

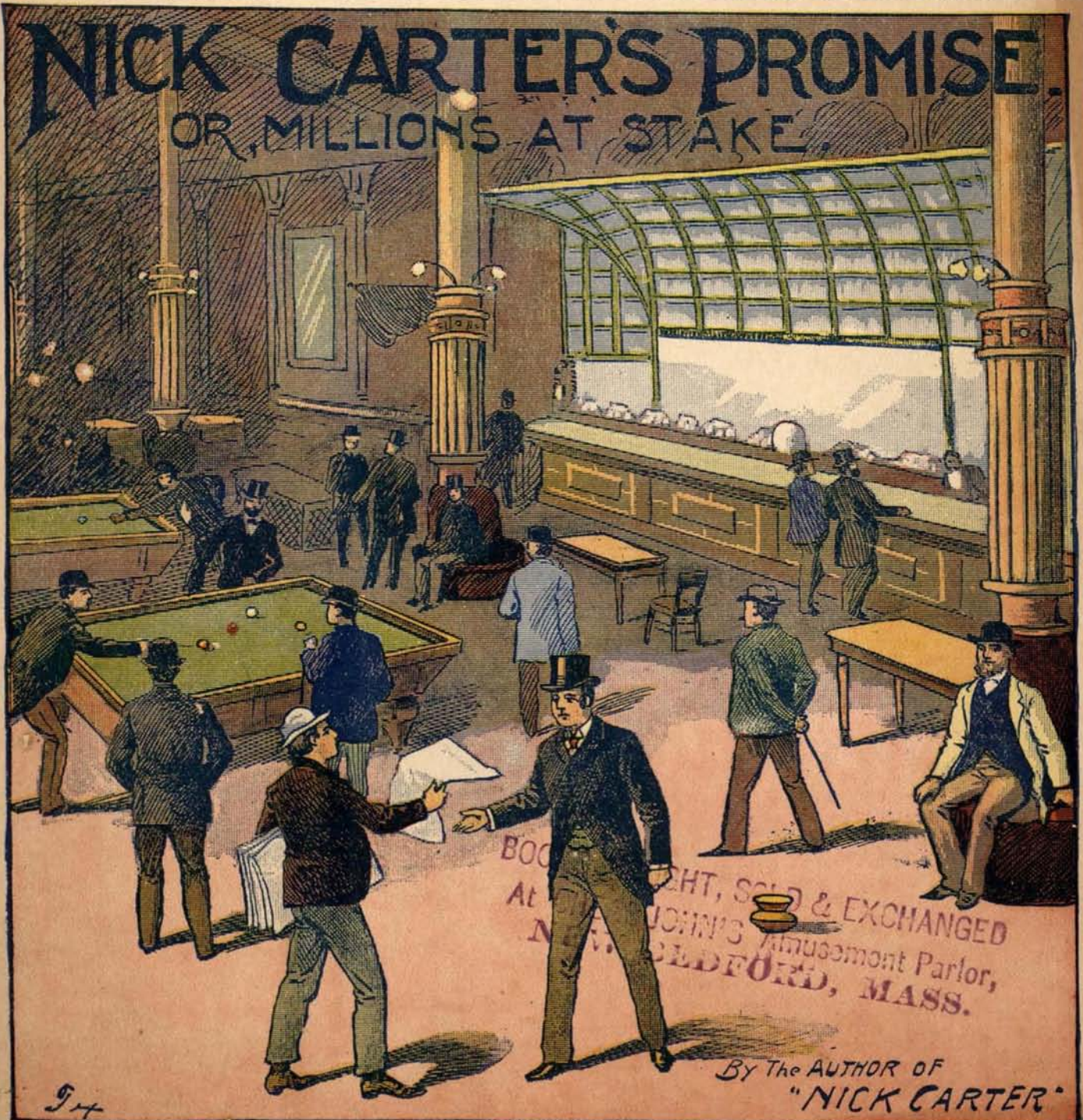
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued weekly. Subscription price, \$2.50 per year. Entered as second class matter at the N. Y. Post Office by STREET & SMITH.

No. 45.

NEW YORK, November 6, 1897.

Price 5 Cents.



CHICK, DISGUISED AS A NEWSBOY, ENTERED THE CAFE ROYAL AND SUCCEEDED IN SELLING A PAPER TO THE VERY MAN HE WAS TRACKING. NICK CARTER SAT NEAR BY WATCHING THEM.

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Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1897 by Street & Smith, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress,
Washington, D. C.
Entered as second class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.
Subscription price, \$2.50 per year. November 6, 1897.

No 45. STREET & SMITH, Publishers. NEW YORK. 29 Rose St., N. Y. 5 Cents

NICK CARTER'S PROMISE; OR, Millions at Stake.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A VICTIM OF A STRANGE PERSECUTION.

Marcus Astorel, millionaire, middle-aged, corpulent, ruddy-faced, and anxious-eyed, sat one forenoon in the reception-room of his suite in the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, impatiently drumming his fingers on the little table in front of him.

He was expecting a visitor.

The time was the latter part of March.

Ten o'clock arrived, and the visitor presented himself.

It was Nick Carter.

He had arrived that morning from a small town in the interior, where he had succeeded, with Chick's assistance, in unmasking a fiend in human shape.

The millionaire shook hands heartily with the great detective.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you, Mr. Carter."

"You have urgent need of my services, then?"

"Yes. Before my arrival in California two days ago, I thought the case a most pressing one. To-day it has become a matter of life and death with me."

Mr. Astorel's lips twitched in nervous fear, and he glanced uneasily at the door opening into the corridor.

Nick followed his eye, and interpreting the glance, went to the door, opened it and peered out.

"There is no one there," he said. "Now, then, to business."

"Two months ago," began the millionaire, "my wife was abducted."

"The abductor demanded ten thousand dollars for her safe return to San Francisco."

"I paid the money in the manner stipulated, and my wife arrived at our home on Van Ness avenue, safe and sound."

"Two weeks later my only daughter Hester was abducted from Mills Seminary in Alameda County; where she was receiving the finishing touches to her education."

"And to-night you must turn up fifty thousand dollars more, or turn up your toes."

Nick spoke half-jestingly, but Astorel shivered at the words.

"Yes," he said, "I must be prepared for the loss of more money or the loss of my life, unless you are able to extricate me from the terrible dilemma."

"I will do my best, and I have the faith to believe that Mr. Dellman will not succeed in his purpose."

"You will have a man with the cunning of old Satan to contend with."

"The odds then will be in my favor, for Satan would never be in school but for a little mistake he once made."

Nick's air of confidence inspired Astorel to remark, quietly:

"I believe you will succeed in spite of the evil ability of Dellman."

"I admit his ability. He must be able, indeed, to have covered up his tracks so well; to have so arranged his evil programme, that although you know him to be the man who has robbed you, yet you have no evidence to produce that would warrant his arrest."

"I never saw cunning and audacity so queerly combined as they are in this man," said the broker.

"He will show his audacity once too often, Mr. Astorel," Nick went on. "I like this case. It attracts me."

The plan of campaign against the enemy was arranged, and when Astorel was made acquainted with the line of attack his astonishment thereat was equaled only by his admiration of the great detective's strategical intelligence.

Some hours after they had parted, Nick went into the Cafe Royal, in Flood Building.

He was in search of Albert Dellman.

He had not been seated more than five minutes in one of the comfortable chairs ranged along the sides of the large hall, when the object of his search entered.

Tall, dark-featured, handsome, with polished manners and a pleasant smile, he was a man calculated to make a favorable impression wherever he went or in what society he might be cast.

Nick gazed at him long and steadily, and noting certain lines about the mouth, together with other character indications, formed the correct conclusion that Albert Dellman could commit a murder with that smile of his, and never suffer from a perturbed conscience.

"Mentally he is as bright as a new dollar," thought Nick, "but morally he is an idiot."

An acquaintance at one of the tables greeted Dellman effusively.

"Glad to see you," he exclaimed.

"Where have you been for the past week? Missed you awfully at the club. Must have you at the bull's-head dinner to-morrow at the Cliff. Now don't say no, old fellow, for without your assistance the affair must be a failure."

Dellman smiled in return, showing, as he did so, a set of firm white teeth.

"I can't possibly oblige you," he answered, "for to-morrow I shall be on my way to Los Angeles."

"What! Have you struck a windfall?"

"Not yet"—composedly—"but before I start I expect to be better off, financially, than I am to-day."

"Glad of it, Mr. Dellman, for that tilt of yours made the other day against the Associated Virginia must have cost you a cool fifty thousand."

"Just that, my boy, to a dollar. But I shall recoup to-night beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"Will you?" said Nick, to himself. "Now, if I know anything about matters and things connected with your case, Mr. Albert Dellman, I should prophesy that to-night will not help you out. Instead of fifty thousand dollars in that old tree back of Berkeley you will likely find a bottle of soup."

Dellman was on his way to a seat, when struck by a sudden recollection he paused, put his hand to his brow, then wheeled quickly, and started for the door.

But before he reached it a smart young man—a news peddler—entered with a bundle of papers under his arm.

“Here’s yer Bulletin, Post ‘n Report,” he cried out. “Latest news from Chili. Big jump in Associated Virginia——”

“Here, boy, give me a Bulletin,” interrupted Dellman.

After procuring a copy he made his way to the open air.

A big jump in Associated Virginia meant that he had missed the chance of his life.

The other day when the stock went down he had sold out at a great loss, fearing that the bottom of the concern would fall out entirely if he held on.

He glanced at the list of the lucky ones in this new mining deal, and sighed.

From the mining news he turned his eye to the personals, as was his daily habit.

He started, turned pale, and then let fall a string of oaths when he read these lines:

“Among the passengers by the Summer Queen, this afternoon for Honolulu, was Marcus Astorel, Esq., the well-known broker, who goes to the islands for his health.”

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR THE CAMPAIGN.

The news peddler was Chick.

As Albert Dellman, with the paper in hand, disappeared through the door, Chick looked at his superior, and grinned knowingly.

Nick approached and bought a paper.

“Astorel got off, did he?” he asked, in a low voice.

“Yes.”

“Follow Dellman, find out where he

goes and what he does between now and four o’clock, then report to me.”

“Where shall I find you?”

“At a sailors’ boarding-house on Clay street near the water front. You’ll know the place by the big wooden eagle over the entrance.”

“Very well.”

Chick was off without another word.

The great detective went to the door and watched the shadowed and the shadower until they were out of sight.

Then he hastened to the Palace Hotel, where he remained an hour.

At four o’clock he was at the sailors’ lodging-house on Clay street awaiting the appearance of his brave and keen-witted assistant.

Chick was on time, his honest features aglow with excitement.

“Well?” said his chief.

“Followed Mister Man to a French restaurant on Dupont street. He went into a private stall, I went into the one adjoining. The partitions are low, and I managed to look down on him without his becoming aware of the fact.”

“What did you see?”

“I saw him open the paper he bought of me and read the mining and personal columns several times over.”

“What was his manner?”

“He was pale and nervous at first, but when at last he put away the paper, his face had regained its ordinary color and expression, and he fell to on the raw oysters he had ordered as cool as a cucumber.”

“What do you infer?”

“That he has either ‘dropped to our game, or has discovered a new way to corral the fifty thousand he was counting on for this evening.”

“I don’t think he suspects trickery,” observed Nick, after a pause.

“Come to think of it, I don’t, either.”

“Then he has concocted some new scheme.”

"Against whom?"

"Mrs. Astorel and her daughter."

"That ought to suit our arrangement."

"It does, for it is in the commission of some new act of villainy that we must hope to trap him and render him in future powerless to work injury against any one but himself. What did he do after finishing his oysters?"

"Paid for them and walked out of the restaurant."

"Where did he go?"

"To a saloon on Dupont street, frequented by the sporting fraternity, 'pugs,' and their satellites principally. I followed him, and saw him enter into earnest conversation with a 'Tar Flat' bruiser, a fellow who has done time in San Quentin for robbery."

"Do I know him?"

"I should think you did. It's Flat-Nosed Batson, who was run out of Chicago by the police at the time of the anarchist excitement."

"Yes, I do know him, and I owe him one for a headache he gave me once when I was working up a case for Chief McCaughrey on the Lake shore. Did you overhear their conversation?"

"Part of it. They spoke in whispers, but I have an acute ear, and besides they were not far from the lunch counter which was my coign of vantage at the time."

"Repeat what you heard."

"'Batson,' said Dellman, 'I want to play a joke on a certain individual in this city. This is no place to talk the matter over, so meet me at seven o'clock at my office, at the Merchants' Exchange.'"

"Batson promised to be there, and they separated."

"But you did not lose sight of Dellman?"

"Oh, no. From the saloon he went to the Russ House, and in the reading-room sat down at a desk, and wrote a letter,

sealed, stamped it and put it in the letter-box at the corner."

"It's a pity you could not have read the address."

"I did read it."

"Chick, you're comin on."

"Thank you. The address was 'Miss Hester Astorel, No. — Broadway, Oakland.'"

"Good. We'll know what it contains before many hours."

"From the letter-box Dellman went to his room in a Bush street lodging-house, and is there yet for aught I know to the contrary."

The conversation above detailed had taken place in a little up-stairs room in the sailors' lodging-house, hired for the occasion by the great detective.

When Chick had concluded his statement, Nick wrote two letters, one to Chief Crowley, with an inclosure; the other to Albert Dellman.

"Go to the city hall first," said the detective to his assistant, "and have Chief Crowley O. K. the newspaper copy which I have inclosed. As for the other business mentioned in my note, he can attend to that without your assistance."

"What is the business?"

"The arrest of Flat-Nosed Batson. He is wanted in Denver for burglary."

"But Batson's appointment with Dellman? How will you discover what Astorel's enemy wants of the man, or wants done by some rascal of Batson's ilk?"

"Your questions, Chick, evidence your appreciation of the situation. Batson's arrest will not interfere with the movement Dellman proposes making, that is if I know myself, that is if I know myself, and about this hour in the afternoon I think I do."

Nick spoke with the calm confidence that was a part of his nature.

"The other letter which you hold in your hands, Chick, is addressed to Albert Dellman, and is signed 'James Batson.'"

"I see your game, sir, but——"

"You are afraid Dellman may detect the forgery, eh?"

"Yes."

"No danger on that score, my good fellow, for I happen to know just what kind of a fist our man of the flat-nose writes. It is in back-hand style, and is easily imitated."

"I might have known that you would not make a miscue."

"The letter states that the writer has been arrested, that there is no hope of escaping conviction, and recommends that the business of playing a joke on somebody, which Dellman desires transacted, be intrusted to the writer's pal, Nevada Saul."

"Precisely, and Nevada Saul will be Nick Carter."

"Of course. And Batson, per Carter, further conveys the information that Saul may be found at this place at seven o'clock this evening. Now hurry off, Chick, and get that newspaper copy fixed by the chief, for I want it to appear in the last edition of the Bulletin this afternoon. You'll have time, I think."

Chick was off like a shot.

An hour later Flat-Nosed Batson occupied a cell in the city prison.

The captain in charge received orders to permit no visitors to see or talk with the prisoner unless by order of Nick or one of the superior judges.

The six o'clock edition of the Bulletin contained an additional number of personal items.

One read as follows:

"Col. Bently Henderson, of Missouri, one of the millionaire railroad builders of that State, arrived in town this afternoon. He is the uncle of Mrs. Astorel, whose husband is now on the ocean, bound for Honolulu. He will remain in the State for several weeks."

Nick Carter read the item and smiled in satisfaction.

"That will catch him, I think," he said to himself.

At seven o'clock, the detective, disguised as Nevada Saul, received a visitor at the little room in the sailors' boarding-house.

The visitor was Albert Dellman.

CHAPTER III.

A MURDEROUS SCHEME.

Dellman bestowed a searching look on the disguised detective as he entered the room.

"He's satisfied," thought Nick, as the villain shifted his gaze to the side window, which overlooked a small, dirty alley.

Placing a chair close to this window, Dellman sat down, and opened the conversation.

"Were you expecting me?" he asked, carelessly.

"Yes, Flat-Nosed Batson said you'd probably whirl in and gimme a job ef I waited here for yer this evenin'."

"H'm! What do you know of Batson?"

"I know he's a thurrerbred, an' that he's in a hole."

"Were you ever a partner of his?"

"Was I a pardner? I should ree-mark. Some o' ther neatest jobs on the coast war did over thar in Nevady when we worked together."

"Batson probably told you that I wanted his assistance in playing a joke on a friend of mine, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything more?"

"Not a word. P'raps he might ha' unloaded his mind, if he'd knowed anything more 'bout ther business."

Dellman took out his cigar case, selected two cigars, and offered one to Nick.

Soon the two men were puffing contentedly away.

"The joke, if played at all must be

played to-night," said Dellman, after a pause.

"I'll do whatever Flat-Nosed Batson would ha' done, s'long's there's boodle in prospect."

"You shall be well paid for your services. You can spar, I suppose?"

"Spar! Now you shout. I kin spar for anything, from a drink to a square meal."

"You misunderstand me, perhaps," returned Dellman, quietly, with his cold gray eyes intently fixed upon the false Saul's face, "for I spoke in a fistic sense. For example," and the speaker doubled up his fists, assumed a pugilistic attitude, and made several passes at an imaginary opponent.

Nick broke into a loud guffaw at this exhibition.

"Spar! That's too fancy a word for me, old hoss. "Slugs' ther caper, see?" and on the instant Nick executed a number of movements with such swiftness and dexterity as to cause Dellman to nod his head in delighted approval.

"You'll do, I fancy," he remarked, "and now for action. First, I will show you the man on whom the joke is to be played."

Dellman arose and opened the door, and Nick passed out in a very curious frame of mind.

The villain had fallen into the trap too readily.

But the adventure had commenced and the courageous detective was determined to see it to the end.

Up Clay street they went, past Sansome, and into Leidesdorff.

The latter is a short, dark, narrow little street, but little used at night by reputable people on account of the exceptional facilities it offers for the commission of robbery.

Into Leidesdorff street Dellman turned, Nick closely following.

Under a lamp-post at the corner of Sac-

ramento street, the guide stopped and looked at his watch.

"Five minutes to eight," he said. "He'll be here in five minutes."

The disguised detective waited in some impatience for the man to appear, in order that the next move in the peculiar game that was being played might be made.

At eight o'clock a policeman slowly sauntered up to the corner where the two men were standing.

He looked sharply into their faces and then passed on.

A thrill passed through Nick's frame as he met the searching gaze of the guardian of the peace.

"That's the man," said Dellman in a whisper.

"What!" Nick whispered back. "Is their joke to be played on a copper?"

"Yes."

"What is ther style o' the joke?"

"This. You must follow him to California street, and when you see him go down some stairs into a basement, you must be close on his heels, so that when he turns you can play the joke."

"Suppose he does not turn round, but waltzes into ther basement."

"All the better, for it is not tenanted, is in fact a large empty store-room, where the tramps occasionally hang out."

"All right. Now about ther joke."

"It is to be played with this joker."

Dellman drew a sand-club from his breast and handed it to the false Nevada Saul.

"Strike back of the ear, and strike hard. Here's five hundred dollars in advance. Five hundred more goes into your hand when you've laid him out."

Nick shoved the notes which Dellman held out into his pocket, and then asked:

"Where'll I run across you to corral the other five hundred?"

"At the basement door. I'll be on the

spot so soon as you have completed the job."

"Nuff sed, and now to business, for the copper is half way to California street now."

So saying Nick hurried away and he chuckled softly to himself as his feet lightly brushed the cobblestones of the roadway.

The policeman was in the act of descending the stairs to the unlighted basement, in a silent and unlighted part of the street, when Nick prepared to pounce upon him.

But the night guardian turned before the sand-club could be raised, and with a few quickly spoken words, allowed his own club to come into play with the effect of stretching the great detective at full length at the foot of the stairs.

He lay like a log, without motion.

The policeman was bending over him when an eager voice, the voice of Albert Dellman, caused him to look up with a start."

"Have you fixed him?"

"I reckon I have, captain.

"Anyway, he declines to breathe, as you may observe."

The villain rubbed his hands gleefully.

"How well I played my little game," he chuckled. "Hoodwinked and laid out the greatest detective in the United States. Ha, ha! Sam, but this night has been a good one for both of us, indeed.

"How about the blunt?" queried the policeman, coldly.

"Yes, yes, you shall be paid. First I'll go through Mr. Nick Carter's clothes and hand you the five hundred dollars he thought he had picked up in the softest snap he had ever struck, and then I'll add to it five hundred out of my own pocket."

Nick had placed the notes in his vest-pocket, so the arch-villain had no difficulty in finding them.

"A thousand dollars, Boston Sam, isn't

bad for one clip over the head with a club, eh?"

"No."

"You've probably robbed drunks and blackmailed Chinamen at much less profit per night."

"What I've done is none of your business," Boston Sam surlily returned.

"No, I suppose not. I was only joking, you know. This is my joking night. I wanted to play a joke on Nick Carter, and I've done it. But the joke is not entirely played yet. We must get this body into the basement and examine it for signs of life."

The door was unlocked, and the body was carried in.

In the middle of the room was a pile of empty dry-goods boxes.

Behind these the body was deposited.

Dellman then returned to the door, and locked it with a key taken from his pocket.

Boston Sam produced his bull's-eye lantern and flashed the rays upon the detective's face.

Nick's eyes were closed, his cheeks were pale as death.

Dellman knelt down and placed his ear over the detective's heart.

"It beats faintly," he said. "He's just alive and that's all."

"Do you want him dead?" asked the murderous policeman.

"Dead as a herring. Did you not understand me when I made the bargain with you? Didn't I tell you I wanted you to knock him out for good and all?" replied Dellman, angrily.

"Oh, very well," was the careless response. "I'd as soon give him a second crack as not. Want to see it done?"

"Yes—no. I'll step to the other side of the boxes while you paste him. Give him enough this time, for the fellow has escaped death so often that it's not policy to take any chances with him now."

The villain took himself from the sight

of his cold-blooded tool, and the detective victim.

A number of heavy blows, each followed by a sickening thud, satisfied the listener that the murderous work was being done by an expert at the business.

"Now what do you think?" Boston Sam hoarsely cried out.

Dellman stepped from behind the boxes, and by the lantern's light beheld a spectacle that made him shudder, case-hardened though he was.

The detective's face was covered with blood, blood streamed from his ears and nostrils, while his hair was matted with gore.

There was every indication that his skull had been broken, and that his career had been abruptly cut short.

"What shall we do with it?" asked the murderer, pointing to the ghastly sight.

"Feed it to the rats. There's a trap-door opening into a still lower-room, a former receptacle for smuggled goods. There's nothing there now but rats, hundreds of them, and all hungry and vicious. They won't leave a scrap of flesh on his bones. What do you think of the scheme?"

"It couldn't be improved upon, but——"

"But what?"

"I'll need a drink before I go any further.

"I'm as weak as a cat now. The air down here is not suited to my constitution."

"I'll go out and get you a drink."

Dellman hurried away to return in five minutes with a bottle of whisky.

"There," he said, "drink that, and then rush the business through. I want to get away from here, for I've other business to attend to that can't be postponed."

Boston Sam took the bottle, sat down on a box, and took his time in putting down the "bracer."

When he returned the bottle to Dellman over half the contents had been poured out.

The lantern meanwhile had been resting on the floor with the light turned from the spot where the detective's body had lain.

"Well, let's be going," remarked the policeman, as he smacked his lips, "for the job's done."

"What!"

Dellman snatched up the lantern and brought the light to bear on the place of murder.

Nick Carter's body was no longer there.

Before the villain could open his mouth to express his astonishment his murderous tool coolly remarked:

"He's gone to the rats."

Dellman rushed to the trap-door, lantern in hand, opened it, and looked down.

He saw a legion of ravenous rats squealing and fighting over some tempting morsel that had but recently fallen into their den.

And from the hole there arose the sickening smell of raw, warm flesh.

The villain closed the trap, and rose to his feet as pale as death.

"How came you to do this?" he asked, gaspingly.

"I heard footsteps outside, and fearing that some fool might stagger in and oblige me to commit another murder, I rushed the stiff into the hole as quick as you please."

"All right, all right. Now for to-morrow's business. You are to go to Oakland in the morning. See the chief, and get a lay off for a couple of days. If he kicks any, resign from the force, for there's money enough in the work on hand to keep you in idleness for the rest of your life."

"I'm your tamate, captain."

"You will find me at the Galendo Hotel at nine o'clock."

"I'll be there on time."

"When I meet you there I will tell you what I want done."

"Very well."

The two men parted at the California street corner.

Dellman took his way homeward in a satisfied frame of mind.

When he had passed from sight, Boston Sam walked slowly back to the basement.

He reached it just as a man was coming out of the door.

The man was Nick Carter.

"All serene, Chick?"

"Yes," said Chick, alias Boston Sam, "we've fooled him beautifully."

"You've fooled him, you mean, for this night's work goes to your credit, Chick, not mine."

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARING THE TRAP.

Half an hour after the Leidesdorff street adventure, the two detectives occupied a private stall in a Market street restaurant.

While they refreshed themselves Chick told his story.

"After I left you in the afternoon," he began, "I went as directed to the city hall and was fortunate enough to find Chief Crowley in his office.

"I am always happy to oblige my friend Carter," said he, when he had read the note, and within ten minutes thereafter two commissions had been executed—an officer had been dispatched to arrest Flat-Nosed Batson forthwith, and a messenger had been sent to the Bulletin office with the personal which the chief had indorsed.

"Col. Crowley wanted me to dine with him, but I had to decline on account of

the important nature of the business that engrossed my attention.

"After Batson had been brought in, I hurried to Dellman's lodgings, and here again luck favored me. He was in, and I gave the note into his hands, but was off before he could read it.

"I waited across the street, in a little news-stand, until he came out, and I shadowed him to the city hall.

"In the belief that his steps would be directed to the city prison, I took a cut off to the place by way of Merchant street, and was behind the door in Captain Lindheimer's office, and concealed from observation when he appeared and asked to see the prisoner, Batson.

"Captain Lindheimer, who had been hurriedly posted by me as to the situation, courteously complied with the arch-villain's request, and conducted him to the cell where Batson was playing checkers with his nose.

"As soon as Captain Lindheimer had locked Dellman in he gave me the opportunity I wanted of overhearing the conversation between the two men, by putting me into the cell adjoining, which is provided with excellent eavesdropping facilities.

"The first question asked by Dellman was in reference to the letter signed 'James Batson.'

"'Did you write that?' he said.

"Flat-Nose looked at it in amazement. 'Not by a jugful, I didn't,' he answered. 'Who in blazes has been forgin' my hand-write?'

"'I know the rooster,' said Dellman, emphatically. 'He's Nick Carter, the shrewdest and most dangerous detective on the American Continent.'

"'The deuce you say!' and you ought to have seen Batson's expression when he spoke. He was as white as a sheet, and he looked as scared as if he had seen a ghost.

"'My God!' he went on. 'Then I'm

done for. If Nick Carter is in San Francisco, my arrest lies at his door, and my conviction will be certain. But how do you know that it is Carter?"

"How do I know? Never mind how I obtain my information. But all the same, the man who put you in quod is Nick Carter."

"Batson dropped his eyes to the floor, and did not say anything for some time.

"Every now and then, however, he would sigh deeply.

"At last he looked up and regarded Dellman queerly.

"You wouldn't have come to see me," he said, "if you hadn't a point to make. What is it?"

"I want to help you, at the same time, help myself."

"Help me! Can you do it?"

"He clasped his hands, the big duffer, and looked entreatingly at the cold, calculating villain before him.

"I can help you, I think. Let me ask one question first. If Nick Carter were out of the way, would you have any chance of escaping conviction on the charge for which you have been arrested?"

"Every chance in the world. The case was put into Nick's hands by the Denver chief of police. The detective has never reported what he has found out about the case. I know that, for I have a pal in Colorado who is in a position to keep me well posted. I know further that Nick has got me dead to rights, and that he will pull the string that will let me down into the mire, when he gets me before the Denver court."

"Good. I'll lay Nick Carter out before midnight."

"You will? But how?"

"Never mind how. Leave that business to me. Now, for your assistance. Do you know of any one in San Francisco who can be trusted to perform the work for which I engaged your services?"

"Yes. There's one man, he's a jim-dandy—the finest fakir on the coast. He has strength, nerve, and audacity, and can be depended on to work any kind of a snap, from cracking a crib to slitting a weazand, as long as there's money in it."

"Where can I find this paragon of criminals?"

"On the police force."

"What!"

"On the police force, I tell you."

"Come now, Batson, I want no jesting. This is a serious matter, serious for you and serious for me."

"I'm not jesting. Boston Sam is on the force, but only for this week. He's a sub, and got in through political influence."

"Does Chief Crowley know his character and antecedents?"

"Not he. Boston Sam always burns his bridges behind him. There isn't a man in the city who is on to him but me."

"Where shall I find him?"

Batson named the beat, which included Leidesdorff street.

"Nothing more of importance was said between them, and soon Dellman took his leave.

"It was then five o'clock.

"Captain Lindheimer informed me that Boston Sam would report for duty at six.

"Do you know where he hangs out?" I asked.

"At the Red Retreat, on Stockton street."

"Fifteen minutes later I was in the retreat, a corner saloon with a snide grocery attachment, and in conversation with Boston Sam.

"I gave him a note from Captain Lindheimer, informing him that his services would not be required that night.

"After he had read it, I told him I was a Sacramento constable, and that I was looking for a burglar who was supposed to be in Sausalito. I gave a faked descrip-

tion of my alleged quarry, and offered Boston Sam twenty dollars if he would go over to Saucelito by the next boat and make the arrest for me.

"He jumped at the offer like a pike for a young sucker, and when I parted with him at the cable car which was to take him to the water front, it was half-past five.

"I had then just thirty minutes in which to do a change and get to the city hall. To prove that I have profited by your instructions, I will say that at six o'clock precisely, I was in Captain Lindheimer's office and ready to go on duty for the night as Boston Sam."

"Chick, you're a brick," said Nick with enthusiasm.

"Don't mention it. As I was on my way down Merchant street toward Montgomery, I met Dellman. He accosted me as Boston Sam, gave me a note from Flat-Nosed Batson, and invited me into a saloon to have a chat.

"That sort of business wouldn't do at all, you know, and so I informed him. He then suggested that we slip into a hallway on Commercial street and do our talking. I consented to this, and was soon put into possession of the details of the fiendish plot that had been concocted against you. "I knew you would recognize me when I stopped at the Sacramento street corner, and that you would take a quick tumble to the little racket I had entered upon."

"You acted with consummate ingenuity and skill, Chick," said the great detective, approvingly. "I couldn't have done better myself."

This was great praise, but the faithful assistant fully deserved it.

"There was one thing, as you know, that bothered me, and that was, how to make Dellman believe that you had really been cast into the hole to constitute a dinner for the rats. I had carried out the other portions of my scheme of deception

well enough. I had faked blood with red paint, and I had hit my boot, in lieu of your head, with my club until my toes and instep ache even now; but I might have slipped up on the most important part of the programme, if I had not spied a big black cat behind the boxes just as Dellman was going out to get me the drink of whisky.

"That cat had never done me any harm, but it had to be sacrificed all the same, and the smell of raw warm flesh which greeted the villain's nostrils had something feline but nothing human in its nature."

Chick's story was told.

And the telling not only demonstrated the young detective's courage and astuteness, but it also proved that Albert Dellman was a foe worthy of the great detective's skill.

Nick had never counted on the possibility of the villain either penetrating his disguise, or discovering his presence in San Francisco.

"That fellow must know me, that's certain," mused the detective, "and yet to save my life, I can't place him. Who can he really be, I wonder?"

"Chick," said he, after a period of serious reflection, "you must play Boston Sam for me one more day. You must keep that Oakland appointment."

Further plans were discussed before bedtime came.

Nick, in a new disguise, that of a smart appearing book canvasser, was a passenger on the first boat for Oakland which left the Market street slip the next morning.

Dellman was to meet the bogus Boston Sam at nine o'clock, and Nick wanted to transact a little business in the city of oaks before giving his special attention to the master villain.

It was not yet eight o'clock, when he knocked at the door of a neat cottage on

Broadway, a few blocks from the old post-office corner.

The door was opened by a pert maid in a white apron, and with her sleeves rolled up.

"We don't want any books," she said, brusquely, and would have shut the door in his face, had not Nick uttered the one word:

"Rondelle!"

The girl turned pale, glanced quickly over her shoulder, and then faltered out an invitation to come in.

"Can I speak with you on the quiet?" said Nick, in a low voice.

"Yes."

She led the way into the front parlor.

Her hand trembled as she opened the door for him to enter.

Nick's face wore a smile of satisfaction.

He knew the girl having formed her acquaintance some years before when she was serving as maid for Rondelle, the notorious confidence operator, who afterward came to grief in Sacramento.

To find her in service at the Vane House, where Mrs. Astorel and her daughter were temporarily residing was a suspicious circumstance, and before proceeding with the business that had brought him to the house, the great detective resolved to subject her to a little judicious catechism.

"Now, Miss Serena Dare," he said, sternly, when he had seated himself in a comfortable arm-chair, "it will be good policy on your part to answer truthfully such questions as I may put to you touching your position in this house, and the motive that brought you to it."

"Who are you?" she hoarsely demanded, after a vain attempt to discover his identity.

"Did you ever hear of Chief Rogers of Sacramento?"

"Yes."

She shivered as she uttered the word.

"Now, it does not in the least matter

who I am," Nick went on with grim composure, "so long as I am in Chief Rogers' confidence, and know that for the last six months a warrant has been out for the arrest of a certain pretty panel thief, who was known last year in New York as 'Pretty Jane,' but who was christened Serena Dare when she was an innocent babe, some twenty-six years ago."

The girl's face flushed at this correct statement of her age.

She did not look more than sweet sixteen.

"I know you now," she said as she bit her lips in fear and wrath; "you are Nick Carter."

"Wrong."

"Then who are you, if not he?"

"I am Chick, the Little Giant's assistant."

"I've heard of you. But where is your superior?"

"Don't know. Maybe dead. Haven't seen him since yesterday afternoon."

"Never mind him, then. What's your lay? What do you want?"

The girl was recovering her self-possession.

"There is but one Nick Carter," ran her thoughts at this juncture "He is indeed a terror, but I'm not afraid of a dozen Chicks or Dicks or Toms or Harrys."

"What do I want?" said Nick. "Information, nothing more and nothing less."

"About what?"

"About you."

"I'm nobody—just a plain servant-girl; wages, twelve dollars a month and found."

"Not wanting, I hope."

"Sir."

Miss Dare gave the false Chick a look of lofty contempt.

"See here, Serena, this won't do, won't do at all. See?"

"Can't see for the dust in the room. Haven't swept yet."

"That ought to be an easy job for you."

"Why?"

"You have such a sweeping manner."

Nick gave utterance to a low chuckle.

Then he glanced at his watch.

No time for chaffing. He must get down at once to bed rock business.

The girl was turning her back on him, when he said abruptly and with more sternness than he had hitherto assumed:

"Sit down and answer my questions. Your fate is in my hands. If you refuse to obey me, I'll have you in jail for that Sacramento job in less than half an hour."

Miss Dare began to tremble again.

She sat down and faced him.

"Will you promise not to use your knowledge against me if I answer your questions to the best of my ability?"

"I will not only make that promise, but I will give you the further assurance that you shall never be prosecuted for the crime."

"Ah!" with a sigh of intense relief, "then I am satisfied. Go ahead with your questions."

Nick had been quite easy in his mind when he made the promise.

He neither run any risk in doing so, nor did he put any onerous task upon his shoulders.

The man upon whom the panel game had been played had died the week before in Spokane.

Nick had learned the fact before he had left San Francisco.

It was evident from Miss Dare's lack of knowledge on the point that she was not a very close reader of the daily papers.

The examination began in this wise:

"How long have you been in service here?"

"Since yesterday."

"Who engaged you?"

"Mrs. Vane."

"Through an advertisement?"

"No."

"At an employment office?"

"No."

"How, then?"

"I made a personal application for the place."

"How did you know there was a vacancy?"

"I did not know."

"Then some one must have sent you here?"

"Some one did."

"What is some one's name?"

"A gentleman I used to know in Sacramento."

"Don't close up like an oyster at the most important point, Serena. A gentleman from Sacramento is very indefinite. I do not doubt but that there are several gentlemen in Sacramento, and it may be—it's a bare possibility, Serena—that your friend from the capital city may not be a gentleman in the proper sense of the term. I'll write to Chief Rodgers for a list of all the gentlemen in his bailiwick. If his name appears thereon, I'll call at the jail, Serena, and let you pick it out."

Her eyes snapped savagely, but she made no answer.

"Out with the name, Serena, or——"

"His name is Albert Dellman."

"I thought so."

"What do you know against him? Nothing, for he is one of the most respected and popular residents of San Francisco."

"Is he? Then he doesn't live in Sacramento now?"

"He never lived there. I met him while he was up on a visit."

"Of pleasure?"

"Pleasure and business."

"Strange that such a reputable gentleman should have become the friend of a panel—but, no, Serena, I'll not refer to

your past again. Now that you've turned over a new leaf, all shall be forgotten."

The girl looked at him and shut her lips tightly.

"She could murder me with pleasure at this moment," thought Nick.

The examination was resumed.

"Albert Dellman sent you here for a purpose. What was it?"

"To keep him informed as to the goings on in the house—who came, who went, what was said, and what was done."

"Anything more?"

"No."

"Other instructions to come later, I presume?"

"Presume what you like—I don't know."

"Where were you to meet him and make your report?"

"At the Galendo Hotel, room——"

"When?"

"Every evening at eight o'clock, until further orders."

"Very good. Now then, Serena, you will not keep any of these appointments, nor will you see Mr. Dellman again, not even if he calls in person at the house and asks for you."

Miss Dare bowed her head in acquiescence of the arrangement.

A few more words in relation to her conduct while she remained under the Vane roof, and the detective curtly requested her to inform Miss Hester Astorel that he desired to see her at once on business of pressing importance.

A few moments elapsed and the daughter of the millionaire entered the parlor.

She was a demi-brunette, with a low, broad brow, serious gray eyes, a face of rare loveliness, and a tall, symmetrical figure, and she carried herself with the grace and dignity of a duchess.

Her face was grave when she entered the room, but when Serena Dare had closed the door behind her and she found

herself alone with the disguised detective, her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she came forward, and, offering him her hand, spoke thus impulsively:

"Oh, Mr. Carter, how glad I am that you have come. I had every confidence in you, of course, but I feared after what papa said when he came home yesterday that you might meet with some terrible accident, and leave us defenseless."

"Accidents will happen," Nick replied, "but then, if I failed to keep my engagement, there was Chick, who could take my place."

"Yes, yes, but I am glad that you have come."

"Are you certain that I am really Nick Carter?" said the great detective, laughingly. "We have met before, I am in disguise, and yet you implicitly confide in me as the genuine and only Nicholas C."

"I trust to my intuition. It never failed me yet," she responded, quietly.

"And may it never fail you," said Nick, earnestly. "Now to business, for my time is short. Did you receive a letter last night or this morning from Albert Dellman?"

"Yes."

"Will you allow me to read it?"

"Certainly."

While she was gone from the room to get the letter, Nick glanced at his watch. Half-past eight.

An important move must be made before nine o'clock.

He was prepared to make it.

CHAPTER V.

DANGER IN THE AIR.

Hester Astorel was gone but a few moments.

Nick took the letter which she placed in his hands and read the following:

"Miss Astorel:—A rumor has reached my ears that yourself and your mother

look upon me as the enemy whose evil machinations against your father induced his hurried flight to Honolulu. A decent regard for my honor, my reputation, hitherto unassailed, demands that I should at once offer such proof as must convince you that the rumor is as baseless as it is malicious and cowardly.

"As an act of justice to myself will you permit me to call upon you as soon as possible? An immediate answer is earnestly requested.

"Most respectfully yours,
"Albert Dellman."

"A very cunning effusion," said Nick, when he had finished reading the letter, "but luckily no one will be deceived by it."

"Thanks to you, Mr. Carter."

"He knows very well that his name has not yet been publicly connected with your father's departure," the detective went on, "and he also knows, or has every reason to know, that Mr. Astorel made no secret to his family of the knowledge he had gained relating to the villain who had robbed him.

"Therefore, Miss Astorel, the point he aims to make is to clear his skirts with you. What his object can be, I leave for you to judge."

Nick gave her a look whose meaning she was quick to interpret.

"I have never met the man but once," she said, "and he has never pretended to be an admirer."

"Perhaps he admires your fortune."

"Perhaps he does, but his admiration shall not profit him any."

"Yet I would advise you to answer the letter, and grant his request."

"Very well, Mr. Carter."

"You might make the appointment for to-morrow evening, if convenient."

"Yes, that will suit."

"If you should meet him anywhere to-day do not speak to him."

"I do not think there is any likelihood of my meeting him to-day."

"Are you not going to the Warner Miller reception?"

"Yes."

"With your mother?"

"Yes."

"Then if you do not see Albert Dellman there, he will have his eyes on you beyond the shadow of a doubt. And I will not be surprised if your humble servant comes in for a large share of the villain's attention."

"At the reception?"

"Yes, for I shall be there in the guise of your respected uncle, whose existence, by the way, you never dreamed of until you read the personal in the Bulletin."

After promising to see her again, Nick hurried off to a cheap lodging-house down the street, into which he quickly disappeared.

Ten minutes later, just as the clock in the little office struck nine, there emerged from the establishment a stout, well-dressed gentleman with a snowy white hair and beard, and a noble bearing.

He walked with an erect figure and a military tread, using his heavy, gold-mounted cane, not as an ornament, but as a necessary aid to locomotion.

The reception was to be held at the court-house, and in the forenoon, for the reason that the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce had arranged to honor the gentleman from New York in the afternoon.

Mr. Miller had come to California as the representative of the Nicaragua Canal Company, and as the enterprise was one in which the business men of the State were vitally interested, he had been everywhere received in the most cordial manner.

The Oakland reception had been arranged under the auspices of the Board of Trade, and was not limited to gentlemen, because there were ladies in Mr. Miller's party whose claims to the courteous con-

sideration of the Californians could not consistently be overlooked.

The ladies of Oakland had appropriated the judges' chambers, adjoining the large court-room as a committee-room.

Here, a short time before the opening of the proceedings, sat Hester Astorel and her mother; the latter a handsome, middle-aged lady, with a plump figure and a comely and intelligent countenance.

Her manner was serious and expectant, and she kept her eyes fixed upon the doorway.

The entrance of the old gentleman with the gold-mounted cane caused her features to brighten with pleasure and satisfaction.

"My dear niece," spoke the new-comer, as he came forward and took her two hands in his and softly pressed them, "I am pleased to meet you under these happy circumstances. I saw your husband in the East and counted on meeting him here to-day. But business is business and he had to sail for the islands."

"He went for his health," said Mrs. Astorel, with a smile, which the new-comer returned. "He had met with some reverses, and his health had given away under them."

"Pardon me, then, for having alluded to the present circumstances as happy ones. I am deeply grieved to find that they are tinged with sadness, but——"

"What can't be cured must be endured, eh?"

The ladies started at the voice, which came from the doorway, and looking up saw a policeman of the "flash" order standing there with a grin upon his face.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," he said, still grinning, "but I'm used ter sorrer, and know it ain't er biter use cryin' over spilt milk. See?"

Nick Carter, alias Col. Bently Henderson, Mrs. Astorel's uncle, now spoke up:

"Look here, my man," he said, pompously, "you may not know with whom

you are taking liberties. Another insulting word from your coarse lips and old as I am, I will arise and throw you into the street, and there dance upon your anatomy until you cry for quarter."

"Who are you, any how, old skeezicks?"

"There is my card, sir."

The policeman picked up the piece of pasteboard which Nick threw at him, glanced at it coolly, and then as coolly put it in his vest-pocket.

"Colonel, I apologize. I did not know you were a Missourian. Ta-ta!"

The policeman disappeared with a broader grin than ever upon his countenance.

Outside he was greeted by Albert Dellman.

"Well," queried the arch-villain, "how is it, Sam?"

"It's all right," returned Chick, alias Boston Sam, "for he's in there."

"Who? The colonel?"

"Yes."

"Good. His appearance will cause me to make a change in my programme, but a change for the better."

"What am I to do?"

"When the reception is over, get him into a corner alone."

"I've got an excuse to do that. I insulted him, and I've apologized, but my conscience troubles me, and I want to apologize again."

"When you've got him alone, tell him that you are the everlasting friend of any man who fought in a Missouri regiment; that you are from Hannibal yourself, and have often heard his name mentioned in terms of praise and admiration by the people of that section of the State. Give him a big fill about the chances of picking up fortunes in California."

"But will he listen to all this balderdash?"

"Listen! He'll suck it all in like mothers' milk. I know the stuff of which

these pompous military cusses are made. They like flattery and they think they know it all, whereas they are the easiest people in the world to hoodwink."

"All right. I'll do as you say."

"After you've got him interested, play the gold-brick racket on him. He'll take in all you say as gospel truth, or else I'm mistaken in my man."

"Where shall I locate the brick?"

"In the hills, a few miles from town, on the Martinez road. Tell him it's not far from Joaquin Miller's mountain home, and that he can make a call on the poet while he is up there."

"Well, what next?"

"Tell him if he wants to see the brick, he must go out with you this afternoon, or right after the reception. That won't take long, for Miller is in a hurry to get to San Francisco, and you can probably start by one o'clock."

"What am I to do when I get him in the hills?"

"Nothing. Just get him out of town, and leave the rest to me."

The pseudo Boston Sam pretended to be satisfied with the programme, and at once proceeded to carry out his part of it.

Of course he had no difficulty in persuading the false Col. Henderson to take a ride with him after lunch.

Nick was not a bit surprised when Chick related his conversation with Albert Dellman.

"Just what I expected, what I wanted in fact," he said. "I assumed the role of the millionaire uncle in order to court an abduction, and abducted I am going to be."

"Albert Dellman is in urgent need of fifty thousand dollars, and as I have spoiled his plan to make it out of Marcus Astorel by sending the broker to Honolulu, he will snap at the first chance that offers itself to obtain the money by robbing somebody else."

"After you finish your business in the

hills, Chick, you must drive back to town and remain there, keeping a close watch over the Vane residence, until I arrive."

"Trust me for that."

"I do trust you, Chick. By the way, what makes you fidget about so? Is it pure nervousness from overwork, lack of sleep, or what?"

"I feel out of sorts, why, I don't know. Perhaps there is too much electricity in the air."

And the brave fellow tried to laugh off his nervous feeling, and partially succeeded.

Their talk was interrupted by the entrance of a number of ladies who announced that the excercises were about to begin.

Nick did not remain to listen to the speeches, but after a few words with Mrs. Astorel and her daughter, went to the Galendo Hotel and registered as Col. Henderson, of Missouri.

While the great detective was away, Chick was talking business with Dellman, in one of the small back rooms of a Seventh street hotel.

At one o'clock in the afternoon the disguised detectives, playing the parts of villain and dupe, respectively, left Oakland in a spanking rig—a span of fast-stepping nags, and a handsome phaeton.

As they passed through the suburban hamlet of Temescal they both caught a fleeting glimpse of the face of a man who was supposed to be at that moment either in Saucelito or San Francisco.

It was that of the genuine Boston Sam, and he had been sitting at an open window in the second story of a large building evidently a hotel or lodging-house, when the team approached.

He gave one glance at his counterpart, and then rose hurriedly and took himself out of sight.

"Queer," muttered Nick, "very queer, indeed."

"I don't understand it at all," remarked Chick.

"It's certain that he did not intend that we should see him."

"Yes, for he dodged back out of sight the moment he clapped his eyes on me. What's up, do you think?"

"Something that we had not counted on, Chick. Dellman has made a discovery of the cheat you have been practicing on him."

"Do you think, Nick, that he found out I was not Boston Sam before he sent me on this errand?"

"No, he was a hoodwinked man up to the moment we left the morgue."

"But Boston Sam must have seen him, else he would not be over here in Temescal, close to the foothills, and on the route mapped out for me by Dellman."

"Undoubtedly."

The horses by this time had gone a few blocks past the building.

"Chick, we must checkmate this game, if we can."

"Of course."

"I will go on with the team, while you had best get out and interview Mr. Boston Sam. It's a ticklish job I've laid out for you, my boy, but I'll trust you to carry it through all right."

"I'll do the best I can."

Without further words, Nick's plucky assistant got out of the phaeton and walked back to the hotel.

Boston Sam met him at the foot of the stairs as he was about to ascend to the second story.

The two men, habited alike, and resembling each other so closely that an intimate friend might have found it hard work to tell which was the false and which the true, stared at each other for a moment without speaking.

Then the simon pure Boston Sam opened his mouth. "I've been looking for you," he said.

"That's lucky," returned Chick, coldly.

"It's the biggest kind of luck. Come up stairs, won't you?"

Chick followed the reprobate policeman to the room in which he had been seen from the phaeton.

The brave fellow vaguely felt as he took a seat that there was danger in the air.

CHAPTER VI.

CHICK'S DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

Once seated in the room, Chick started the ball by saying:

"What do you want of me?"

"I want your advice."

"State your case."

"First let me explain. I went to Saucelito, and did not find your man, of course."

"Why, of course?"

"Because the man lives in the moon. I got back to San Francisco by the late boat last night, and learned from Flat-Nosed Batson that I had been monkeyed with by a detective."

Chick whistled.

Here was news indeed.

"Where did you see Batson?" he asked, quickly.

"At the Red Retreat."

"How did he get out of jail?"

"On an order from Nick Carter, the man who caused his arrest."

"That was a queer proceeding, wasn't it?"

"No, for Chief Crowley was holding Batson subject to Nick Carter's instructions. Crowley would do anything to oblige the New York detective."

"Yes, I presume he would. And where is Carter now?"

"I have no idea. You ought to know, it seems to me."

"Why ought I to know?"

"Because you're his partner, that's why."

"Am I? And how did you arrive at that extraordinary conclusion?"

"By talking with Flat-Nosed Batson and afterward with Albert Dellman. We put two and two together, and tumbled to the truth in no time. This morning I came over to Temescal at Dellman's order."

"Why didn't you go up into the hills with your companions in crime and have the settlement with the colonel and myself occur at one and the same moment?"

Boston Sam grinned.

"I'd as soon tell you as not," he said.

"The boss thought the business might be managed better if the forces of both opposing parties were divided."

"By which you mean that he expects to make as quick work of the colonel as you will make of me."

"Precisely."

The cool audacity of the ruffian "rattled" Chick somewhat.

"Well, then," he said, sternly, as he rose to his feet, and put his hand on his trusty revolver, "suppose you start in now with your little circus. You have been hired to lay me out. Proceed with the laying."

Boston Sam stood up with a strange smile on his face.

He made no attempt to draw a revolver.

Nor was his attitude an aggressive one.

For one moment he looked at Chick, whose pistol was out, and cocked, and then suddenly threw up his hands.

On the instant something happened that Nick Carter's brave assistant had not calculated on.

When he had entered the room he had unthinkingly taken the seat Boston Sam had indicated.

It was directly under a sliding trap-door in the ceiling, put in probably for purposes of ventilation.

When he arose to his feet the door slid back noiselessly and the face of a man appeared at the aperture.

The face belonged to Flat-Nosed Batson.

One of his hands clasped the handle of a tailor's goose weighing a dozen pounds or more.

His eyes, meanwhile, were fixed intently upon the person of Boston Sam.

When the latter raised his hands in air, Flat-Nosed Batson acted.

Down went the heavy iron in the direction of the unsuspecting Chick's head.

Only a miracle, it seemed, could intervene to save his life.

Chick could never explain why he moved his position at that supremely critical moment.

But he did move forward a step, involuntarily, and the goose, instead of crushing his skull, just grazed his right elbow.

Striking the young detective's "funny bone," it gave him such a queer sensation, as of partial paralysis, that he relaxed his grasp on his revolver and it fell to the floor.

He stooped quickly to pick it up, but before he could reach it, Boston Sam was upon him.

A terrific struggle ensued.

Boston Sam, as he rushed forward, essayed to throw his arms around the detective's neck.

Without raising his head Chick anticipated the movement.

Before the ex-sluggish's hands touched his would-be victim's shoulders, Chick had him about the waist.

The next instant the assistant of the great Nick Carter gave a superb exhibition of his muscular strength.

The burly body of Boston Sam rose quickly in the air, and as quickly shot backward and descended with crushing force against the plastered partition.

Panting from the terrific effort he had put forth, Chick stood still for one mo-

ment and looked at the form of his partially stunned adversary.

Suddenly Boston Sam's heavy shoulders began to move.

Chick gave a step forward with revolver clubbed, when a noise at the door attracted his attention.

He turned his head and on the instant Flat-Nosed Batson entered the room.

With one bound, and regardless of the weapon that confronted him, he was at Chick's side.

Dodging the blow aimed at his head, he raised his right hand which had been closed since his entrance, and threw some powdery substance in the gallant young detective's face.

It was red pepper, and partially filling Chick's eyes, nearly blinded him, at the same time causing him the most excruciating pain.

But he did not meekly fold his hands and give up the ship, though his situation was a most desperate one.

With a yell like that of a wild beast he sprang upon Batson, beat him to the floor, stamped on him, then turned as he saw Boston Sam coming, and assailed that fighting expert with the ferocity of a demon.

Chick's blood was up.

He could scarcely see, and he was suffering agonies from his injured eyes, and yet he felt possessed of the strength of a dozen men.

Boston Sam had his knife out—a huge Chinese cleaver—but Chick cared no more for the weapon than if it had been a toothpick.

His onslaught was so furious that the villain could do no more than give Chick a slight prick in the arm.

The smarting sensation caused by the puncture of the flesh gave zest to the detective's ferocity.

He pummeled Boston Sam until the ex-sluggish sank unconscious to the floor with

features indistinguishable by reason of blood and bruised flesh.

Flat-Nosed Batson had not moved since Chick had laid him out.

"There," groaned the brave fellow, as he groped his way to the door, "I think they're fixed for a few moments, long enough for me to get down stairs to the wash-room."

He reached the door, opened it, and passed into the corridor.

He felt about the lock after he had closed the door, found the key, turned it, and then taking the key out put it in his pocket.

At the top of the stairs he hesitated a moment, for it seemed to be darker than usual in that locality.

Had his eyesight grown dimmer, or had the hall been darkened since his entrance into the house?

But he had no time for speculation.

He must do something at once to relieve his eyes.

With his hand on the balustrade, he prepared to descend the stairs.

He took one step, and nothing happened.

Two steps, and—

His feet encountered space.

A cry of terror involuntarily burst from his lips as he went down, to strike with a cruel crash among a heap of broken boxes, old bottles, and dishes, and to feel his senses leaving him.

As he lay there under the stairway without sense or motion Boston Sam came noiselessly out of the room above, and stopping at the head of the stairs listened intently for a moment.

Satisfied that the detective had fallen into the trap set for his benefit in the event of his escaping from the clutches of his foes in the room, the ex-sluggish went back for his comrade in crime.

But Flat-Nosed Batson was too sick to move.

He was a very sick man, indeed.

After trying in vain to arouse him Boston Sam made up his mind to descend to his victim alone.

He found Chick still insensible, and dragged his body from under the stairway to a small room in the basement.

After securing his ankles and wrists with stout cords he locked him in and departed.

The room had no window, and was a veritable dark hole.

An hour passed away before Chick came to his senses.

His eyes no longer pained him, but because he could not penetrate the black darkness of the apartment he thought he had gone blind.

But he gave no serious thought to his own situation.

One subject alone engrossed his mind, and as a dire possibility presented itself, the cold perspiration started to his forehead.

"If Nick should fail, if he should be opposed by the whole force of the enemy and overcome or killed, a terrible thing might happen to Miss Astorel, for it is not her money alone that the villain Dellman seeks."

Gloomy, indeed, were the brave young detective's thoughts as the hours went by in that dark and stifling house, and no relief came.

CHAPTER VII.

INVIRONED BY PERILS.

Luck had favored Albert Dellman in his villainous crusade.

After he had parted with the false Boston Sam on the night of the Leidesdorff street adventure he had gone to his room and put on his thinking cap.

Matters during the evening had proceeded so smoothly that he began to suspect that there might be a screw loose somewhere.

Heretofore his operations had been con-

ducted with such skill and shrewdness that the possibility of detection and consequent punishment had been thoroughly guarded against.

In fact, so well had he carried on his game of robbery that he had had the unblushing effrontery to tell Marcus Astorel to his face on the street that he, Dellman, was the man who had planned all the abductions and had profited by them.

"The cowardly miser," said the villain to himself, as his mind reverted to his bad performances of the past, "was afraid to put his case in the hands of the local detectives, for fear that I might tumble to the game and come down on him for it worse than ever. So he had to go to New York and dig up this man, Carter. A smart detective, none smarter in the United States, but I've been a match for him, all the same," he chuckled, "and, what's more, old Astorel can't put up any trick to catch me that I won't be able to get away with."

Then as he thought of what had slipped from his grasp by the sudden departure of the broker, his hands clinched in murderous anger, and he cursed the day that saw Nick Carter enter into the fight against him.

After a weighty consideration of the situation, he determined to have another interview with Flat-Nosed Batson before he went to bed.

Perhaps that worthy might either ease his mind or prove that he had really been duped.

When he reached the city prison a patrolman, who was temporarily in charge of the office, had just left his post to attend to the agonizing call of one of the female prisoners.

Dellman stood by the railing so that he could look upon the desk.

An open note, probably but recently taken from the envelope which lay beside it, gave him a serious start, for he read the name at the bottom of it.

The name was "Nick Carter."

Watching his chance while the officer's back was turned, he snatched up the note and hastily read it.

It was short and to the point.

"On no account must you permit any one from the outside, no matter if he were the governor himself, to see or talk with Batson until I call or send a written order."

Dellman, after reading the note, glanced quickly down the passage, and to his unbounded relief saw that the officer was in the act of entering the cell where the woman who had called to him was confined.

Realizing that moments were golden he whipped out his pocketbook, found a blank leaf, and with a pencil quickly copied the great detective's signature.

An expert at forgery, he made every stroke of his pencil tell.

His work done, he put the book in his pocket, replaced the note on the desk, and walked noiselessly out.

As he was passing by the quarters set apart for the newspaper reporters a thought struck him, and he glanced in.

No one was there.

Dellman, without a moment's pause, walked into the room, which was lighted up, and sat down at a table, provided with writing materials.

He took out the pocketbook, tore out the leaf with the imitation of Nick Carter's signature, and placed it before him on the table.

Then he found a half sheet of foolscap, and soon produced the following letter:

"It is necessary for the success of an important movement against an Eastern crook, lately arrived here, that James Batson should be released, temporarily, from confinement. I am unable to come to the prison in person. Mr. Dellman, my friend, and with whom you are acquainted, is empowered to take charge of

Batson upon his release. Let Flat-Nose out on receipt of this, and oblige
 "Your friend,
 "Nick Carter."

This he handed to the officer in charge of the prison.

Having read the false order the officer, as a careful man, compared the signature with that of the note he had received earlier in the evening.

They were apparently identical.

"All right, Mr. Dellman," he said, and five minutes later Flat-Nosed Batson and his employer were outside and on their way to an underground oyster saloon.

Up to this time, though suspicious that some of his plans had either miscarried or were in danger of miscarrying, Dellman's mind had not dwelt on the possibility that Nick Carter might be alive.

It was reserved for Boston Sam, who joined the party soon after they came into the eating house, to open the arch-villain's eyes to the truth, and to show him the awful precipice upon which he was standing.

Nick Carter alive meant his downfall, for the forgery would be detected before another day ended.

If luck would but favor him in just one instance he might win his wicked battle after all.

If Nick Carter would only go to Oakland in the morning without calling at the city prison and discovering the deception that had secured the release of Batson, all would be well.

It was extremely probable that the great detective would take an early boat for Oakland in order to attend to his business with the Astorels, and it was not likely that he would call at the city prison before starting.

So Dellman reasoned, and as the sequel has shown he reasoned well.

But to make sure, he was up before daybreak next morning, and while Bos-

ton Sam watched the city prison entrance, he piped off the ferryboats.

Arrangements for the day's programme had been made with his two hirelings the night before.

He was therefore prepared to leave the city when he saw Nick Carter in the guise of a book canvasser step up to the ferryboat office and purchase his ticket.

Dellman's power of penetration was phenomenal.

It was well nigh impossible to deceive him when his senses were alert, and he was on a keen lookout for points.

He knew Nick Carter the moment he saw his face, and noted the peculiar poise of his finely shaped head, and thus knowing he set out to shadow him.

Nick, as the reader knows, on arriving in Oakland went immediately to the Vane residence on Broadway.

Dellman, in disguise, saw him enter the house, and rightly inferred that Miss Serena Dare would be subjected to a searching oral examination.

When Nick came out he was shadowed to the lodging-house, where he became metamorphosed into Col. Bently Henderson, of Missouri.

The arch-villain saw his quarry enter the court-house, and then grinned like a fiend.

He would have the shrewd detective where he wanted him before he left Oakland.

It was with malevolent joy that Dellman played Chick against Nick, and saw them enter a livery stable for the purpose of hiring a rig for the Martinez hills.

Before they started, however, the arch-villain had gone on horseback to the hills in advance.

He stopped a few minutes at Temescal, where he had staked Boston Sam and Batson, gave them some further instructions, and then rode on.

He was up on the first rise in the range

when Nick Carter driving alone began the ascent.

The great detective had changed his plan of procedure after parting with Chick.

In view of the momentous interests at stake it would be the height of rashness to risk an abduction while his faithful ally was absent and engaged upon an undertaking that might have a disastrous result.

Therefore, instead of permitting himself to be abducted, according to the original programme, he intended to close in on Dellman and bring him back to Oakland a prisoner.

The attempt at murder in the Leidesdorf street basement could easily be proven against the villain, and once in San Quentin, with a heavy sentence over him, his persecution of the Astorel family would cease.

Nick felt sure that he would meet Dellman in the hills from the fact that Boston Sam had been left behind at Temescal.

In anticipation of an ambush the detective kept a wary lookout.

He had nearly reached the summit when he saw a man sitting on a small culvert where the road made a bend.

It was Albert Dellman.

Nick drove up slowly, fearing no immediate trouble, because he still entertained the opinion that the villain knew him only in his assumed character of the Missouri colonel.

But when he came close enough to catch Dellman's eye he knew by its peculiar glitter that his identity was known.

And with this knowledge came the startling suggestion that his death and not his abduction was desired.

But he must keep up his role of colonel for the present, and not let the villain suspect he was aware that his identity had been discovered.

The horses were reined up at a sign from Dellman.

"Why," he exclaimed, in assumed astonishment, as he looked into the phaeton, "I expected my partner. Why didn't he come?"

"He had business in Temescal which detained him. But he will come out in an hour or so."

Nick spoke in a matter-of-fact way, though he could hardly keep a straight face.

A farce was being played by two excellent comedians.

But it might presently develop into a tragedy.

"The brick, Col. Henderson," said Dellman, respectfully, "is in yonder cabin."

He pointed to a small wooden shanty a few rods from the road at the opening of a small ravine.

"Bring it here. I'll wait for you."

"But it's buried."

"Can't you dig it up?"

"Yes, but it is very heavy, and if I brought it out here some one might come along the road and notice it."

"What of it? It's yours, isn't it?"

"Certainly it is mine, but I bought it from a man who had stolen it from a miner."

"Ah!"

"But if you buy it—say at half price—you can have it cut up, and dispose of it in sections without running any risks."

"I want to see the brick first. It may be bogus for aught I know."

"It is my desire that you should see it. Hitch your team to a tree, and come to the cabin with me. It is unoccupied."

"I am a stranger, and you may not be an honest man," said Nick, bluntly. "How do I know that you do not intend to rob me if you can?"

"I will prove to you that I am acting squarely," Dellman asserted, with feigned earnestness and sincerity. "Here now. I'll

lay my revolver and knife down here on this rock," indicating a flat boulder by the roadside. "You do the same with your weapons, and we'll enter the cabin unarmed."

"That's agreeable," said Nick who felt able physically to handle a quartette of Dellmans.

The arch-villain, when the team had been secured, walked toward the cabin, Nick following.

There was one small window on the side.

It was placed high up, and standing on tiptoe Dellman peered into the small room, and then motioned to the disguised detective to do the same.

Nick, with one eye on the man of crime, used the other to take in the details of the apartment.

It was unfurnished save for a long shallow box in one corner.

"The brick is buried under that box," said Dellman. "Come, let's go in."

Nick, not without some misgivings, followed the villain into the room.

But the moment the detective had taken a step across the threshold Dellman gave him a quick, powerful shove forward, and the next instant sprang out of the door, and closed it.

But the door was made of common red-wood boards, and the detective felt no alarm, for he knew he could kick it down before his enemy could return to the spot with the revolvers.

He had made a step toward the door with the purpose of demolishing it, when a peculiar hissing sound, which was quickly succeeded by a dry, suggestive rattle, rattle, rattle, made him start violently and then nervously turn to face the terrible danger that now unexpectedly menaced him.

What he saw drove the blood from his face.

He was a brave man, but the sight he beheld was one calculated to appall the stoutest heart.

From out the box in the corner there had crawled five large rattlesnakes.

Of the most active and venomous kind—the deadly diamond back—they were moving swiftly toward the man who had been caged in the shanty, in order that

he might fall a victim to their poisonous fangs.

It would be courting death to try to escape by the door, for before he could hope to smash it in the reptiles would be upon him. As for the window, there was no way of reaching it in time to break through and escape.

And yet he must do something; he must not stand still and accept the fearful fate which that villain of villains, Dellman, had meted out to him.

One moment more—all the thoughts that had passed through his brain had not occupied more than a few seconds—and the rattlers would be upon him.

One—the largest—had coiled close to his feet, and Nick's fear-dilated eyes seemed to pierce the veil which shrouded the future and to see himself a swollen, putrid corpse, and—when suddenly the thought came to him like inspiration, that all was not yet lost.

He had been a traveler in India, where the deadly cobra luxuriates, and he had been the companion and confidant of some of the noted fakirs and snake charmers of the Hindoo land.

He could now make practical use of the curious knowledge he had gained from them.

A low, sibilant whistle, made with closed teeth, arrested the motion of every rattler in the room.

The one nearest, who was about to strike drew back its head, slowly uncoiled itself, and slunk quietly to the cover of the box.

The others followed until not a snake could be seen.

Still the low hissing sound was kept up until the detective had reached the door.

He had his foot raised to break it down, when the thought of Dellman made him pause.

The villain must suppose that his fiendish scheme had succeeded.

Therefore he lowered his foot and listened with all his ears for any sounds of the enemy's return.

Soon a crackling of dry twigs outside announced that some one was approaching.

Nick began to groan faintly as the steps came nearer the door.

The key turned, the door was thrown

open, and then the detective made a rush and caught the oncomer by the throat.

One swift glance told him that the man was not Dellman.

He was tall, angular, hook-nosed, and was dressed like a hunter.

But he had muscles like steel, and was as active as a cat, as the great detective soon discovered.

The moment Nick's fingers clutched his throat, the man threw his long arms around his assailant's body, and gave him a hug like that of a grizzly bear.

Though expecting every moment that his ribs would crack under the terrible pressure to which they were being subjected, Nick gripped his opponent about the windpipe with desperate force.

His own breath was leaving him, and it did not seem possible for him to come out victorious in the struggle.

But at the moment when his fingers were ready to relax, Nick's unknown adversary dropped his hands.

This action was followed by a tighter, more fearful pressure of the throat, for with the stoppage of the hook-nosed man's efforts, Nick's lungs expanded, and new strength was infused into his muscles.

Not even a second Samson could long withstand the choking that the detective's foe was receiving.

His face became mottled, his eyes protruded, until it seemed as if they would burst from their sockets, and his tongue lolled out like that of a dog heated from fierce exertion.

At last his knees began to give way, and he became as limp as a rag.

At this stage of the proceedings, Nick suddenly withdrew his fingers from about the man's throat, and giving him a powerful shove made him measure his length on the ground.

As he lay there, and while the detective was searching his person for weapons, there came that sharp suggestive rattle, which Nick had heard with a shudder of dread but a short time before.

As he sprang to his feet, the rattler struck.

But the fangs were never meant to work harm to the great detective.

They had sought a nearer, better defined mark, the neck of the prostrate, unconscious man.

Too late to arrest the dread catastrophe, Nick could only seize the reptile by the tail, and beat its head into a jelly against the corner of the cabin.

A look about him, when he had finished this savagely pleasurable operation, showed him that the other rattlers—four in number—had taken advantage of the open door to escape from the cabin, and that they were now making off rapidly for cover among the rocks and brush a few rods away.

A glance at the rattlesnake's victim showed that human aid would be useless.

Struck in one of the most vulnerable portions of the body, full in the jugular vein, already the dark shadow of death had overspread the man's face.

With a grave countenance, Nick dragged the body into the cabin, and closed and locked the door.

He was deeply shocked and grieved at the occurrence.

But his grief would have been tempered somewhat had he known then, what he afterward discovered, that the dead man was an ex-convict, a notorious law-breaker, had been concerned in more than one murder, and that as Albert Dellman's tool he had assisted in the abduction of the various members of the Astor family.

In anticipation of the return of the arch-villain, Nick concealed himself in a clump of chemisal near the cabin and waited.

He was no longer unarmed, for upon the person of the rattlesnake's victim he had found two revolvers and a large hunting-knife.

Ten minutes elapsed and Dellman appeared in sight. In his right hand was a cocked revolver.

When within about ten paces of the cabin door, he stopped and listened for some sound from within.

A faint moaning noise greeted his ears as he bent his head forward.

Satisfied that his foul scheme had succeeded, Dellman walked rapidly up to the door.

He was about to turn the key when prudence suggested that he first take a look in at the window.

As he stood on tiptoe peering in through one of the panes, his back was

toward Nick, who was not more than ten feet away.

Now was the great detective's opportunity.

With the quickness of a panther he leaped forward and struck Dellman a powerful blow behind the ear.

The villain went down with such force that his head struck the ground with a resounding thud, while his pistol went flying out of his hand, and exploded in the brush.

Before he recovered his senses Nick was astride of his body, and busily employed in securing his wrists and ankles with cords which he had provided himself with before starting on his journey.

"There," he said to himself, as he prepared to rise to his feet, his work finished, "that job is settled, and it is a good job, too."

A rustling sound behind him made him turn with a start, but too late to save himself.

He had time only to see the evil face of Boston Sam, and then a heavy club descended on his head and consciousness left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK COMES OUT AHEAD.

It was close upon sundown when Nick Carter opened his eyes and realized his condition.

He was lying in the cabin, bound hand and foot, and within a few feet of the body of the man who had died from the bite of the rattlesnake.

His enemies had departed—perhaps gone to Oakland, or—he shivered, and grew pale at the thought—they had gone down the canyon to find more snakes to replace the ones which had escaped.

He did not try to account for the presence of the poisonous reptiles in the cabin when he had first entered it, for his thoughts were directed into sterner grooves.

The dead man could have furnished the explanation, for the snakes had been his property, and had been captured for shipment to the Smithsonian Institute.

Nick's head ached from the terrible blow he had received, and when his mind reverted to his unaccomplished work, the pain was intensified.

It became mental as well as physical.

The presence of Boston Sam in the hills—who should have been safe in the care of Chick had matters gone right—meant that some accident had happened to his faithful assistant.

Perhaps Chick had been taken by surprise, as he, Nick, had been, and was even now a prisoner, or worse still, dead in Temescal!

The thought of such a dire misfortune was an agonizing one to the great detective, for he believed if neither he nor Chick appeared in Oakland the next day, that some vile plot against Miss Astorel would be successfully carried out.

The great detective shut his eyes and groaned.

At the same moment, in Temescal, Chick, a prisoner also, was following his chief's example.

Could it be possible, thought Nick, that the cause of the wicked would be allowed to triumph.

Had his luck at last deserted him?

He would not believe it, and he tugged and strained at his bonds until the blood streamed from the torn flesh, but to no purpose.

The cords had been put on to stay.

He rolled over and over on the floor in the nervousness of acute despair.

Suddenly he found himself in front of the box which had been the nest of the rattlesnakes, and gazing at it as if fascinated.

Soon he began to tremble, not from fear, but from the suggestion of a blissful possibility.

The box had a sheet-iron band, and this band had been broken near the bottom, at one corner, leaving it jagged and sticking out.

Nick propelled himself by means of his knees and elbows until he reached the box.

Another instant, and with the jagged sheet-iron band he was sawing away at the cords about his wrists.

Five minutes sufficed to do the work and place him on his feet a free man once more.

Free! No, not entirely free, if action were to be considered.

He would not be free until he had passed the door and reached the open air.

He was moving toward the door, when he heard the key softly turn in the lock.

The enemy had returned.

Nick was unarmed, but he minded not this disadvantage.

In his present state of mind he felt able to cope with an army.

But though the door was unlocked no one entered.

Nick wondered greatly at this circumstance.

And all was so silent without.

What could it mean?

While he stood still, debating what he should do, a woman's shriek burst upon his ears.

It was succeeded by a man's brutal imprecation.

As Nick threw the door open and rushed out the shriek was repeated.

It came from the lips of a lovely woman not ten yards away.

It was Hester Astorel, and she was struggling in the arms of Boston Sam.

Nick was at the scene in two bounds, and it was not one blow that he gave the ex-sluggler, but two, three, four—upon head, face, and neck.

The assault resulted in a complete knockout.

Boston Sam sought mother earth with a sprawl that was far from elegant, while Hester sobbed her thanks on the great detective's manly shoulder.

CHAPTER IX.

VICTORY FOR THE RIGHT.

Boston Sam was handcuffed and lashed to a tree pending arrangements for his removal to the Oakland jail.

He was thoroughly cowed, and now knew that the game was up as far as he was concerned.

He told Nick that he had left Chick at Temescal in charge of Flat-Nosed Batson, who though not strong enough to travel, had yet enough physical ability and mental gumption left in him to guard a bound prisoner.

Dellman, he said, had started for Oakland immediately after Nick had been overcome and placed in the cabin.

"How did he go? With the team, or on horseback, as he came?"

"On horseback."

"And the livery rig—where is it?"

"Back in the road, where you hitched it."

"Good," said Nick, and with restored confidence he fairly beamed on the pale-faced young lady at his side.

"I saw Mr. Dellman in Oakland before I came out," she said, "and I also overheard a conversation he had with Serena Dare, Mrs. Vane's maid-of-all-work."

The detective showed the greatest interest at this statement.

"He came to Mrs. Vane's, thinking I was out," she went on. "I did go out to make some purchases, but after traversing a few blocks found that I had forgotten my purse.

"As I was returning to get it I saw Mr. Dellman enter the front gate.

"Suspecting that no good was meant by this call, I waited until the maid had admitted him, and then secretly entered the house by the back way.

"Serena showed him into the parlor, and as my mother and my aunt had gone out to a neighbor's, the two, thinking they were alone in the house, spoke in ordinary tones, so that I could easily hear everything that was said from my station in the hall.

"The maid told him of your visit early in the morning, and of other matters which it is not necessary now to speak of, and in return he informed her of what occurred in the hills and at Temescal.

"When the villain announced that your fate was sealed, and that the manner of death had been left with Boston Sam, I waited to hear no more, but hurriedly left the house, procured a saddle horse at a livery stable, and galloped swiftly to your assistance."

"Why didn't you bring an officer with you?" asked Nick, as he gazed at her with respectful admiration.

"I went to the police office, but all the officers were out. I did not even tell the captain what was wanted, I was so greatly excited. Minutes were precious to my mind, for at any moment this Boston Sam might take a notion to carry out his fiendish employer's order."

"It was well that you acted so promptly," Nick feelingly said, "for Boston

Sam was at the door of the cabin when you came in sight of it."

"I know, and when I saw him I ran forward with all my might."

"Were you armed?"

"I had this," said Hester, with a slight blush.

She held out a pair of scissors.

Nick could not repress a smile.

"I could find nothing else, except a carving knife, and that was too large and clumsy."

"You needed no weapon," spoke the detective, earnestly, "for your presence alone was sufficient to save my life. I shall never forget your courageous and self-sacrificing action."

Again the young lady blushed, but this time from pleasure, not shame.

They reached Temescal with Boston Sam just after dark.

Nick did not anticipate any trouble with Flat-Nosed Batson.

He expected to find the fellow half drunk and so stiff and sore besides from his bruises that he would not be likely to make much of a resistance.

And so it proved.

Batson was found squatted in the front of the room in the basement that held Chick a prisoner, with a bottle of whisky in his lap, and his head nodding drowsily.

Nick gave him a cuff that sent him sprawling on his back.

It did not take long to reduce him to utter subjection.

Entering the room quickly the great detective found Chick suffering more from sore eyes than from the inconvenience of his bonds.

An hour later Chick was in Oakland receiving medical treatment.

He was well enough to accompany Nick on a certain expedition at midnight.

It was determined that the arrest of Albert Dellman should take place at once.

He had made an appointment to call at Mrs. Vane's on the evening of the next day, but it would not be policy to wait until then before closing in on him.

Boston Sam and Flat-Nosed Batson were already in jail, and the former had made a full confession, which had been legally taken down and attested before a notary public.

Acting upon information furnished by the ex-sluggar, Nick and Chick went to a saloon on one of the main streets where gambling was surreptitiously carried on in a back room every night.

Given the "open sesame" by Boston Sam, the two detectives had no difficulty in obtaining an entrance.

The back room door was wide open, and the players at the long oval table—the game was faro—were in full view from the bar-room.

Albert Dellman sat facing the door, but his eyes were glued upon a stack of chips staked upon a card in front of him.

Nick and Chick got out of his line of vision, and calling the bar-keeper aside had a few earnest words with him.

He was not a bad sort of fellow, and kept what was known as a "respectable joint."

No thugs, hoodlums, or tin-horn players were allowed to participate in the games.

When Dellman's real character was made known to him he promised his hearty co-operation in the detective's scheme to place him under arrest.

As he sauntered into the card-room Nick and Chick placed themselves just out of sight, on opposite sides of the doorway.

The barkeeper waited until the deal in hand had been consummated and the bets settled, and then he spoke thus to Dellman:

"A gentleman of the name of Batson wants to see you outside."

The arch-villain started and turned pale.

If Batson wanted him, then something must have gone wrong.

Perhaps Chick had escaped from Temescal, and was even now in Oakland on his trail.

The bare possibility of a miscarriage of his evil plans gave him the cold shivers.

He rose quickly from the table, took something from his vest-pocket, and held it tightly in his hand as he walked toward the door.

Utterly unconscious of the nearness of the danger, he stepped confidently across the threshold, when——

"I want you," came with stern impres-

siveness from the lips of Nick Carter, who at the same moment seized his quarry by an arm.

Chick, on the other side, grasped the other arm.

It was all done in an instant.

Albert Dellman, in the grasp of two powerful and determined men, knew it would be a waste of time and energy to struggle.

He submitted to the handcuffing process without making a single movement in resistance.

But when his white wrists had been ornamented with Nick's steel bracelets he opened his mouth to speak.

"You've got your points down fine on me, I suppose?" he said, sneeringly, to Nick.

The detective nodded his head.

"Have you any objection to telling me what the case against me is?"

"None in the world."

And then Nick told him everything. Dellman's face was very grave at the conclusion. "I ought to have kept in the background," he muttered.

"As you did in the abduction cases, eh?"

"Yes. Batson and Sam worked those snaps for me."

They were about leaving the saloon when Dellman complained of faintness, and asked to be allowed to sit down for a few moments.

Nick saw no reason why the request might not safely be complied with.

But the moment Dellman sat down he raised his hands toward his face.

The hand which had been closed since his departure from the card-room now opened quickly, and a small pellet was as quickly transferred to his mouth.

"Too late," he cried out, in savage triumph, "for I'll be a dead man in twenty seconds."

Nick hastily called for mustard and salt, but before the barkeeper could furnish the articles Albert Dellman had ceased to breathe.

The papers next morning had the biggest sensation of the year.

The names of Nick Carter and his now famous assistant were in everybody's mouth.

A public ovation would have been

tendered them had they remained a day longer in the city of oaks.

But business had called them away before the gaming-house tragedy was a day old.

They carried with them the heartfelt gratitude of the Astorel family and something very substantial in the way of a reward, which received an addition when Marcus Astorel returned from Honolulu.

Boston Sam, by reason of his confession, got off with a light sentence for his share in the series of abductions.

Flat-Nosed Batson was taken to Denver, and tried on the old charge of burglary, and being found guilty was sentenced to imprisonment for twenty years.

[THE END.]

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "The Gold Wizard; or, Nick Carter's Clever Protege," by the author of "Nick Carter."

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