancient building, it had brought the floor beams of the second story down with it.

Thus the moonlight streamed down into what would otherwise have been a darkened interior, and the Bradys could at this point see through to the other side in an uncertain way.

The clatter of hoofs now grew plainer, and in a few minutes the watching detectives caught sight of two horses coming up on the other side.

A halt was made, and after a moment they caught sight of two figures coming through the building.

They were a man and a woman.

On they came until they stood in the corridor on the side where the Bradys were.

And then might have come a surprise had not both been prepared.

It was Brazos Bill, still wearing his fancy dress.

The woman was Lady Watkins.

For the moment they stood talking in the moonlight, apparently in the most friendly manner.

Then they advanced to the place where the "ghost" had vanished, and here they vanished too.

They disappeared suddenly, and in precisely the same way as the ghostly monk had done.

One moment they were visible, and the next nothing was to be seen of them.

"Come, Harry, there you are," said the old detective.

"You won't play Don Quixote for that lady again, I fancy. Whatever differences she and Brazos Bill may have had this morning, they seem to have made them up in beautiful style."

"They certainly do," replied Young King Brady. "And yet I can't understand at all why Lady Watkins should have brought us all the way from New York to Texas if she is standing in with Bill's gang."

"That's the mystery, and it is up to us to solve it. But come, we won't stop here any longer. Those two may have a confab of an hour's length on their hands. Let us get around on the other side."

"All right. Just as you say. But what's your idea?"

"I want to get on to the lay of the land there. Then we will take the horses and get down to the revenue station, which I understand lies midway between here and Cerro Gordo."

"What to do?"

"To pull this place, if you can call it that. We will

have a heart-to-heart talk with whoever is boss there, and perhaps we may be able to bring our case to a speedy finish."

"You've got an idea that Sir Archie may be concealed in the mission."

"Sir Nothing! Call him Dr. Roundy, for that is his name. Yes, that is my idea, if he is concealed anywhere. Ten to one he has given them all the slip, and that is why we were sent for."

"That may be it, too. Come, are you going to get on the move?"

"We go now," replied Old King Brady.

They went back into the garden, climbed the wall, and made the circuit of the mission on the tower side.

Now that they had a full view of the front they saw that they were only a few hundred yards back from the bluffs, which overhung the Rio Grande at this point.

The first thing they did, naturally enough, was to look around for the horses, but these could not be seen.

"What on earth has become of those horses?" muttered Old King Brady. "This is more than strange."

"You will be thinking that we have seen the ghosts of horses next, Governor."

"Quit your nonsense, boy; the only ghosts here are Brazos Bill and his gang, if I know anything. Just the same, we want to catch on to their curves."

"That's what we do; but we had better keep back. We are only two against heaven knows how many desperate characters."

"I'm taking no chances, Harry. We won't even go near the building now. Let us go down under the bluffs, if we can find the way."

"And all the time we are in plain sight."

"There may be nobody on the watch. Walk as fast as possible."

They hurried forward to the edge of the bluff.

They were unchallenged, and this contrary to Harry's expectations.

Leading down to the river edge, some two hundred feet below, was a narrow slanting trail deeply cut in the side of the bluff.

"The work of the old Dominican fathers and their Indian helpers, Harry," said Old King Brady, calling attention to this trail.

"And well built, too, for those times."

"Just as well built as a modern contractor would make it. The Rio Grande is good and high all right."

"Yes, indeed; there's plenty of water coming down. But I suppose it is nothing to what it is in time of flood."

"You are right there. You should see it in a time of flood. Why, there is a regular landing pier here, built of stone, too. The old fathers spared no expense."

"I suppose they never dreamed of being ousted from their holdings?"

"Probably not. Their settlements were made here about the year 1600. For two hundred and fifty years

following that date these Indian missions were successfully conducted. Why should the good fathers imagine that they were to be suddenly brought in contact with a people who would crowd them out of the land?"

While talking the Bradys walked out upon the pier and turned to face the bluff.

Now no trace of the mission could be seen.

But another discovery of importance was made.

The bluff was not all sand. Directly behind the pier the limestone formation was exposed.

Great quantities of the stone had been quarried out with which to build the pier, and in its place an adobe or mud structure had been built.

This ran along under the bluff for a considerable distance.

"The old warehouse of the mission!" exclaimed Harry.

"Exactly," replied Old King Brady. "There they stowed their hides and horns, which were shipped in great quantities to the Northern cities."

"I'm going over to have a look at it."

"Be cautious. I want to get a look around the bend here. We may safely separate for the moment, I think."

Directly beyond the pier, say at a distance of three hundred feet, the bluff took a sharp turn.

It was impossible to see up river any further in this direction from the pier.

So as Old King Brady started for the bend of the bluff Harry walked over to the warehouse under the cliff.

As he approached Young King Brady discovered that this warehouse was very much more of a structure than he had supposed.

The front was finished off in white plaster, striped with red; the windows were provided with heavy iron bars, and the doors looked to be solid oak.

There was no sign of ruin here; indeed, the place seemed to have been kept right up to the mark, which was all the more singular to Harry because he knew that on occasions of very high water on the Rio Grande this ancient warehouse must be entirely submerged.

Harry peered in through the windows, but could see nothing.

Between the moonlight and the grimy panes it was not so easy to get a view of the dark interior.

"Wonder if I've got a key on my bunch to fit that lock?" he thought.

Both the Bradys carry skeleton keys.

Of course, the introduction of the Yale lock has limited the usefulness of these handy little articles.

But there was no Yale lock on this door, and the third key tried by Young King Brady did the work.

Pushing the door open Harry stepped into a long, low room.

Scarce had he entered when a wild yell rang out, and he could see a half-naked figure bounding toward him.

Holding the door, Harry whipped out his dark lantern, and for one second flashed its light upon the figure.

It was a man, wild-eyed and terrible.

The only article of dress which he wore was a pair of bathing tights.

"Yow! yow! yow!" he yelled. "Go way! Go way! You shan't rob me of my treasure! Yow! Yow! Yow!"

He was not a pleasant person to parley with, evidently.

Harry sprang out and hastily locked the door.

"A lunatic, all right," he gasped. "I must get the Governor and have this looked into. For all I know that may be Lord Archie Watkins himself."

He waited for a moment.

Now he could hear the man hammering on the thick glass of the window nearest the door.

Even if he had broken it there were still the bars.

But this old style glass did not break so easy.

The man's face was pressed against the panes.

It was the face of a lunatic.

He made a horrible grimace at Harry, sticking out his tongue and putting his fingers to his nose.

Something was yelled out, but Young King Brady could not distinguish what he said.

Harry turned away and started for the bend of the bluff, when all in an instant three men armed with rifles suddenly sprang out through another door in the old adobe under the cliff.

"Hold there!" shouted one, all covering Harry. "Throw up your hands or you are a dead man!"

For an instant Harry hesitated.

He could not throw up his hands without dropping his rifle, and that he did not care to do.

Then again came the warning:

"Drop that gun! Throw up your hands if you want to live!"

The speaker fired on the instant, the ball whizzing over Harry's head.

CHAPTER VI.

WATCHING FOR SMUGGLERS.

Harry's real reason for holding back when ordered to surrender was the hope that Old King Brady might come to the rescue.

But Old King Brady was having troubles of his own just then.

Lonely as the landing place below the old mission had looked when the detectives first came upon it, there seemed to be every probability that the situation would be made lively enough before the night was through.

Old King Brady ran head foremost into trouble, so to speak.

No sooner had he turned the bend of the bluff than he perceived several small boats drawn up upon the shore.

Here the bluff overhung to such an extent that any-

one looking down from above could not have seen these boats.

Old King Brady halted, and as he did so half a dozen armed men sprang out from the shadow of the bluff, covering him with their rifles.

"Hold on there, old man!" cried one, in a suppressed voice. "You are up against it. Instead of keeping your appointment with Brazos Bill you will have to deal with us—see?"

Old King Brady saw the rifles.

The men came crowding forward and thrust them directly in his face.

"Drop that gun!" ordered one, a large man with a deep bass voice. "I am Marshal Rollhaus. You are under arrest."

Old King Brady let his gun fall to the ground.

He raised his hand to throw back the lapel of his coat and display his detective shield.

It is a wonder this had not been his finish.

One of the men actually snapped a revolver in his face.

Perhaps the weapon was not loaded, for it did not go off, but the situation was strenuous just the same.

"Hold on there! Would you murder a Secret Service man in the discharge of his duty?" Old King Brady exclaimed.

"Who's the Secret Service man," sneered the marshal. "Not you."

"Yes, yes! If you will pull back the lapel of my coat you will see my shield."

Old King Brady's hands were up now.

What was more, he did not dare to let them down.

"Don't lie to me, old man," sneered the marshal. "You know very well that you are here to meet Brazos Bill. No doubt it is your cargo which is to be run over from Mexico to-night."

"Marshal, you are all wrong!" replied the old detective, regaining his calmness as best he could. "I am Old King Brady, of New York. Perhaps that means nothing to you. On the other hand, you may have heard my name."

"I certainly have heard of Old King Brady, but you are not the man."

"Perhaps I am insane, but if so I didn't know it. I labor under the delusion that I am actually Old King Brady, friend."

"You are Colonel Baggs, of Austin, that's who you are."

"Marshal Rollhaus, I am not Col. Baggs, of Austin, nor Baggs from any other bailiwick. Will you be good enough to look at my shield?"

"You might as well look at his shield, Mr. Rollhaus," said one of the men. "Like enough he stole it, but it won't do no harm to look."

"Say," drawled another, "I don't wanter butt in, but the old duffer looks like the pictures of Old King Brady, blamed if he don't."

Marshal Rollhaus consented to examine the shield then.

More than that, he brought a dark lantern to bear upon it.

"That's a Secret Service shield all right," he said, in a more respectful tone. "So you actually claim to be Old King Brady?"

"I am Old King Brady. You have heard of me, I suppose?"

"Why, sure, I've heard of you. Everybody has heard of Old King Brady."

"Then put up your guns."

"I advise you to go slow, my friend. I advise you to go slow."

"I shall neither go fast nor slow. I simply don't go at all until I have convinced you that I am Old King Brady."

"How can you do that?"

"Easily. Here is one of your men recognizing me already. Besides that, I can show you a bunch of letters addressed to me."

The marshal gave up.

"You can put down your hands and let me see the letters," he said.

Old King Brady complied.

"Waal," said the marshal, "I guess you are Old King Brady all right. I must apologize, I suppose."

"You needn't go to that trouble, marshal," said Old King Brady, mildly.

"Consider it done, suh. I am a gentleman. A gentleman never hesitates to acknowledge that he has made a mistake. Shake hands."

"Glad to meet you, Marshal Rollhaus," said Old King Brady, with a hearty handshake. "My partner, Young King Brady, is at the old mission pier around the bend of the bluff. If one of your men would call him; or perhaps you are here for a purpose, and don't care to show yourselves just yet."

"That's what we are. All the same I will send for him. Don't want him hanging around there, nor you neither. It may spoil our pie. Bill, you go and tell the young feller to come hyar. Now, Mr. Brady, I hope we are friends? This is cold business with me, and I can't afford to take no chances—no!"

"It is all right, marshal. I don't even inquire into your business, but I will tell mine freely."

"You may as well. There is going to be hot work here on the border to-night. We may as well come to an understanding all around."

"My partner and I were hired by Lady Watkins to look up her missing husband. That is what brought us here."

"So?"

"Yes. You have heard of Lady Watkins?"

"Oh, yes. English woman stopping at the Davis House down to Cerro Gordo."

"Exactly. Do you hail from Cerro Gordo?"

"No. My headquarters are at Eagle Pass."

"I see."

"Have you found any trace of this Englishman?"

"None as yet. We only arrived this morning, and have but just begun."

"I see. Did he have money with him when he disappeared?"

"A couple of thousand dollars, so his wife informs me."

"Waal, that's enough to tempt Brazos Bill. Likely he got him all right."

"I had the pleasure of meeting Brazos Bill at Cerro Gordo this morning."

"Oh, he was there, hey?"

"Yes."

"The marshal who is stationed there is away. Between ourselves, Brady, I believe Bill stands in with him. He was called away purposely, and I was ordered down from Eagle Pass. We have every reason to believe that the gang mean to run a cargo across the river to-night."

"I see. This is a piece of secret service work."

"Waal, not exactly. My orders came from the Treasury Department, but some of these fellows with me are secret service men."

"Not from Washington. I am acquainted with most of the prominent ones there."

"No, from Galveston."

"I see. Does the gang use the old mission as a hold-out?"

"I have long suspected it, but we could never get proof. The mission has the reputation of being haunted. It is avoided by everyone in this section. It would be very hard to get a party of men willing to come here at night."

"I see; but the secret service men know nothing of this?"

"I daresay my boys have told them. The few I have with me are ghost proof."

"How many have you altogether?"

"Twenty. Most of them are lying low further up shore."

"I see; but her comes your man Bill back again, and alone. What can this mean?"

Already Old King Brady began to scent trouble.

Bill came hurrying up with the announcement that he could find nobody at the landing.

"I left my partner just going to that old adobe warehouse under the bluff," said Old King Brady. "Something must have happened to him. This must be looked into at once."

"And where were you going when we caught you?" demanded the marshal. "Why didn't your partner come with you?"

"We had just come down from the old mission, where we left our horses. We were taking in things generally."

"I see. Strange! Perhaps he went back on the bluff. Did you see anyone, Bill?"

"Why, of course I didn't, cap," was the reply. "Wouldn't I have told you if I had?"

"I mean anything to show that anyone had been there?"

"No, sir."

"And you, Mr. Brady, did you see anyone about the old mission?"

"Oh, no," replied the old detective.

At the same time he winked at the marshal, and drew him aside.

"I don't want to scare your men," he whispered, "but we did see something up there."

"Ha! What was it?"

"It looked like a Dominican monk. We saw the figure pacing the corridor on the side of the long building toward the garden. We saw lights flashed from the tower also."

"We saw the lights. The gang is there. It probably suited the purpose of one of them to play ghost. But don't mention this, Mr. Brady."

"Not a word. I must go and look for my partner."

"Evidently he has fallen into trouble."

"It must be so. Will you go with me, or had you rather I would go alone?"

"You had better go alone. We don't want to show ourselves till the last minute. Just the same, we will watch you around the corner of the bluff, ready to jump in the minute if you are attacked."

"Tell me about the warehouse. How does it come to be in such good condition?"

"Why, it was restored by San Antonio parties a year ago. They bought the mission and were going to start a town here, but the scheme fell through."

Old King Brady now hurried back to the pier.

There was indeed no trace of Harry to be seen.

The old detective went to the warehouse, peered in at the windows, and tried the doors.

Both were fastened, and Old King Brady did not attempt to open them, as he might easily have done with his skeleton keys.

He saw that he had got to act in connection with Marshal Rollhaus, for the time at least.

"Harry has gone up against Brazos Bill's gang, but he will work out of it all right," the detective assured himself, and he started to return around the bluff.

All at once a bright light shot up from the Mexican shore.

It seemed to be on the top of the bluff on the opposite side of the Rio Grande.

"Getting ready for business," thought Old King Brady. "There will be something doing before long."

He hurried toward the bend of the bluff.

Just as he reached it he heard exclamations from the marshal and his men.

Looking back, Old King Brady saw that the light on the Mexican shore had disappeared.

In its place a broad band of light streamed across the river from the Texas side of the Rio Grande.

"You see!" said the marshal, meeting Old King Brady now.

"Yes; the smugglers appear to be getting ready to put in their fine work."

"That's what they are. Find anything of your partner?"

"Not a trace."

"Brazos Bill's band have got him all right."

"I am afraid so. It can mean nothing else. We must get them if we can."

"And that's just what we are gunning for. Well, they are signaling each other all right, but we don't make a move until the correct time comes."

And now the watch became as close as many sharp eyes could make it.

The light soon vanished.

A little later a small steamboat was seen putting out from the Mexican shore.

Old King Brady first caught a glimpse of this through his powerful night glass.

"Pity you haven't a steamboat to match her, marshal!" he said.

"Oh, but we have," replied the marshal. "Ours is a little further up the river in hiding. She'll come along at the right time. What we want now is to get ready for business. We may not get that cargo, but we must not let Brazos Bill slip through our hands."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT ON THE SHORE.

Old King Brady felt that he knew something about smuggling on the Rio Grande as well as Marshal Rollhaus.

More than one gang of this sort have the Bradys broken up in their time.

By closely studying the situation and putting this and that together, the old detective felt that he had already caught on to the marshal's scheme.

The current of the Rio Grande is at all times exceedingly swift, and especially so at a time of high water, as it was now.

Thus it is not feasible for small craft to strike directly across the river—indeed, even a good-sized steamer would find difficulty in doing that.

The only way was to run upstream for a considerable distance, and then strike across at such an angle which, allowing for the current, would take the steamer at the point on the opposite shore to which it was desired to make a landing.

In this case it was undoubtedly the pier, and Old King Brady looked to see the steamer strike upstream before it had gone far away from the Mexican shore.

And this it did.

After moving away from the shore about twenty or thirty yards, to avoid some eddy, no doubt, the little craft swung slowly around and started up against the current.

It made but slow headway.

Old King Brady figured that at least half an hour must elapse before the captain would dare to attempt to cross.

At the point where the marshal's men had stationed themselves it was practically a bay, for here there was a semi-circular indentation in the bluff.

Thus on ahead was another projection of the bluff.

"I suppose you have your steamer around that head," Old King Brady remarked to the marshal, as they stood together watching the movements of the little craft.

"That's right. She's the Davy Crockett, in charge of my deputy, one of the slickest river captains on the Rio Grande."

"Will those fellows pass beyond the head?"

"Probably not. That's the calculation, at least."

"Ah, ha! I see how the cat jumps. You expect Brazos Bill and his men to appear in this bay to watch her as she comes down."

"That's exactly it, Mr. Brady. We are safe to stand here for a few minutes, but not for long."

"The guard you have stationed there at the bend of the bluff will notify us when they show themselves."

"Sure. That's what he is there for. You have caught on."

"And your plan?"

"I'm out for Bill this trip. I'm going to get him, too, even if we lose the smugglers; but the Crockett will attend to their case all right, if they don't prove too slick for my deputy."

"If she makes the Mexican shore in time there will be nothing doing, I suppose?"

"No; we shan't attempt to interfere with her in that case. Of course, we might do it safe enough as far as we are concerned ourselves, for the country over there is just a wilderness, but it might lead to some international squabble, and that would be sure to cost me my job."

"But with Brazos Bill it's a fight to a finish this trip?"

"That's right. My orders are to get him alive or dead."

"Then we may as well prepare for hot work," said Old King Brady.

The marshal assented, and walked away to give some order to his men.

This was all very interesting for Marshal Rollhaus, of course, but so far as Old King Brady was concerned he would rather have given up considerable good money than to have hit Brazos Bill's holdout at such a time.

"It may knock me out on my case completely," he thought. "Bad job! Where is the boy? If he was only here! Of course, he must have been captured. Yes, it's a bad job all around."

For some time the old detective stood watching the steamer.

Then all at once a low whistle was heard from the man on guard at the bend of the bluff.

"It's coming," thought Old King Brady.

Just then the steamer began striking across the river.

The intention was evident.

The captain proposed to avoid the stronger current beyond the upper bend of the bluff, and to take advantage of the bay.

At the signal Marshal Rollhaus gave the word for all hands to get back into the shadow of the bluff.

Here the guard joined them.

"There are men on the pier, captain," he said.

"Ah, ha!" replied the marshal. "And how did they get there? Did they come down the road?"

"No; they didn't," was the answer. "They came out of the warehouse, by the upper door."

"So, so! That's interesting. How many?"

"Six."

"Brazos Bill with them?"

"No."

"Recognize any of them?"

"Not one."

"Very well. Line up now. If they show themselves around here we will jump on them, but let there be no firing till I give the word."

"We are going to get them, surest thing you know, Brady," said the marshal jubilantly. "Come, I like this. Don't you worry about your partner. 'Tain't likely that they killed him. If they are just holding him prisoner we'll get him all right."

"I'm not doing any worrying," replied Old King Brady. "Harry is able to take care of himself."

Moments of anxious waiting followed now.

Old King Brady could not but admire Marshal Rollhaus' methods.

While he watched the steamer he kept his men with rifles ready turned toward the bend of the bluff.

Where they stood the bluff, partly rock and partly sand, overhung so that they were completely concealed in the deep shadow.

By attentively listening they could hear the men talking around the bend.

In the meantime the little steamer was making good headway in crossing the river.

"As soon as they lose sight of her you will see them in here," said the marshal. "You may look for a fight now any time."

"And should we get the worst of it?"

"Then we take to the boats and fall back on the Crockett. "She ought to show up in a minute now. I had hoped that we would be able to have our fight first."

"Then your wish is likely to be gratified, for here they come."

Two men came hurrying around the bend of the bluff.

"She's striking in all right," one exclaimed. "This night's work is going to be a big success."

Three others followed.

They seemed to be wholly unsuspecting of trouble.

These three were joking and laughing.

Suddenly a big fellow in fancy dress appeared, accompanied by another.

"It's a lucky thing we caught the young snoozer," he was saying. "Only wish we had the old man."

"Ah, what's the good of 'em, anyway?" growled the other. "We don't want no Yanks to tell us what to do."

It was Brazos Bill who had spoken first.

In the moonlight Old King Brady was able to recognize the big outlaw at a glance.

"Quiet! No move till I give the word to fire!" breathed the marshal, and the word was passed along.

"I tell you them Bradys is the slickest detectives in the world," retorted Bill. "We've been two weeks working over the fellow, and what have we done? Nothing. Lady Watkins is right. The Bradys is what we want. Can't imagine what became of the old man, and the young feller swears he don't know."

Others had come around the bend of the bluff now.

There were at least nine of them altogether.

Most of the men were calling out to each other about the steamer. Not one of them appeared to have caught sight of the boats which lay drawn up on the shore further along.

Brazos Bill was the first to do so.

"Hold on thar!" he suddenly shouted. "What do them boats mean?"

"Fire!" cried the marshal.

A dozen rifles cracked.

"Bill Buncombe, I arrest you in the name of the law!" bawled the marshal.

The shots had all passed over the heads of the outlaws, by previous arrangement, no doubt.

As he spoke the marshal darted boldly forward, covering the outlaw with his rifle.

It was a brave act surely, but unwise.

Taken by surprise, the gang fell back.

All but Brazos Bill himself.

Up went his rifle on the instant.

"Take that, Mike Rollhaus!" he yelled, and at the same time let fly.

But the marshal was just as quick.

So was Old King Brady.

The instant they saw Brazos Bill start to raise his rifle both fired.

All three shots were without effect.

Brazos Bill fell back on his men then.

More of the marshal's force came running out from under the rocks.

Meanwhile the smugglers had been re-enforced, too.

A dozen men came running around the bend of the bluff.

"Let 'em have it! Let 'em have it!" roared the marshal.

"There comes the Crockett!" somebody shouted.

And as the battle opened a larger steamer appeared, rounding the bluffs at the upper end of the bay.

The next few moments saw considerable of a mix-up.

Lively firing followed, but in the darkness it was without much effect.

Several were wounded, but no one seriously, as it afterward appeared.

The end was what might have been expected.

The marshal's men outnumbered the outlaw's gang, and soon the latter were on the run around the bluff.

Led by Old King Brady and Marshal Rollhaus, the secret service men pressed after them.

A parting round was sent whizzing at their heels as they darted through the smaller door of the old warehouse and vanished.

It had been hot work while it lasted, but now came the lull, for the marshal ordered a halt.

"Shall we not follow them up?" demanded Old King Brady. "They can't escape us now."

"They have escaped," replied the marshal grimly. "You can go on, but you won't find them. We have tackled this place before. Besides, if we venture through that door we are liable to pick up a shot."

"Then we have lost the battle?"

"For the present, yes. I had hoped to bring them to a surrender, but it's no go. All the same we have got the steamer on our hands."

"Hang me if I don't investigate, then! I'll know what is inside that place."

The door stood open, and Old King Brady advanced boldly toward it.

And this is ever the way the old detective does business.

Bullets seem to have absolutely no terror for him.

So far he seems to have borne a charmed life.

That he will some day tempt fate once too often is Harry's constant fear.

But there was no danger now.

Old King Brady looked in through the open door and then walked in.

He now produced his little electric dark lantern, and flashed it about.

"Marshal, you are perfectly safe here!" he shouted.

And so it seemed.

Old King Brady found himself looking into a large, square room with stone walls on three sides.

The apartment was unoccupied, and entirely cut off from the remainder of the warehouse under the bluff.

Brazos Bill and his gang had vanished, but where to or how Old King Brady could not tell.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALK WITH BRAZOS BILL.

We must now return to Harry, and learn how he came to do the vanishing act.

Harry found himself caught on the fly, so to speak.

The moment Young King Brady perceived that it was a case of three against one he gave up.

He had decided upon this course even before the shot came.

The Bradys never struggle against unequal odds.

Their rule is to lie back and wait for the tide to turn.

Fortunately the shot was a miss, or Harry's career might well have ended then and there.

He dropped his rifle and threw up his hands.

"I surrender, gentlemen," he said. "It is no use to waste any further powder on me."

The three men who closed upon Harry were typical Texan toughs.

They looked the boy all over, never lowering their rifles for fully a minute before they spoke.

"Be you Young King Brady, the detective? Yes, you be," one remarked then.

Harry made no attempt to conceal his identity.

He recognized all three of the men for what they were.

Doubtless they had seen him with Old King Brady in Cerro Gordo, and very likely they had been overlooked while they were prowling about the grounds of the old mission as well.

It seemed utterly useless to attempt to lie out of it, and Harry made no such attempt.

"Yes, I am Young King Brady," he replied. "What about that?"

"That will be for the boss to say," growled the man.

"You come along with me."

"Don't we want to put the blinders onto him, Gus?" demanded one of the other men.

"Ah, teach your granny how to such eggs," sneered Gus. "Don't you suppose I know my business, Hibb Tolland? Course I'll put the blinders onto him. But can't that be just as well done inside?"

"I s'pose it can. You needn't bite a fellow's head off, Gus Goater."

"What are you callin' out names for? Don't you know it's against the rule?"

"You began it!"

"You lie; I didn't!"

"You did so. You called my name right out."

"Why, of course you did, Gus," said the third man. "Say, cut all that out."

While this squabble was going on the rifles were not lowered.

The third man seemed to be more on the alert than the others.

Young King Brady saw no chance to give his captors the slip.

They now hurried him into the room in the warehouse which Old King Brady was to enter later on.

Here a red bandanna handkerchief was securely tied over his eyes, and Young King Brady was led away captive.

The movements which followed were most mysterious.

Harry was not able to make much out of them, except that he judged they had taken him to the old mission in the end.

First he was led down a flight of stone steps, then along a level; after that it was a turn to the right, and then a turn to the left; then up a flight of wooden steps, and by several turns to more stone steps, and so on.

At last a door slammed behind him, and he caught the glimmer of light.

"Yes, that's Young King Brady," a gruff voice called out. "You can leave, boys. I'll look after him now."

There was a shuffling of feet and a slamming of doors, and then the voice called out:

"You can remove that handkerchief now, Brady."

Harry took off the handkerchief.

As he supposed, he found himself face to face with Brazos Bill.

The room was a square apartment with white-washed walls, and little windows set in deep niches, in each of which a screen had been fitted to prevent the light of a handsome hanging lamp from being seen on the outside.

The room was rather luxuriously furnished.

Costly rugs lay scattered about the floor, there were pictures on the walls, a brass bedstead stood in one corner.

In the middle of the room was a bamboo couch, upon which Brazos Bill lay stretched out at full length, smoking a Mexican brown paper cigarette.

Beside him, on a low table, was a black bottle, a glass, a pitcher of water, a plate of fruit, a jar of tobacco, and several fancy pipes.

Evidently Young King Brady had struck the outlaw chief in his hours of ease.

Harry looked for trouble at the start, but the talk took an altogether unexpected turn.

"Young feller," said the outlaw, lazily raising his right hand, which clutched a cocked revolver, "I suppose you have got a gun, perhaps two; lay them on that ar table so's we can talk in peace."

"Your men took away my gun," replied Harry, in the quiet tone which he always adopted in such cases.

"I mean revolver, not rifle. You know that blamed well. Come, now, understand me. I don't lay up no grudge against you, nor I don't intend to do you no harm if you play fair with me; but if you attempt to do different for you it means simply death."

Harry produced a revolver, and laid it on the table.

"Now the other," said Bill. "Be quick! We want to get down to business. I am satisfied that hain't your only gun."

Young King Brady laid a second revolver on the table.

He was sorry to lose them, but as a matter of fact he was carrying three revolvers this trip.

"That's better," said Bill, opening a drawer and putting the weapons into it, while his own he thrust under

one of the pillows upon which he lay. "Now, draw up a chair and we'll have a talk. If you want a sip of brandy you can help yourself. If you like a pipe fill up. It isn't everyone I'd let smoke my pipes, but you seem to be a good, clean-looking fellow, so I don't mind."

The outlaw's tone was decidedly cordial.

Harry fell in with his mood, and, declining the brandy, filled a pipe.

Bill was now ready for business.

He started in by asking where Old King Brady was.

"I don't know," replied Harry. "He went up the shore. I was told to wait till he came back again. I don't know where he went."

"Didn't he tell you where he was going?"

"No, he didn't. He told me to wait, and I waited. I never ask him his business at all."

"All right. I won't press that. Now, I suppose you expected all kinds of trouble with me because you downed me at Cerro Gordo this morning, but I don't blame you for that one bit. You didn't understand the situation. If I had been in your place I would have done just the same."

"That's all right. There is no quarrel between us, then."

"None at all. Now listen to me, for I'm going to put you in the way of making money, and I suppose that's what you want more than anything else."

"Naturally."

"Naturally, as you say. I know why you and your partner came to Texas. I knew that you would come out to the old mission, for it was I who told that greaser at Cerro Gordo to tell your partner what he did about this place being my holdout. I wanted you here, and you came. From the moment you struck this place you were watched. You want the man who called himself Sir Archie Watkins. Well, you have located him. You ought to be satisfied with your work."

"Go on. You say I have located him; probably you know."

"He was turned loose for your special benefit, Brady. Don't try to appear dumb."

"You mean the crazy man in the warehouse under the bluff?"

"I mean nobody else."

"I saw the man. Is he Sir Archie Watkins?"

"He is; at least he so calls himself. I have no idea that it is his name."

"Is he really insane?"

"He's as mad as they make 'em. He's a morphine fiend of the worst kind. He has been deprived of his drug and it has driven him crazy. That's one of my mistakes. I had no morphine to give him. I could not readily lay my hand on any opium."

"Well?"

"You want to know the why of all this, I suppose?"

"You are bossing the job. I am in your hands."

"Then I'll explain. That man is a notorious diamond

smuggler in the employ of a diamond house in New York. You knew that all right, I'd be willing to bet."

"You have been very frank with me, Bill; I'll meet you half way. We did know this before we left New York."

"Exactly. That's why you came. It was not me you came after, it was them diamonds this Englishman came here to get them over from Mexico. If he had consulted me he would have done better, but he preferred to work on his own account. He picked out this place for his operations on this side of the border, and hired my partner on the other side to help him along with the job. Wise man! We were all ready for him. We let him get the diamonds over, and never made a move. If things had worked out as was planned we would have had them stones and he would have been at the bottom of the Rio Grande now, but I played the fool. I was late in keeping my appointment that night. My partner from Mexico let him take the package into the warehouse. He expected a nigger here with horses. My partner expected me to be inside the warehouse ready to jump on him, but I wasn't here, so he got the best of us. The nigger didn't come. I put him out of business. I came instead, and captured my man, but, Brady, he had hid the diamonds in the meantime, and no threats, no urging, no coaxing, no nothing could induce him to tell where he put them. We held him prisoner, and I will admit we treated him pretty blamed rough. The result was he went off his hooks, and now he goes about howling for his diamonds. He seems to have forgot where he put them, and, with all the watching we are able to do we can't track him to the place."

Bill stopped now to roll another cigarette.

To all this Harry had listened with close attention.

So far as Sir Archie Watkins was concerned the mystery was all explained.

Lady Watkins' part in the business, however, still remained to be told.

Brazos Bill disposed of that in a hurry, once he got his cigarette lighted, however.

"Now, I s'pose you are wondering what my growl with the lady was this a. m.," he continued. "I can soon tell you. I went for her at the start. I made her a fair offer. I told her that if she would come here and look after her husband and help us to locate the diamonds I'd whack up with her. I even offered to do her husband up and marry her. She played fast and loose with me. First she would and then she wouldn't. I reckon she heard from the New York firm what really owns the diamonds. They told her they were going to hire the Bradys, so she writ to engage you herself. I didn't s'pose you would even answer her, and I reckon she thought the same. Well, you came. We had quarreled yesterday. We took it up again this morning. You know what happened. But I've seen the lady since, and I have fixed it all up with her. We are the best of friends now. She's here, and you are here. All we want is your partner. Then you two go right to work and see what you can make out of that man."

"That's an offer. Anything in it for us?" Harry asked.
 "Sure there is. Find them diamonds and you get half."
 "And Lady Watkins?"
 "Never mind about that. Her and me will take care of the other half between us. Is it a go?"

"Do we go free after we have done the job?"
 "Sure you do. Free as air. You can trust me, Brady, for I'm a man of my word."

Trust him!

Harry was no fool.

He could read the treachery in the snapping black eyes of Brazos Bill.

"He means to do us up in any case," thought Harry. "He will use us for all we are worth, and then it is good-by to the Bradys if this fellow has his way."

At the same instant there came a knock on the door.

"Come in!" called the outlaw.

It was Gus Goater who entered.

He halted just inside the door, and saluted in military style.

"Well, Gus?" demanded Brazos Bill.

"Boss, the steamer has put out from the Mexican shore," said the man.

"Ha! Is that so?"

"Yes."

Bill leaped off the couch.

"Have you caught Old King Brady yet?" he demanded.

"No, we haven't. We hain't seen nothing of him."

"All right. Brady, I'm called off on another job. Meanwhile you had better get to work on that business I've been telling you about on your own account. You hain't putting up no kick, I suppose?"

"I'm ready to do whatever you say," replied Young King Brady, for he saw the utter uselessness in opposing the man.

"All right," was the reply. "Gus, I'm going down. You escort Young King Brady to Sir Archie Watkins' room. You needn't be afraid of him, Brady. He isn't armed, and he's as weak as a baby. Good luck to you. So long!"

With this Brazos Bill left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAVY CROCKETT KNOCKS OUT THE SMUGGLER, AND OLD KING BRADY IS HEARD HIT.

Marshal Rollhaus hastily followed Old King Brady into the smaller room of the old warehouse, and looked around in rather a shame-faced way.

"What he had been afraid to do himself the old detective had done without even stopping to say a word about it.

"Where in thunder can they have taken themselves off to?" the marshal exclaimed.

"Secret passages," said Old King Brady. "The old mission has ins and outs which these smugglers know about, and you don't, that's all."

"Probably you are right. I have no time to follow the matter up now, though."

"So? You have given up the idea of capturing Brazos Bill this trip, then?"

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, Brady. I'm going out to help the Crockett capture that cargo of brandy and cigars. When I've finished on that job I'll start in again with Brazos Bill."

The marshal left the room hurriedly.

"Are you with us?" he called back.

"I'm coming," answered Old King Brady.

He shut the door behind him, and followed the marshal and his men to their boats.

The Mexican steamer was now in the bay, with the Crockett gaining upon her every instant.

Safe from the pull of the current to a certain extent, the smugglers' craft was shooting along the line of the shore.

Her intentions were evident enough to Old King Brady.

Beyond the pier of the old mission the current of the Rio Grande was not only very strong, but it set directly toward the other shore.

If the smugglers could once force their boat into that they stood a chance of passing the middle of the river, which of course constitutes the boundary line, before the Crockett could come up with them.

Old King Brady turned his glass upon the little craft.

The greatest confusion appeared to reign on deck.

He could see men running about, while the man at the wheel appeared to be shouting out hurried orders, although the wind bore his words away.

"Brady, we are going to put out in the boats!" said the marshal, coming hurriedly up. "It looks to be more of a risk than it really is. There is an eddy here which will keep us from being carried beyond the head."

"But the object?" the old detective demanded.

"We shall board her."

"That means hot work, marshal."

"Not so hot as you think, perhaps. My deputy on board the Crockett has a little persuader which he will use when the right moment comes."

"In the shape of a bow gun?"

"Yes."

"You think that will bring them to?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Do you know who you are dealing with? Do you know who your men are?"

"Not certainly—no."

"Nor even the name of that boat, perhaps?"

"No; these Mexican smugglers employ several boats. They have a beautiful way of painting off the name every week or so; then they run them first to one place and then

to another. But I know my business. We will get there just the same. Will you go with us?"

Old King Brady had been expecting this request.

He had already determined to comply.

With Harry gone his only hope of bringing his case to a quick finish was to tie to Marshal Rollhaus.

He assumed that the marshal really did know his business, and that there would be no actual danger in this.

And so Old King Brady consented to stay by the marshal without comment, and he stood watching the preparations of his men.

The boats were now hurriedly run into the water, and the entire party boarded them.

They held back until a gun from the Crockett rang out upon the night.

The shot struck the water a little astern of the Mexican.

"Now!" cried the marshal. "Off with you, boys! They will surrender all right, I guess."

They pulled out about fifty yards from shore, keeping within the eddy, and there rested on their oars, waiting for the smugglers to come on.

And this, owing to the peculiarities of the current, the Mexicans had to do in order to attain their purpose.

Perhaps we have not made this as plain as we might have done, but we shall not go into further details.

"Hold on there! You want to lie to or we will blow you to glory!" yelled the marshal. "I am Marshal Rollhaus! You are all under arrest."

The boats shot forward rapidly as this challenge rang out.

At the same moment another shot was fired.

And this took effect.

It hit the smugglers' steamer astern just above the water line, cutting a good bit of her woodwork away.

Still they did not stop.

"Cap, you'll stop her or you'll regret it!" Marshal Rollhaus roared.

"We'll stop when we have done you up," came the answer, and a fierce imprecation accompanied the call.

"Fire! Every fellow pick his man!" bawled the marshal.

The boats had parted right and left to prevent being run down.

The marshal and his men now threw up their rifles and let fly.

Old King Brady saw several of the men on the deck fall.

At the same instant the Crockett's gun boomed again.

The crashing of woodwork which followed showed that the shot had taken effect.

The steamer now made a list toward the Texas bank.

At the same instant Old King Brady saw the pilot-house topple over and fall into the water.

"Look out! We shall be run down! She is right upon us!" the marshal cried.

But he had spoken too late, or the oarsmen were too slow to act.

All in an instant the smuggler was in among the boats.

The next Old King Brady knew the marshal's boat was cut in two, and he himself was struggling in the water.

And that was the time when Harry, if he could have seen what happened, would not have given two cents for the old detective's life.

Old King Brady cannot swim.

This is a part of his education which has been neglected.

The old detective went head under, and vanished.

And now the smuggler, caught by the eddy, was carried back toward the shore, while the Crockett came bearing down upon her at full speed.

The battle was won.

One of the other boats picked up the marshal and the men who had been with him swam ashore.

But in the hurry and confusion Old King Brady was forgotten.

Marshal Rollhaus, when, a few minutes later, he boarded the wrecked smuggler, fully believed that the old detective was dead.

But there he was mistaken.

Old King Brady's life, for the time being at least, had been miraculously preserved.

It was the darkness and confusion which caused the blunder.

When Old King Brady came to the surface, struggling for his life, there was the pilot-house floating past him within reach of his hand.

Old King Brady clutched at it.

There was a man perched on top of the bobbing structure who glared down at him, and made a motion as if he would strike the old detective's hands.

"Hold on, friend! Don't kill a drowning man!" panted Old King Brady. "I cannot swim! Help me to preserve my life as you hope for life yourself!"

The man's hands were withdrawn.

He stared at the detective, whose big hat had been so tightly drawn down upon his head that it had not floated away during his involuntary immersion.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "I've seen you before—but no, it cannot be!"

Old King Brady did not more than half hear him.

He did not then grasp the significance of the words.

"Help me to climb up there!" he called out. "I am an old man, and I shall be a dead one if you refuse me a helping hand. Help me, friend, and I will reward you well."

"Catch hold!" cried the man, whose face showed the Mexican, although his speech had not a trace of accent.

He extended his hand, and pulled the old detective up on the pilot house.

Such another powerful grip Old King Brady had never felt.

He scarcely had to help himself.

Meanwhile the Rio Grande had been taking a hand in the game.

The accident had occurred right at the edge of the eddy. Something had thrown the pilot house into the main current, and away they went flying down the river at great speed.

Old King Brady, astride the bobbing structure, could only hold on for dear life, trying to get his breath.

The man regarded him gloomily.

His back was turned, and he did not even look around to see what the fate of the steamer had been.

On they flew past the bend of the bluff.

On by the old mission pier, and then the pilot-house struck out into the middle of the river.

They were heading for the Mexican shore.

"Shall we be able to stand it?" gasped the old detective. "Is there any hope?"

"Yes, Mr. Brady," replied the Mexican, quietly. "I think there is."

"Ha! You know me?"

"Very well."

"It seems incredible. I can't see——"

"You don't remember me?"

"I do not."

"I am Tony Perez."

"The name don't tell me anything."

"It is a good many years ago, to be sure."

"Never mind now. You can tell me about it later. Do you think this house will float?"

"It is floating now. It is ever so many times heavier than we are. There is no reason why it shouldn't hold us up."

"And this current, will it hold to take us down the river, or shall we run on the Mexican shore?"

"Mr. Brady, it may do one of three things for us. Either we hit the cross current in a moment, or we pass through it. If we do go through we may run on down river, or get caught in an eddy which will send us over against the Texas bank again."

"And in that case where shall we land?"

"About seven or eight miles below the mission. We may not hit the shore, though. It is just a chance; if we get carried by we go on down river."

"Then there is no telling what is going to happen to us," said Old King Brady, grimly. "We can only wait and see."

He clung on, wondering where in the world he had ever run up against this Mexican, for in spite of his good English, it was evident that the man was nothing else.

Soon the pilot-house began swinging round and round.

"Here we are in the cross-current now," said Tony, calmly. "Which way we are to go will be decided in a minute."

"And it will have to be if I am going to keep hold here," muttered Old King Brady.

The whirling of the pilot-house was making him so dizzy that he could scarcely retain his hold.

CHAPTER X.

HARRY AND THE MORPHINE FIEND.

Brazos Bill had scarcely closed the door behind him when Gus Goater broke out into a coarse laugh.

"Waal, by thunder, I don't envy you your job!" he exclaimed. "But I suppose whatever the boss says has to be did."

"I am ready," replied Harry.

He knew that it would be of no use to kick.

Moreover, the task laid out for him was in the line of his work.

Young King Brady was anxious to get down to business and have done with it.

Perhaps Sir Archie Watkins was not so crazy after all, he thought.

"You'll have to be blindfolded again," said Gus. "I suppose you know that?"

"I did not know it. I am ready, though."

"Do you know where you are going, anyhow?"

"Look here," said Harry, "you just go ahead with your end of the business, and I will with mine. I'm not giving away anything Brazos Bill told me, not even to you."

"And that's right, too," growled Goater. "Where's the handkerchief? Oh, I see it. Well, we'll bust ahead."

He took the handkerchief from the table where Harry had placed it, and again bound the detective's eyes securely.

"Now you catch hold of my coat tail," he said. "Keep close. Look out for the steps or you are liable to break your own neck and mine, too."

They seemed to retrace their former course as near as Harry could make out.

He was able to follow it for a part of the way, and then they took a turn which confused him.

But they had gone down steps enough, some of stone and some of wood, to bring them to the level of the river.

At length they halted, and Gus Goater pulled the bandage away.

They were standing in a narrow passage with walls of stone on either side.

Before them was a heavy wooden door, and Gus held a key in his hand.

"Say, young feller, I'm going to put you in there now," he said. "But do for goodness sake look out for yourself. That man is raving mad. He tried to choke me to death all right, and he may try the same game with you."

"Thank you for the warning," replied Harry. "I suppose there is nothing for it but to go right ahead."

"You have got to go ahead, seeing that the boss has ordered it. I wouldn't undertake to change his plans none."

"Very well. The sooner the better then. Don't lose any time."

Goater applied the key to the lock.

"You'll have to jump right in then," he said. "He'll be charging out if you don't."

He opened the door just wide enough to allow Harry to pass.

Beyond a dimly lighted room could be seen, and over from a distant corner the same half-naked man came rushing.

"Let me out!" he shouted. Let me out! I won't stay here!"

Goater pushed Young King Brady through the opening, and slammed the door.

It was with sinking heart that Harry heard him turn the key in the lock.

On came the lunatic, his eyes blazing with real madness, his hands outstretched.

"My diamonds!" he yelled. "You have come to rob me of them! I'll strangle you!"

"And I have got to make you know that I am your master," thought Harry.

He was all ready for the fellow when he came.

Striking down his hands he managed to clutch the lunatic by the throat, and to force him back against the stone wall of the apartment.

It was all over in an instant.

Just as Brazos Bill had said, the man was as weak as a child.

Nothing but this display of force was needed to bring him to terms.

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me!" he whined, and then he began shedding tears.

Harry let go his hold.

"It all depends upon yourself, Dr. Roundy," he said sternly. "If you behave no harm shall come to you. It is up to you."

"Who calls me by that name?" demanded the wretched man.

His body was a mass of scars.

That and the tears showed Young King Brady that he actually was dealing with a morphine fiend.

"It is your name," he said. "Now, doctor, be sensible. I am not one of your enemies. You never saw me before."

"Never."

"I am here to help you—to save you if I can."

"Nothing will help me but opium in some form. Will you give me that?"

"I will try and put you in a position where you can get it."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"You're a white man, whoever you are. I shall go mad

if I am kept this way much longer. They will not believe me, but it is true."

"I believe you. I know it's true."

"Perhaps I am mad now. Brazos Bill says I am."

"And I thought you were at first, but now I begin to doubt it. You are a medical man. You ought to know."

"I ought to but I don't. My reason is shattered. I have only myself to blame for it, that is true, but it is none the better for that."

"I suppose not. How long have you been here so?"

"I don't know. It seems months to me. It may be years. But who are you?"

"I will tell you honestly who I am. I am going to talk to you like a reasonable being."

"I wish you would. You are different from the others. Perhaps you can find my wife and bring her to me. I am satisfied that it is she who has betrayed me into the hands of that fiend, but if she could see me now I believe she would relent."

"I advise you not to build on that. I have reason to know that your wife is against you. The best thing you can do is to trust me."

"But who are you? You haven't told me that yet."

"I am a secret service detective."

"Ah!"

Here was no madman.

Harry had learned his mistake.

Dr. Roundy's reason was tottering, and his nervous system utterly shattered, of course, but he certainly was not mad, or he could not have talked as connectedly as he did.

And Young King Brady knew how to handle him.

Harry has had much to do with morphine fiends in his time.

They must be treated like unruly children in their sensible moments, and like wild beasts when the frenzy is upon them.

"You have managed to get yourself into serious trouble, doctor," he said persuasively. "If you don't look sharp this will be your last trip."

"I know," replied the doctor. "I realize that. But what am I to do when they have taken away my clothes?"

"The very best thing you can do is to tie to me. If I can't help you nobody can."

"You keep talking that way, but you don't tell me who you are or what you are driving at."

Dr. Roundy was eyeing Harry closely all the while.

Young King Brady was prepared for trouble at any instant, but he kept right on talking in the same persuasive way.

"I'm going to tell you who I am, doctor," he now said.

"You have heard of the Bradys, I daresay?"

"Bradys," repeated the doctor. "Bradys."

"Yes, Bradys."

"You don't mean the famous New York detectives, of course?"

"Yes, I do."

"Ah! Well, what about that?"

"I am Young King Brady."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe a word of what you are saying."

"We want to get right together now. I know that you are Dr. Roundy, the notorious diamond smuggler."

"Oh!"

"You were sent down here by Hilson & Thiel, of Maiden Lane."

"Yes."

"You know it. Come doctor, come now! For your own good. You ran a big lot of diamonds over and then you fell into the hands of Brazos Bill. You were slick enough to conceal the diamonds, and they are holding you prisoner. You have tried to fool them into believing you are mad, and upon my word you have succeeded pretty well in making them believe it. You are not mad, but you soon will be if you don't get your morphine."

"It is true," said the doctor, in hollow tones. "It is truer than you think. There are times during the last few days when I have actually been mad. They will come to stay soon if something isn't done to relieve this terrible nervous strain."

"You are right. Then there is your wife, who goes under the name of Lady Watkins."

"Well, what about her?"

"You will be interested to know that she is here in the old mission with Brazos Bill. She is standing in with him in this whole deal."

A look of intense hatred came into the doctor's face.

"Is that so?" he hissed. "Is that really so?"

"It is."

"She is here?"

"I just said so. She is on the most friendly terms with Brazos Bill."

"And how do you stand with him?"

"You needn't ask that. I am trying to help you get out of this snap. Tell me where you put your diamonds and we will make off with them together."

"You want me to stand in with a secret service man?"

"You can escape in no other way. You turn against Hilson & Thiel and you are safe."

"You ask me too much. Listen! Don't you hear shots? They are firing down on the shore. What does that mean?"

"I can't tell you. Probably the United States marshal is after Brazos Bill."

"By heaven, I hope he gets him."

"But we want to get out of this first. Do you know of any way?"

"I do, but I can't go without clothes," replied the doctor in an impressive whisper.

"Look! We are about of a size. I'll divide with you. We shall both have enough to take us into Cerro Gordo.

It will be all right then. I can go in my underclothes if it comes to that."

The firing continued.

Dr. Roundy walked up and down, his hands twitching.

"It's a shame! It's wicked. Was there ever a man so persecuted?" he kept muttering.

"Does he really know a secret way out of this place?" Harry asked himself.

The firing was making him nervous, too. He could not tell what was going to happen.

And yet he seemed in a fair way to tame Dr. Roundy.

That the man was only pretending when he called out: "Give me back my diamonds!" was evident enough.

Harry turned and stepped to the door to examine the fastening. He thought it possible that he might be able to open it by means of his skeleton keys.

He shook the heavy wooden door.

Apparently it was not bolted.

"I believe I can do it," thought Young King Brady.

His back had been turned on the morphine fiend but a moment, and now he faced about again.

The doctor had vanished.

Although the light from the small hanging lamp was dim enough, Harry could still see every part of the long room.

We can hardly say that he was surprised.

The doctor's words had in a measure prepared him for this.

Not a trace of the diamond smuggler was to be seen.

Young King Brady pushed about here, there, and everywhere.

There was no break in the walls at any point that he could discover.

Again he returned to the door, and made the attempt to open it.

It was useless.

The huge, old Spanish lock was too much for his skeleton keys.

They wobbled about, striking nothing.

And now the light grew dimmer.

The flicker of the wick showed what the matter was—the thing was going out for want of oil.

In a moment the flame gave a dying spurt and vanished.

The firing had now ceased.

Young King Brady stood alone in the darkness of that dreary room.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD KING BRADY BALKED.

"That settles it! We land in Texas. Mr. Brady, it is up to you to keep me from being arrested and putting in a couple of years in a Texas jail. Do that and I'll put you

on to the biggest thing ever. I can't work it alone, but with your help I believe it can be done."

It was Tony Perez who made these remarks.

The pilot-house had managed to swing itself clear of the eddy, and had now been caught by a strong current, which was carrying it rapidly in the direction of the Texas bank of the Rio Grande.

Nothing interfering, it looked as if they might land there in a few minutes.

Old King Brady had just come to the conclusion that they were destined to strike the shore about five miles below the old mission wharf, when Tony broke out as above.

And the old detective was quick to catch on.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm always open for a good deal, but I shall want to know you a little better first."

"The thing has got to be done on the fly or not at all," replied Tony. "Can't you remember me?"

"No, I can't."

"It is not strange. I was only a boy then, and I suppose you see so many. Don't you recollect the murder in that Spanish boarding-house on Great Jones street, New York, twenty years ago?"

"Ha! That old Mexican who was murdered for his money?"

"Ramon Gutierrez—yes."

"I remember it perfectly. I brought it home to the woman who kept the boarding-house and her son."

"Exactly. And don't you remember the waiter boy who was arrested, and who was proved innocent through your efforts?"

"Well, I do! Now that you recall the incident to my mind I remember it perfectly well."

"I am that boy."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Come to think of it, his name was Tony."

"I am the boy—Tony Perez. I have never forgotten your kindness, Mr. Brady. I knew you the instant I laid eyes on you."

"This is interesting."

"I can make it more interesting. I have led a wild life since then."

"I daresay."

"May I ask why you are here?"

Tony's mysterious manner seemed to smack of diamonds.

In spite of his uncomfortable position, Old King Brady was doing rapid thinking.

He quickly determined to fall in with the man's mood.

"Tony," he said, "I am going to tell you the whole story. You can make out of it what you like. I am as ready to make a stake as anyone. Just listen to what I have to say."

Rapidly Old King Brady outlined the details of the

work he and his partner had undertaken on the Texas border.

"It is just as I supposed," said Tony. "I was satisfied that you had nothing to do with Rollhaus and his gang."

"My meeting with them was just an accident, as I tell you. In fact, Tony, I have told you all my business. I you know anything about those diamonds, out with it."

"Hold up," said Tony. "We are going to land now. It will be a job, too. Sit still, Mr. Brady. Don't you attempt to move or you may spoil all. If we pass this point there is no telling where we may turn up."

The pilot-house was rapidly nearing the shore, coming against it at a point where one of the numerous bends of the bluff jutted out.

Tony reached in through the window and fumbling about, produced a coil of rope.

This he made fast to a little ornament on the roof of the pilot-house, securely tying the other end around his waist.

"Now I go, Mr. Brady," he said. "Hold on tight, if she starts to turn over. It will only be a few minutes, anyhow."

With this the Mexican leaped into the river.

Old King Brady watched eagerly for his reappearance. Presently the moonbeams struck upon his black glistening head.

There are no better swimmers in the world than the Mexican half-breeds, of which Tony was one.

To cut the story short, he towed the pilot-house in under the bluff, and Old King Brady managed to scramble ashore.

None too soon, either.

The pull of the current was so strong that Tony could hardly hold it.

The instant he let go the rope the thing went sweeping around the bluff and disappeared.

"Done!" said Tony. "Mr. Brady, I have saved your life."

"That's what you have, and you won't find me ungrateful," replied the detective. "At the same time, it is only fair to tell you before we go into this deal that I am no crook."

"I know that perfectly well. I don't expect to bribe you into giving up those diamonds, but look here, they are smuggled goods. If I help you get them you might at least let me take my pay on the spot. Give me a few of the stones, and I shall be satisfied."

"Perfectly fair. I agree. Now tell me what you know."

"You want to get dry first. I'll build a fire."

"Don't. It will only attract attention. How far are we from the old mission?"

"Five miles, or thereabouts."

"We will walk. The night is warm. I am not afraid to let my clothes dry on me. I assume that we are going to the mission?"

"Yes. Come on."

They started then, and Tony began his story at once."

"I suppose you think because I was in the pilot-house of the Bella—that was the name of our boat—that I am boss of this business," said the smuggler, "but I am not. I am only the pilot. Senor Torres runs the Mexican end of Brazos Bill's smuggling company. They make big money. Bill pretends to be a professional badman, but that's only a blind. He's really a sharp business man. He makes money all the time, and they can't trap him because he knows the secret rooms and passages in the old mission. The place bears the reputation of being haunted. The marshal can't get his men to go there, and that's where the trouble comes in. They have been running three years here, and this is the first serious setback they have had."

"Go on," said Old King Brady. "Get down to the diamonds."

"I've been working for Torres only a few months," continued Tony. "We never did diamonds before, and it was only by accident I found out that we were doing them on the night we brought the man who you call Sir Archie Watkins across the river."

"The man had come over in a small boat alone. He received the package from Torres, and paid him a lot of money on the Mexican side. I happened to overhear the conversation. I thought then that the fellow was crazy, and I think so still."

Here Tony paused to light a cigarette.

"Was Brazos Bill in the deal?" the old detective asked.

"Wasn't in it at all," was the reply. "Torres was doing this on his own account. Well, sir, we carried that man across the river, towing his boat, and landed him at the mission wharf. Here he had a horse ready saddled, and he was just about to mount when we saw Bill and his gang coming down the slanting trail on the side of the bluff."

"I think it was a put-up job with Torres and Bill, but I can't swear to that."

"Look out! There comes Brazos Bill! Torres says to him as he went ashore."

"It seemed to strike the fellow all in a heap, Mr. Brady. He gave one yell, just like a lunatic, and instead of making for his horse ran straight for the old warehouse, the door of which stood open."

"I had gone ashore to make fast the line and was standing on the wharf."

"After him, Tony! the boss hollers. 'See what he does with that package!'"

"I cut up the wharf and got to the door just in time to see him getting up off the floor over in one corner. He stamped his foot hard and turned toward me."

"Go 'way, you spy!" he yells. "Go 'way, or I'll kill you." He whips out a knife and makes a rush for me. I cuts back and gets aboard the steamer. Well, Mr. Brady——"

"Come, Tony," said Old King Brady, impatiently. "Cut this thing short. He was captured by Brazos Bill?"

"Yes, he was. He yelled and screeched, and——"

"Never mind that. Did you tell what you saw?"

"No, I didn't. I lied about it, and said I never seen nothing. Torres didn't go in for it. He let Bill's gang do the work. They stripped that feller clean naked, but they couldn't find the diamonds. He went crazy for fair then, and it wasn't no use to question him. You want me to cut it short, Mr. Brady, and I'll do it. Bill has had him locked in the secret room of the old warehouse or the mission, I dunno which, ever since. Up to last accounts they hadn't got the diamonds nor they don't seem likely to get them. There's my story. I can take you right to the place where I seen him stamping on the stones, and under that stone you will sure find the diamonds, if that crazy man hasn't got in ahead of us and taken them away himself."

"Come," said Old King Brady, "all this sounds well. Have you been there since?"

"No, I haven't. I have only been across the river twice since then until to-night, and I never got the chance."

"Besides, I don't want to get arrested. I'm afraid Torres will kill me, too. I can handle a few diamonds without getting into trouble, but if I attempt too much I shall get into trouble sure."

"Wise man," said Old King Brady. "Come along, Tony. We will strike back there and see what can be done."

In his conversation with Tony Perez, Old King Brady had not mentioned Harry.

The old detective felt that it would be useless for him to hope for any real help from Marshal Rollhaus that night.

"The boy is good to take care of himself," he thought. "If I can lay hold of the diamonds my plan is to make straight for Cerro Gordo, deposit them in the bank there, and then raise men enough to overhaul the old mission. We are sure to find Dr. Roundy, and chances are Harry will have something doing by that time which will put the whole matter right."

He talked further with Tony as they hurried on, hearing little but the details of the story already told.

At last they caught sight of the mission wharf.

The place was absolutely deserted when they reached it.

Above they could see the tower of the old mission, but there were no signal-lights visible now.

The night was wearing away and the gray dawn began to appear in the east.

Tony was burning with excitement.

"Come on, Mr. Brady," he said; "let's pitch right in. They have all gone. We shall never have a better chance."

"Wait!" replied the old detective. "First of all we want to make sure that the marshal and his men have gone."

"What about me if they haven't?" asked Tony, anxiously.

"Does the marshal know you?"

"No, I don't think so unless he got a look at my face to-night."

"He could hardly have done that in the darkness and confusion. Stay here, however. I will go around into the bay and have a look."

"I'll stick to you," replied Tony. "Brazos Bill knows me if the marshal don't. I don't want to get mixed up with him none."

They went around to the scene of the fight together.

There lay the wreck of the smuggler's steamer made fast to a post which had been driven deep into the sand.

The Crockett had vanished, however, and there was not a trace of the marshal and his men.

"It was a knockout for the old man, sure," sighed Tony. "I suppose they have all been arrested. Good job that shot knocked the pilot-house over or I'd be in the soup, too."

"They are all gone, anyhow," said Old King Brady; "so that leaves us free to attend to our diamond business. Tony, I am ready now."

They returned to the old warehouse.

The door of the larger room stood open now.

"If we only had a light," said Tony.

"We have," replied the detective, producing his little electric dark-lantern. "Lead on!"

But it was destined to be a disappointment after all.

As Old King Brady flashed his lantern over into the corner toward which Tony started, then the Mexican gave a cry of disgust.

"That's the stone!" he exclaimed. "Someone has been ahead of us!"

The floor of the warehouse was entirely composed of flat blocks of limestone. This one had been turned.

Beneath it was an old ladder leading down into the darkness.

But this they did not discover till they came up to it.

"Courage, Tony!" cried the old detective. "We are balked, but we may not be defeated yet."

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Harry waited several hours there in the room alone.

He would have been in utter darkness but for his little electric lantern.

What had become of Dr. Roundy he could not discover, although he, of course, assumed that the man had gone out by some secret passage.

Every instant Harry expected a visit from Brazos Bill or his men, but no one came.

And this, as he learned later, was easily accounted for.

Bill was lying low, not caring to run up against Marshal Rollhaus.

Besides that, the smuggler was entertaining company that night in the person of Lady Watkins.

Enough to state that Young King Brady was forgotten and left undisturbed.

During that long wait Harry made every effort to find the secret passage, but in vain.

At last, after twice giving it up, Harry tackled the job a third time, trying Old King Brady's method.

He took the floor and patiently examined every inch of space, crawling about and testing each of the blocks of stone of which it was composed.

And now success crowned Harry's efforts at last.

Suddenly, and that when he had almost completed his work, a loose stone was encountered.

Harry pulled and up it came.

With the flat stone came a long, rusty chain, and below was a ladder leading down into the darkness.

The secret had been discovered at last.

Young King Brady was jubilant.

He scrambled down upon the ladder, making the discovery that, by pulling the chain, the stone slipped noiselessly into place.

The ladder was but a short one.

It landed Harry in a long corridor from which opened several small rooms with wooden doors and grated openings at the top.

"Cells of the old Monks!" thought Harry, "or perhaps they were wine vaults or places where they stored their corn."

He flashed his lantern through the gratings, peering in.

All were vacant, nor was there anything to indicate what their use might have been.

At last, near the end of the corridor, he came upon one of which the door stood open.

And here Harry found his lunatic.

Dr. Roundy, with an old blanket thrown over him, lay upon a low bed in a deep sleep.

Such sleeps come at times to those whose systems are enfeebled by the use of morphine.

"And this is it," muttered Young King Brady. "Perhaps he meant to come back, but sleep overtook him. I think I will waken the poor wretch, although I hate to disturb him. He may know a way out of here. If I could only connect with the Governor I should know better what to do.

"Doctor! Doctor! Wake up!" he called, shaking the sleeper.

But there seemed to be no arousing him until suddenly he sprang to his feet with a loud yell and made for Harry's throat.

There was a hot time for a moment.

Harry dropped his lantern and they struggled desperately.

Of course in the end he overcame the man.

Dr. Roundy's strength seemed to leave him all in an instant, and Young King Brady pushed him over on the bed.

Harry now caught up his lantern and turned the light directly upon his own face.

"Dr. Roundy! Do you not know me?" he demanded. "Why did you leave me so suddenly? I who would have been your friend."

The doctor sat up, heaving a deep sigh.

"Ah! I know you now," he panted. "Why did I do it? I don't know. I had made up my mind to give you the diamonds. I started to get them. You were going to help me. Have I been asleep? You are one of the Bradys, or was it all a dream?"

"No dream. It's all true. You remember me now?"

"Yes, yes. I give up. Get me away from here or I shall die."

"Show me the diamonds and I will do my best."

"It won't be so easy. Understand, Brazos Bill is against me. He is my wife's brother. You say she has turned against me, too?"

"I believe she has. So she is that man's sister?"

"Yes. They think they know the old mission, but they don't know it as I do. I was born on a ranch near this place. When I was a boy this used to be my playground. I learned all its secrets. They could not have confined me here if they had not taken away my strength by depriving me of the drug which is my life."

"And which will be your death if you don't take care of yourself. Come, Doctor, whatever we are to do let us do now."

"Yes, yes," mumbled the doctor. "Let me think. My head is all mixed up. Did I get the diamonds out of their hiding-place before I went downstairs, or didn't I? Perhaps I dreamed that I did. Brady, I can't think. How about the clothes?"

"What's the matter with wrapping this blanket around you?" said Harry. "I've got strong cord. We can cut holes for your arms and tie it about the waist."

"Why, that will do all right. Strange I didn't think about it before!" cried the doctor.

Harry seized the blanket and pulled it off the bed.

As he did so a parcel done up in blue paper fell to the floor.

"The diamonds!" cried the doctor, making a grab for it. "It was no dream! I did get it! Come, Brady! Come! I'll show you the way out if Bill hasn't bolted the lower door."

Off he started on the run, while Harry seized the blanket and followed.

Were the diamonds actually in the package?

Young King Brady could not be certain.

There seemed, however, to be nothing for it but to let this madman have his way.

At the end of the corridor was a ladder, down which Harry climbed.

At the foot was another and narrower passage.

"Come on! Come on!" shouted the doctor, who was still ahead.

Harry joined him at the foot of another ladder, this time leading up.

In a moment they stood in the main room of the old warehouse.

"I'll put this stone back in place," said the doctor. "The door is open! The way is clear!"

"Let me put your blanket on," said Harry. "We may as well fix you up before we start."

"I'll help," said a voice outside.

In walked Old King Brady, with Tony at his heels.

The doctor gave a yell and darted for the old detective.

"You shan't rob me of my diamonds. No, you shan't!" he cried.

"That's the package!" said Tony.

"Stop! It's all right, Doctor. This is Old King Brady. He is with us!" Harry cried.

But the doctor was ready to show fight.

It was all the Bradys could do to handle him.

There was no pacifying the man, so they had to overcome him.

They took the diamonds away and tied his hands behind him.

As he continued to shout and rave, they had to gag him, too.

Helpless at last, the blanket was wrapped around the unfortunate man, and Old King Brady took a hurried peep into the blue paper parcel.

It was filled with small diamond papers in the usual style.

Three of these Old King Brady opened.

They had won out for the time being at least—in each paper were glittering gems both large and small.

Several hundred thousand dollars was the value given by Hilson & Thiel when Old King Brady had his talk with the firm, and the old detective saw no reason to doubt that the gems were intact.

And now the question was to get away.

"Do you go with us, Tony?" Old King Brady asked.

"I'd rather you would leave me here," was the reply.

"Then here is your reward," said the old detective, and he placed in the hands of the Mexican six diamonds, each worth at least a hundred dollars, while Dr. Roundy glared and seemed to fairly choke with rage.

"And now," said Old King Brady, after he and Harry had briefly compared notes, "if we can only find our horses where we left them there is nothing to hinder us from ending up our case at once and returning to New York in triumph. As for these diamonds, the Secret Service commission can settle with their owners. We are out of it once we turn them into his hands."

They bade Tony farewell and climbed the bluff, reaching the grove where they had left their horses unchallenged.

And the horses were there undisturbed.

Dr. Roundy now showed decided signs of failing.

Old King Brady produced a small box.

"This is what will fix you, my friend," he said. "If you will promise to hold your tongue if I pull that ha-

kerchief out of your mouth I'll give you two grains of morphine right now."

The doctor nodded vigorously.

He swallowed the pills as a wild animal would raw meat.

"That gives me new life!" he breathed. "Gentlemen, don't put back that gag. I'll make no trouble. As for my wife, I am done with her forever. Take me back to New York even if you land me in the Tombs."

"We will take care of you," said the old detective, "never fear."

He was going on to say more when Harry suddenly threw up his hands.

"Look! Now we are in for it!" he exclaimed.

Over by the garden wall stood the man whom they knew as Gus Goater.

Daylight had just come—Harry could see his face plainly.

He shook his fist and vanished.

"Mount! We must be off instantly!" Old King Brady exclaimed. "That fellow is no ghost of the old Monks at all events."

They helped Dr. Roundy up on one of the horses and Old King Brady got up behind him.

Harry flung himself into the saddle and then off they flew.

"They will follow us! It's all over," groaned the doctor, after they had ridden a short distance. "Yes, there they come!"

It was so!

Six mounted men suddenly came out from among the trees onto the desert.

Brazos Bill was at the head of the procession, and right behind him rode Gus Goater and the man Hibb Toland.

It was a question of horses now.

The Bradys had lost their rifles and had only revolvers.

Needless to say their horses were crowded to their utmost capacity.

They had a good start, but the smugglers steadily gained upon them.

On they flew over the desert.

They were near the house of the leper woman when the firing began.

The shots went whizzing past their ears—they were already in range.

"We are done for!" panted the doctor.

And it looked so, indeed, when all at once Senor Gonzales sprang out of the house, rifle in hand.

He shouted something which the Bradys did not catch, threw up his rifle and let fly.

The Bradys looked back.

Behind them a wild cry went up and they saw Brazos Bill drop out of the saddle.

"My son is avenged!" cried the Mexican. "Go your way, gentlemen! They will not come here!"

The Bradys did not stop to argue the point.

The smugglers halted and, dismounting, clustered about their fallen leader, while the Bradys and Dr. Roundy dashed on; nor did they draw rein again until Cerro Gordo was safely reached.

It was the end of the Bradys' case and also the end of Brazos Bill.

Later in the day the detectives learned that the smuggler leader was dead.

They did not stop to investigate further, however.

Their arrival created talk, and they were congratulated upon recovering the supposed Sir Archie Watkins by Colonel Tarbox and others.

There was a steamboat for Eagle Pass at three o'clock, and the Bradys took it in.

They made a quick run to St. Louis.

By the time they reached there Dr. Roundy had become so debilitated that they took him to a hospital.

Old King Brady did not put him under arrest, and he was glad of it after.

The unfortunate man lingered two weeks and died a victim to his drug.

Old King Brady notified his wife at the time he put the doctor in the hospital, but he learned later that she did not come to see him. Dr. Roundy went to a pauper's grave.

Back in New York the Bradys turned the diamonds over to the Secret Service Commissioner.

Hilson & Thiel were arrested and had all kinds of trouble, as well as their heavy loss to contend with, before they got through with the affair.

The Bradys got their pay from the government.

It had been a short case, but it was hot work while it lasted.

The smugglers' gang was broken up entirely as the outgrowth of the case of The Bradys and Brazos Bill.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS AND BROKER BLACK; OR, TRAPPING THE TAPPERS OF WALL STREET," which will be the next number (347) of "Secret Service."

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