

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

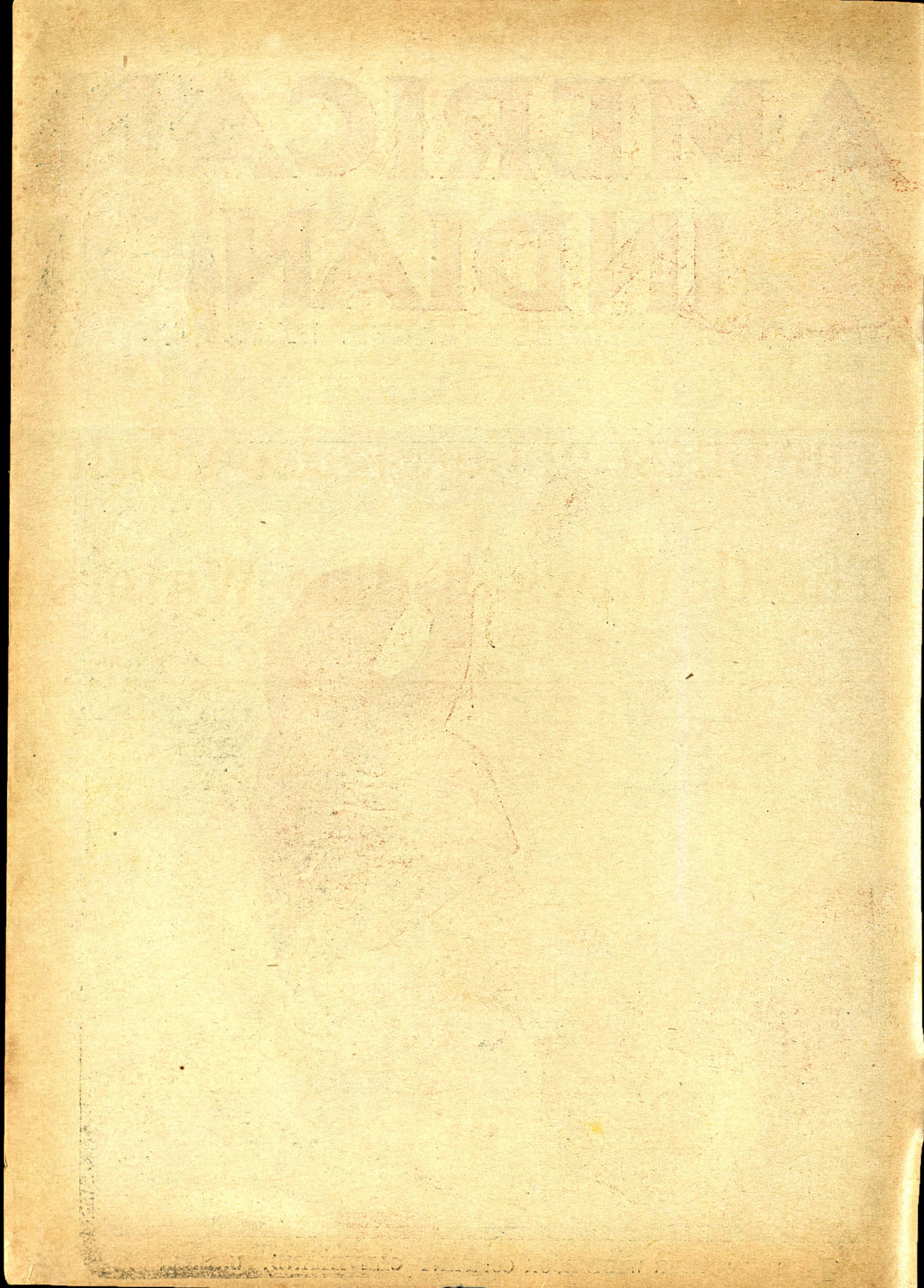
AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE CURSE OF CORONATION GULF



"IF YOU TOUCH A HAIR OF THAT GIRL'S HEAD
I'LL PUT THE GRAVE-CURSE UPON YE, OUTLAWS
THAT YE ARE," HOWLED THE WITCH OF THE SERPENT.



AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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The Curse of Coronation Gulf, or The Outlaws of Blue Waters

By Col. Spencer Dair

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

MOTHER MEG—THE WITCH OF THE SERPENT—The aged fortune-teller whose early life began in affluence and luxury and yet who ended her romantic career by a pistol shot from the hands of an outlaw. For many years she lived in St. Louis, Missouri, where she practiced her profession for the purpose of gaining money to aid her in the support of a child she had stolen in infancy. The story of old Meg touches upon the narrow line which separates the outlaw from the honest man.

ANDERSON FISH—He is an attorney who was named as executor of the estate of Franklin Thomas, a St. Louis banker, who had left many millions of dollars. The only daughter of the banker had been stolen in infancy and when the will of the child's father was opened, it was discovered that one-half of the money was to be devoted to the finding of the missing heiress. The lawyer found himself torn with conflicting emotions when a beautiful girl claims the fortune, and whose career hinged upon that of old Meg the fortune-teller. How Mr. Fish fulfilled his trust is a thrilling narrative.

ETHEL THOMAS—An unfortunate girl, who made a runaway marriage with Rudolph of the Long Knife, an outlaw well known on the shores of Coronation Gulf where he made a wide career as leader of a band known as the Outlaws of Blue Waters. It must not be forgotten, however, that there was an inner cord which bound the life of this girl with that of old Meg the fortune-teller. In fact, Ethel Thomas and old Meg were one.

MAXWELL HYDE—Once more the famous gun-man and former outlaw leader in his official position as a detective in the employ of the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild is called upon to exercise his talent in running down a band of famous outlaws who have looted the bank in the little hamlet of Cemetery Hill, Missouri. Maxwell Hyde rose to the occasion and meets with a series of exciting adventures, barely escaping with his life, but finding a fortune awaiting him at the end of his dashing career, so far as this case is concerned.

EDNA THOMAS—A beautiful girl who for many years was supposed to be the daughter of old Meg, the Witch of the Serpent. A famous band of outlaws, in looting the Cemetery Hill Bank which her father owned, discovered that she was a long-missing heiress to many millions of dollars. In their attempts to abduct her, the girl suffered many hardships and dangers, but finally comes to her own after a series of episodes which almost border on the marvelous.

DOCTOR MASON WHEELOCK—A brave man who knew how to use a gun when outlaws attempt to loot a store in a quiet Missouri hamlet.

RUDOLPH OF THE LONG KNIFE—An outlaw who conceived a plot of revenge which ended in the abduction of the only daughter of Franklin Thomas, the millionaire St. Louis banker.

CHAPTER I.

A PLOT FOR A FORTUNE.

Mother Meg hissed with rage as she turned her bleary eyes upon her caller!

A serpent twined around the body of the aged hag,

raised its head, and, in exact imitation of the crone, hissed at the sneering face of a young man who sat easily in a chair and viewed the angry woman and her no less angry pet with quiet intensity. Outside the traffic on Olive Street, St. Louis, made a strident com-

elling note to remind the figures in this drama of the heart that there were other things in this world than the point they were debating.

But in the pent-up rage that surged in the woman's breast, there seemed to be no room for outside influences. She was in deadly earnest and the broad-shouldered, athletic man facing her, whose sharp eyes narrowed with his intense gaze upon the faded ones of the old woman, saw that his mission was near the failure point. Mother Meg did not propose to give him information if she could help it.

"Now, Mother Meg," cried the man, his brown eyes shiftily looking away from the woman, while the snake around the hag's waist lulled itself back to its interrupted slumber at the touch of her withered hand, "I don't want you to get angry."

"I'm not angry," the hag replied. "But you touch me nearly with your questions. I do not know you but I can imagine your mission."

The man shrugged his shoulders and with a half-smile, gazed into the woman's face.

"You are shrewd," he replied. "I am willing to pay for any information you may give me."

"Gold could not buy my knowledge——"

"But how about trading a secret for a secret?"

Mother Meg gave her caller a swift glance. What did he mean? Had he information of which she was not in possession? Could he possibly have reached by another path the secret that she had long concealed? Her profession of fortune-telling made her observant of intonations of voice and she had the fortune-teller's craft in being able to translate expressions. This man she did not know. He had called upon her and given her her customary fee for looking into the future. Should she raise the veil for him? At least so far as telling him enough to whet his curiosity? Or should she lead him on by hints and vague allusions to the secret that she had buried in her heart for years?

As the hag thought, she glanced around the room and resorted to the art of her profession. Old Meg contorted her face, writhed and apparently fell in a trance.

"Ah," she said in a faint voice, "I see into the future! I look back over a stretch of desolate country. Down a winding road I see three horsemen riding. One man in the band is tall, clean-shaven, athletic. His companion is younger and wears a mustache——"

The caller gave a start. His hand lying upon his knees suddenly clenched itself, and then with lightning speed stole towards his hip pocket. The fingers of the hand grasped the butt of a heavy army revolver.

Old Meg through her veiled eyes, saw the gesture, and her intense cunning told her that she had struck the right cord. So she continued.

"The men I have been telling you of," she murmured in a small voice, "are hurrying toward a little hamlet. I can see the street of that little town, almost deserted and lonely. The men have entered the village. They are dismounting from their horses. I see the word 'bank' in gold letters. The leader of the little party has a revolver in his hand. He is entering the bank. His companions stand outside guarding the horses. I hear a shot——"

Old Meg gave a stifled shriek.

"Murder," she said, faintly. "Murder!"

The caller jumped to his feet. His face was white with a suppressed emotion.

"Stop, stop," he murmured. "You are describing——"

Never mind. I see that you are a clever woman. Where you have gotten your information I do not know. but you have described an event that happened within the last twenty-four hours, and I am willing to say to you that it was this event that caused me to call upon you."

It was the stranger's turn to be puzzled. He had known from certain knowledge that he had received, that Old Meg the fortune-teller, was in touch with the criminal world. The intangible underground current that like an electric wire flashes from one criminal band to another information of the acts of the respective parties, had in some way been crossed so that this old woman had been able to describe an event that had happened in the life of the strange caller not twenty-four hours before. Yet after all, the stranger knew that his identity had been heralded wide-cast in various newspapers throughout the country, and he was not sure but that the fortune-teller knew him from this reason. If she did, he also knew that she would have no trouble in imagining the scene she had presented to his mind. His career of crime had cut a wide swathe through the great Southwest. So for the purpose of extracting more knowledge of the woman's methods, the stranger in his mind decided to cross-examine the fortune-teller.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you are groping in the dark. Is there anything that you can tell me further that would lead me to believe that you know me and the object of my mission?"

Old Meg laughed shrilly. She sat up in her chair, dropped her trance like attitude and turned her shrewd eyes upon the speaker.

"I do not propose to speak your name. But I will write it."

The woman picked up a pad and pencil and rapidly wrote upon it. She extended her hand bearing the paper to the stranger, and allowed him to read what she had written.

"That's my name," murmured the man. "I see you have me right. I believe in you, and I am going to tell you the truth."

"Tell me the truth!" repeated the hag, "I do not believe you can tell the truth. But I am willing to listen to you."

"When we robbed that bank this morning, as you have described," the man said in a sneering voice, "we got away with the loot! In the great steel safe in the bank we found a tin box. In that box we discovered certain papers. These papers told us——"

"Of a certain girl," cried Meg with a mocking laugh. "You learned from those papers that twenty years ago the infant child of banker Thomas, whose millions were made in St. Louis, was stolen by its nurse, who had taken it out into Forest Park in this city for an airing, and from that day to this no trace of the child has ever been found. Into the vista of nowhere the nurse and child disappeared together. During the life of the father of the child, thousands upon thousands of dollars were spent in a vain endeavor to secure some information that might lead to the recovery of the baby. When banker Franklin Thomas died and his will was admitted to probate in the St. Louis Courts, it was discovered that one-half of his vast fortune, amounting to many millions of dollars, had been set aside to be devoted to finding the missing heiress. That girl to-day is twenty years of age. The papers con-

tained the reports of many detective agencies and all the facts narrowed down to one point—Old Meg the fortune-teller! She alone knows the secret and as soon as you discovered from the papers this fact you came to me. Man, do not try to fool me. I know why you are here. Drop that gun. You cannot intimidate me!”

The stranger trembled with eagerness. His face was white with suppressed emotion. His eyes snapped with anxiety.

“I see you know everything,” he said. “I don’t know where you got your information and I don’t care. What understanding can I come to with you? You have the information that I must get because I see now that an easy fortune awaits me if I can discover the whereabouts of the missing girl. Now look here, old woman, I didn’t come here for my health, and I’m out for the long green. Old man Thomas left a fortune of ten million dollars. That means that five millions dollars has been devoted to the finding of this missing girl. Think of it, you old fool! Five million dollars! The executor of the estate of Banker Thomas is living to-day in St. Louis. If we get that girl and deliver her to the executor of the estate, we can make ourselves rich for life. I am willing to go into a deal with you. You can’t pull this thing off alone. You know me and who stands with me in this affair. I know you. I know that you would sell your hope of immortality for cold cash. Suppose that we hitch up together. You deliver the girl to us and we will clean up the reward. I will guarantee to you the long end of the stick. We will stick up the executors of the estate for the entire five million dollars. Then it will be a case of addition, division and silence.”

Old Meg’s lips parted in a toothless grin. She saw that she had netted her fish. In the golden dream that came to her caller, he had dropped his subterfuge. The veneer of civilization and good manners had been dropped as a child throws away the mummer’s mask. The man stood revealed in his natural guise of a blackmailer.

“Brag is a good dog,” shrilled the old woman, “but Holdfast is a better one! You come to me asking me to give you a secret which I already have. All the information that you have I have known since the time that you were a toddling child. If you want to do business with me, come over!”

As she spoke, Meg extended her skinny hand as if receiving money.

The stranger arose and with head bowed paced thoughtfully back and forth in the narrow room. The serpent coiled around Old Meg’s body stirred its slimy folds and hissed feebly and then contentedly bowed its head in the woman’s neck and went to sleep again. Birds of rare plumage flitted through the room. The heavily draped window curtain stirred with the faint air of the June breeze. Still the stranger paced back and forth in his indecision. At length he raised his head and shot a keen glance at Old Meg.

“I am in your hands,” he growled, with a muttered oath. “What is your price?”

“Fifty thousand dollars,” murmured Old Meg.

“That’s pretty steep, isn’t it?”

“Take it or leave it. Do you suppose that I have held these secrets for all these years without knowing their value?”

“How can I trust you?”

“You can trust me as much as I can you. There ought to be some honor among we thieves!”

“I see you believe in calling a spade a spade,” laughed the stranger.

He thrust his hand within his clothing and rapidly drew forth a leather money belt. It was crammed full of bank bills of large denomination. With trembling hand the stranger counted out a large pile of bills. These he thrust into the hand of Old Meg. She clutched them and rapidly secreted them.

“Now then that we have made the bargain,” she cried, “I will see what I can do.”

“Where is the girl?” asked the man.

“All in good time, my friend, all in good time. You cannot walk until you can creep. Give me until to-night at midnight and I will think over our contract, and you come here to-night at that time. That is all I have to say to you now. Go.”

The stranger faded away; his sharp glance once more roving around the room seemed to take in every detail of the den.

For half an hour old Meg sat in her chair without stirring and apparently hardly breathing. Then she turned and in a calm voice said to some hidden person that the coast was clear.

With her words there stepped into the room from a closet in which he had been hiding a tall man. His clean-cut face, alert and shrewd, was wreathed in smiles. He sat down and breathed a long sigh of relief.

“Well played, Mother,” he said. “You are an artist! I did not think that fool outlaw would fall for this. It seems to me that we’ve got him. If I were you, I’d bank that money quick. When that fellow comes back he’ll have the rest of the gang with him, and they would slit your throat for a good deal less than fifty thousand dollars!”

Old Meg laughed.

“I’m not afraid,” she said. “It takes a smarter man than that fellow to do me up. Make yourself scarce. Return here at ten o’clock to-night. By that time I will have my plans better laid.”

With a nod, the man left the house, leaving Old Meg to further complete her arrangements.

It need not be said that the stranger who had been hiding in the closet was Maxwell Hyde in the employ of the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild. No better gun man lived than Maxwell Hyde. He had sworn to capture the gang, one of whose members had just bribed old Meg, and it was with great glee that he viewed the situation. Not five hours after the looting of the bank in the little town of Cemetery Hill, Missouri, where the bank robbers had learned the secret of the missing girl, information had been sent to Maxwell Hyde of the raid, and he was hot upon the trail immediately. He had known old Meg for years and when he had been informed of her complicity in the disappearance of the missing girl, he had hurried to her, knowing that the outlaws would immediately communicate with her. His wonderful detective mind had given him the proper thread to follow, and he had made an arrangement with old Meg prior to the arrival of the outlaw on a similar errand.

Maxwell Hyde stopped beneath the lamp-post and lighted a cigar. His heart beat high with his hope. He could not see that there was a flaw in his campaign, and he felt that at last, after years of endeavor, he was

going to accomplish the mission to which he had devoted his life.

Old Meg arose from her chair, untwined the serpent from around her waist and put the slimy thing in a large box. She then fastened the box, hurried to the door of the room and double-locked it, and then calmly took from her head a wig of stringy gray hair. Her hand quickly rubbed out the lines upon her face. She removed from her teeth several bits of court plaster which revealed them in their pearly whiteness, and, as a glove is removed from one's hand, in a few moments had removed all traces of the old hag Meg!

With a tinkling laugh the girl looked in the glass. She saw revealed the contour of a beautiful girl.

Old Meg, the fortune-teller hag, was the missing heiress!

CHAPTER II.

THE GANG MEET.

The outlaw, filled with pleasure at the easy deal he had made with old Meg the fortune teller, hurried down Olive Street, darted through several cross streets into Jefferson Avenue, then at his best speed whirled across to the Natural Bridge Road and walked along until in a quiet corner of the city, he met a man standing by the side of two horses.

The animals were Kentucky thoroughbreds. Each horse bore a Mexican saddle. From the holster of each saddle peeped revolvers. The man standing by one of the horses carried a rifle slung upon his shoulder.

Without a word the two men vaulted upon the backs of the animals, and sent the horses forward at a smart gallop.

Neither man spoke until they were far beyond Normandy station. Then the man who had met Mother Meg's caller pulled his horse out of his stride into a walk. His companion imitated him.

"Well, Clel Miller," asked the man who had met Mother Meg's caller, "Any luck?"

"Good luck, Jesse James," replied the man. "I got the surprise of my life when I had a talk with old Meg."

"You did!" replied Jesse, who thus stood revealed as the head of the notorious band of bank robbers which in the year '74 had been devastating the southwestern frontier of the United States. "You had better tell me all about it."

"That old hag knew all about the bank robbery we pulled off this morning," replied Clel Miller, in himself famous as a bank robber and bandit.

"What!" asked Jesse, with a tone of wonder in his voice.

"That's right, Jesse! She was wise to the fact that we held up the bank. She knew that we'd got to the box containing the information of the missing heiress. She made no bones of being the woman that I was after. Not only did she know about all we've done, but the old hellion had the diamond nerve to write my name upon a card and show it to me!"

In his astonishment, Jesse James pulled hard on the cruel Spanish bit in his horse's mouth, and the animal danced in fear and rage.

"You needn't pull the head off that horse in your amazement, Jesse," said Clel. "But still I don't blame you at that. I never had anything handed to me so quick in all my life. I felt exactly as if I had

walked out of a bank we had just robbed and had a man pull down a .45 on me."

"What kind of a looking woman was she?" asked Jesse.

"She looked to me as if she was about four hundred years old. She had a big snake around her waist that made me feel like the morning after, but she was right there with the goods, and I came into a deal with her and I had to stake her to fifty thousand dollars."

"That's a good deal of money, Clel."

"I know it is, but I figured it this way. That money came easy to us. We cleaned up a hundred thousand dollars on that round-up, to say nothing about getting next to a secret that if we work it out, will give us fifty thousand dollars. Now I look at it this way. It was dead easy money because all it took to get it was you, your brother Frank and me, three good horses, a sprinkling of good guns and a good deal of nerve. I said to myself when I handed over to the woman that roll, that all I've got to do is to give her the cash and thus lull her into confidence."

"Yes," replied Jesse, "I see that much."

"Then my plan is to go back to-night as I have arranged to. The old woman has confidence in me now. She won't object to you and Frank going back with me. As long as she plays fair, we will play fair. If it looks to us as if she was giving us the double cross, it only takes about two seconds and a half to stick a knife in her and we can get back that money anyhow. If she plays fair, what's fifty thousand dollars when you're talking about getting millions?"

A baleful light came into Jesse James's eyes. Cold, cruel and mercenary by nature, yet possessed of acute intelligence, he immediately began to find how he could not only get possession of the millions but of the fifty thousand dollars already invested in the enterprise.

Jesse James, of all the fierce and wild men that made the frontiers of the United States at this early date a by-word, was the most implacable of all the bandits. It has been said of him justly, that he was the most dangerous of all the early outlaws. His brother Frank was probably the braver of the two. He was never known to take down from any position that he had assumed. Jesse, more diplomatic, often gave a point away and resorted to an act of unnecessary cowardice to gain his point further along in his career; Frank always stood ready to defend his acts with his revolver. Clel Miller, more of a thug than any other in the famous Jesse James gang, governed by brute force alone. The three men made up a startling trio of desperate creatures.

"I will tell you," summed up Jesse, "how we will have to take up this situation. We will all go and see the fortune-teller again to-night. After I have talked with her, I can better judge what steps to take. In the meantime I have told Frank to go to an unoccupied house, half-deserted, not far from Normandy station."

"Isn't that rather rash? You know that there is a price already on our heads, set by the governor of Missouri, and aren't you afraid that some one will send word to the authorities, and that a posse will come out here and arrest us? You know there is a standing reward for the arrest of Jesse James, Frank James and Clel Miller."

Jesse sneered.

"The only thing that I kick about is that the Governor has offered twenty-five thousand dollars' reward for each one of us. It seems to me that as I plan most of the depredations of our crowd, that I ought to be worth a few dollars more, dead or alive, than you fellows."

"I suppose we are like so many bunches of radishes. You get three bunches for ten cents, or one bunch for five. The only thing that I'm afraid of is that some of the country bumpkins around here carried away with the hope of a big reward for our lives or arrest, will hustle into St. Louis and give the authorities the tip."

"Don't you worry about that. The house that I told Frank to go to has a reputation of being haunted, and any country yokel that comes this way, and should see lights about the old house, would swear that the place was inhabited by ghosts. Besides, no one can be sure that Jesse James and his gang will be caught. I usually go back and have a little personal interview with an informer after the informer has told his little story."

"And as a usual thing, the informer don't inform any more."

"Dead men tell no tales," replied Jesse.

Without further argument, the two men hurried away. After half an hour of hard riding, they arrived at the haunted house.

The house was a one-story log cabin. It was tumble-down, a portion of the roof having caved in, and was situated in the midst of a clump of chestnut trees. Through the trees from a roadway, a faint light could be seen issuing from the windows of the cabin. The scene was a desolate one. The house itself stood upon a little hill and was the most prominent object to be seen in miles. Around it stretched a bleak prairie. No other house could be seen from it, and there was something sinister and gloomy, stealthy with the flavor of old crime, that made it in itself a shuddering object to any eyes that might have rested upon it. The house was well known in the country-side as having been the scene of a particularly horrible murder years ago. The taint of the deed seemed to have imparted itself to the very building and so awesome was the feeling in the mind of people dwelling in that vicinity regarding the structure, that Jesse James with his acute mind could have taken no better shelter for himself and his gang than the one he had selected.

Even Clel Miller, steeped in crime as he was, felt a little tingle of dread run up his back bone as he gazed at the solitary house.

"Holy Smoke, Jesse!" Clel murmured. "That's a pretty bum looking joint you've selected."

Jesse laughed, pulled up his horse, dismounted and then gave the faint and gurgling cry of an owl.

"Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" he shrilled.

Thrice came the same answering call from the sinister house.

"All right," said Jesse to Clel. And leading his horse, followed by his companion, he wended his way up a road along which weeds grew dank, and amid the furtive twittering of birds which seemed to be alarmed at the intrusion of man in this solitude, hurried to the house where Frank James, pulling at his tawny mustache, stood in the doorway of the cabin awaiting them.

"I'm glad to see you fellows," Frank muttered. "Of all the God-forsaken spots on the face of the earth, this place is the limit and then some more."

"What's the matter?" snapped Jesse. "Have you got to the point where you're afraid to be alone? If you have, the sooner you trade your revolver for a hoe, the longer you'll live."

"That's all right," returned Frank, "there's more noises in this old place than there is anything else, and rats! I counted over a million of 'em, it seems to me, in a little more than an hour."

"Then you wouldn't recommend this spot as a nice quiet home for a gentleman in search of a country residence?" said Clel.

"Oh, go take a drink," put in Jesse impatiently. "This game we're on needs men without nerves."

"I don't need any false joy, Jesse," replied Frank. "Tell me what you fellows did."

In a few brief words Jesse outlined all that had been accomplished so far. He told his companions that while their plans were not as yet complete, he felt that he had taken a long step toward the accomplishment of the quest for millions upon which they had embarked. Yet at the same time he did not disguise the fact that much remained to be done.

"This game is a little bit out of our line, isn't it, Jesse?" asked Frank. "I don't object to walking into a bank and putting a gun to a cashier's nose and requesting him to hand me all the money he's got in the place, but this confounded diplomatic kind of crime never did appeal to me. In all our former little episodes, we've been doing the talking, and when we three were together, each man knew that he had a solid backing in the other man. Here we have to work through a woman of whom we know nothing and we have to depend, therefore, upon outside aid that may not stand straight with us. I tell you here, I don't like this game. It's too political. It reminds me too much of bribing office holders to vote bills that allow you to plunder somebody else."

"Of all the objectors that I ever met, you're the limit! If the Jesse James gang can't take the diplomatic field and win in it, we'd better disband. Don't forget that there's millions in this scheme. We are able to take care of ourselves. I don't know of a single bank robbery that we ever figured in that's had so much money in it as this scheme has. I vote that we make a dash for those millions."

"I vote that way also," cried Clel.

"Although I'm in a hopeless minority, I vote in the negative," rejoined Frank. "But as I am the kind of a man who believes in running with the majority, I'm with you, and we'll go and talk business with that old hag to-night."

The three men then entered the house, where upon an old sheet-iron stove Frank had prepared a simple meal. After getting some dinner, the three men again took up the question of their mission.

The general opinion, after much conversation, was that they had better await the developments of the night before deciding exactly what further steps they would take. That they would not give up the desperate plans they had made even if they had to go ahead without old Meg, was the general outline they sketched. Clel Miller then devoted himself to tethering the horses so they could feed on the grass surrounding the cabin, at the same time watching the

country around for any spy that might investigate their occupancy of the place, while Frank and Jesse James lay down on the bare and dirty floor to get some rest.

"The only thing that I can't size up," said Jesse, before he went to sleep, "is the position that Maxwell Hyde is going to take in this matter. He must have known long before this, that we have looted that bank. We have fought some sharp battles together and somehow by dint of great luck, we have succeeded in escaping the wiles of that infernal dog. But I must say that I would feel better off if Maxwell Hyde was eliminated from our plans——"

"From our plot," sneered Frank. "I never could understand, Jesse, why you don't kill that fellow."

"I've got a reason," replied Jesse.

"You always have a reason for everything," replied Frank, "but somehow or other you always keep your reasons to yourself."

"Don't bother me," sleepily answered Jesse. "I'll kill Maxwell Hyde when I think it is the proper time."

The two outlaws then went to sleep as calmly as if they were children, although they should have been haunted in their dreams by the terrible criminal deeds which the testimony shown in the records of the police authorities of the world would have born witness.

CHAPTER III.

THE EXECUTOR IS SURPRISED.

The imposing and palatial offices of Anderson Fish were filled with clerks on the same afternoon that Jesse James and his brother Frank guarded by Clel Miller, lay hidden in the haunted cabin on the Natural Bridge Road in St. Louis.

Anderson Fish, a tall, florid-faced man, with gray side whiskers and a drooping gray mustache, sat in his private office engaged in opening his personal mail.

As he sat at his desk, the door opened, and one of his clerks entered bearing a neatly engraved card.

MR. MAXWELL HYDE.

Anderson Fish gasped as he read the foregoing name.

"God bless my soul," he said to himself, "what does this mean?"

Turning to his clerk he ordered the instant admittance of the man whose name was engraved upon the card. With an easy air of assurance that marked his acquaintance with a polite world, Maxwell Hyde entered. Anderson Fish viewed his caller with sharp curiosity. He knew of Maxwell Hyde by reputation. In the deadly arena where all argument was punctuated by the revolver's ringing shot, Maxwell Hyde was known. In his early days, Maxwell Hyde had lived the life of an outlaw. On the frontiers of the United States his name was engraved for years with those of Jesse James, Frank James and Clel Miller, but as the days of the gun man waned, as the tide of civilization rolled onward to the border and immersed within it what had been the border, Maxwell Hyde was shrewd enough to see that the forces that go to make up civilization were stronger than those supporting the outlaws. Having been an outlaw, he became an outlaw catcher. He knew the ways of the men of blood; he knew the trend of their minds, and when in the terrible days that followed the onslaughts of

the Jesse James gang, he had been offered the responsible position of detective by the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild, he had accepted the offer made him and slowly but surely had swept from the earth all of the lesser criminals that were making the southwest unsafe for honest men, until now little was left above earth of all the outlaws that had been so numerous, save Jesse James and his companions.

Anderson Fish was the general counsel for the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild. His amazement and surprise upon seeing the card of Maxwell Hyde had been due to his knowledge of the work of this famous thief catcher and outlaw slayer, although he had never personally met him. It was this reason that caused the start of amazement that the lawyer had evidenced when he had first received the card.

In silence the two men gazed at each other. This silence was first broken by Anderson Fish.

"I suppose you came to see me," Mr. Fish said, "on account of that robbery."

"You mean the robbery of the bank at Cemetery Hill this morning by the James men?" remarked Maxwell Hyde with a smile.

"Yes, of course you have received information of the robbery."

"Yes, I have received such information, but it is not upon that question that I have called."

"Indeed," returned the lawyer in surprise. "Then I suppose your mission is to give me information regarding some of the other depredations of that infamous James band."

"No," answered Maxwell Hyde, "not to take up your valuable time, I am here to give you information, but not upon the subject you have broached. I am here upon the matter concerning the estate of the late Franklin Thomas, the millionaire banker of this city who died a number of years ago."

Had Maxwell Hyde laid upon the desk of Anderson Fish a bomb warranted to blow him into kingdom come, his surprise could not have been greater. But his legal mind allowed him to keep from his face all traces of his emotion. He did not betray his great surprise, and simply raised his eyebrows in interrogation.

"Will you please proceed?" he said.

"I think that I can give information to you that will lead us to the finding of the missing girl."

"Impossible! We have information that the girl died when she was only three years of age."

"I do not know what information you may have received, but your information is incorrect. I happen to know that the girl is alive. I happen to know also that there is one chance left that she may be recovered."

"I suppose you know that when Mr. Thomas died, one-half of his fortune was to be devoted to the recovery of his missing daughter."

"Yes, I know that, and that is why I'm here."

Mr. Fish nodded.

"I suppose," he went on, "that you have taken up this matter in the hope of gaining some of the money left to be used in finding the missing girl."

"Your supposition is correct, as far as it goes. Yet at the same time, while I am willing to freely admit that I have no objections to handling some of those millions for myself, I am not entirely actuated by the hope of a reward. In my position as detective for

the banker's organization which you represent as counsel, I have learned that in the bank looted to-day by Jesse James and his gang was a tin box containing all of the information known about this missing girl. The Jesse James gang have this information. They are using this information to get the millions. My duty is to round up that gang and as a side issue to that duty, I am willing to admit that I have no objection to gaining some of that reward. This is a position where duty and inclination go hand in hand."

"I see that I am dealing with a remarkable man. As a lawyer, I do not think that ever before have I met a man who did not forget his duty when it came to his inclination."

"Thank you. But I did not come here to bandy compliments. I came here to ask you to give me such information as I may need to possess that will allow me to delve further into this mystery. First, let us assume that we are on the right track and that the girl of whom I have knowledge is the missing heiress. Then what?"

"You can readily understand, Mr. Maxwell Hyde, that first assuming that you are on the right track, we would have to have absolute proof of the identity of the girl. She was an infant when she was abducted, and now she must be about twenty years of age, and you will admit, I think, that there is a difference between an infant of two months old and a girl of twenty years of age. Therefore in your quest you have got to set back the clock twenty years, lacking a few months, and have got to prove to the satisfaction of a court of law that the girl you have in mind is really the infant that was abducted. You can readily see that there must be a chain of strong proof that will establish beyond the shadow of a doubt the identity of this girl.

"My dear Mr. Fish, you will at least give me the credit of possessing intelligence. I have gone through the chain of evidence, and am convinced that I am able to give you the necessary information. The girl has never been out of the possession of the nurse who figured in the abduction. The evidence of that nurse would be conclusive, would it not?"

"In a measure. But the courts would require that the testimony of the nurse is substantiated by the testimony of others. Having got thus far, the remainder of your mission would not seem to be hard. I will say to you however, frankly, that you are standing on ticklish ground. The courts of Missouri have been flooded for years with actions growing out of claims to large estates on the part of persons who have never been able to conclusively prove their identity. I know you to be an honest man and I believe that you are here from the best motives in the world, but I wish to call attention to the fact that in Missouri we have got to be shown."

Maxwell Hyde folded his arms and began studying over the words of Mr. Fish. He could see that as executor of the great Thomas estate, he was acting clearly within his rights. Maxwell Hyde himself, like Jesse James and his gang, was groping for a light in the dark. Neither side to this exciting episode were in possession of all the facts surrounding the mystery. They both were interdependent in having as a basis for their quests the word of old Meg. So far as Maxwell Hyde was concerned, he had no actual knowledge as to the reliability of the fortune-teller. As a rule

he knew they were pretty shifty propositions. They lived upon chicanery and their stock in trade consisted of the gullibility of their victims. In his career as a detective, Maxwell Hyde had met old Meg about five years before and he had some professional dealings with her and she had assisted him greatly. But in all of the past dealings there had never been the golden touch. What some people would do for money he had only to turn to criminal records to find out, aside from his own experience. Was old Meg telling the truth? Was she merely a cheap trickster who had gained possession of the story of the missing heiress, which at the time of the abduction had been strewn broadcast in the newspapers, and had she used this information in attempting to force upon him and upon Mr. Fish a spurious heiress?

In his own mind, Maxwell Hyde could not but feel that he had been baffled by the purely legal attitude taken by Mr. Fish. Yet he respected Mr. Fish for that very attitude. Maxwell Hyde saw at once that Mr. Fish was a man of honor and standing in the community and that he was willing to aid in the return of the heiress, but that he had thrown the burden of proof directly upon Maxwell Hyde's shoulders. The detective himself was willing to accept the responsibility, but he had no great faith in the outcome. With these ideas in his mind, Maxwell Hyde resumed the conversation.

"I do not know exactly what I ought to say to you, Mr. Fish," Maxwell Hyde said. "I am not a lawyer but I believe that I've got information that is valuable. I do not come here to dictate terms to you. I have fallen into this matter through my life-long attempt at the extermination of the Jesse James gang. You know my reputation and I know yours. Man to man, what shall I do?"

Had Maxwell Hyde known it, he could not have taken a more direct and convincing line than he had taken in this last remark. Up to this time, Mr. Fish, with the suspicion of the average lawyer had hardly accepted Maxwell Hyde or his story. He now believed that Maxwell Hyde, right or wrong believed that he was right.

"There is only one thing for you to do," said Mr. Fish. "Get that girl and bring her here to me. If she is really the missing heiress, Edna Thomas, I think that right and justice will prevail and we will be able to prove it. If she is merely a trickster in league with other tricksters, we will at least have the satisfaction of putting her in jail where she belongs, along with the rest of her gang. Do you need any money?"

"No. The only thing that I wish from you, Mr. Fish, is advice."

"There it is, then. Produce the girl. Now we will eliminate her from the proposition, and will you please tell me quickly what you think the Jesse James gang intend to do?"

"Get the girl."

"That's bad. If she is really the heiress, it would mean that we would have to pay a remorseless gang of criminals a tremendous sum for her liberation."

"Exactly."

"It means that we must go upon the hypothesis that this girl is the heiress. We must therefore take steps to protect her from the Jesse James gang."

"Yes."

"Do you wish me to call in the local authorities?"

"Heaven forbid! If there's anything in the world that I wish to eliminate from this case it is the average broad-shoed detective. I've got enough trouble as it is, without having to ward off the bungling attempts of a man who doesn't know the detective game. Then my idea would be to take this matter up alone, and if I succeed to also figure in the reward. I am going back to the sources of my information and alone and unaided, secure this girl if I can, and at the same time round up the gang I have been so many years searching for."

Mr. Fish nodded. He saw the force of Maxwell Hyde's remark.

"You can count upon me to assist you," he said. "My advice is for you to continue on your mission and consult with me as often as circumstances warrant. I am willing to say to you that if you do succeed in this mission I, as executor of this estate, will see that any arrangement you may make is honored and that you will receive a substantial reward in case you are successful."

Having made this arrangement, Maxwell Hyde left Mr. Fish and returned to his hotel for the purpose of studying out his next step. He well knew that he was facing a tremendously dangerous condition. Maxwell Hyde did not underrate the Jesse James gang, and he knew that when he returned that night to the home of old Meg the fortune-teller, he was placing his life upon a hazardous chance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OUTLAWS MAKE A SIDE MOVE.

As soon as night had fallen and the country around the haunted cabin was blurred and indistinct, Jesse James, Clel Miller, and Frank James mounted their horses again and started out for the purpose of accomplishing another deed of violence.

In talking over their plots, Jesse had happened to think that as they were not due at the home of Old Meg until midnight, it might be as well to see if they could not clean up what he called easy money before keeping the engagement.

"It's this way, boys," said Jesse James. "We got fifty thousand dollars and a little over along with those papers. Now we've had to give up fifty thousand to get Mother Meg to go in with us. In case she throws us down, we will have only a few hundred dollars left. It seems to me that we better kill two birds with one stone. There's a little six by four bank in a jig-water town near here that ought to be pretty good picking for us. Our horses are fresh and we're feeling pretty good, so what's the matter with our going over there and sticking up that bank?"

"You get me where I live," laughed Frank. "I'm all right in the bank robbing business, and as our bank-roll is getting pretty thin, let's we three walk over there and do up that bank. I hate to put my hand in my pocket and find only a few hundred dollars there."

"That's right," sighed Clel Miller. "What in thunder can a fellow do with a few hundred dollars?"

Accordingly led by Jesse James, at the end of an hour the party had negotiated ten miles of country and halted their horses on the outskirts of a tiny town which straggled over the landscape at the bottom of a steep hill.

The three outlaws halted their horses long enough to cover their faces with black masks and then drawing their revolvers, they started into the town at a rattling pace, screaming at the top of their voices and punctuating the atmosphere with bullets. It was in this deadly fashion that the three men usually opened their campaign of bank looting.

In the darkness of the night, the startled inhabitants of the town were petrified with fright. The tramping of horses' hoofs and the wild shrieks and oaths of the outlaws, the detonations of their weapons and the whistling of numerous bullets made the scene a terrifying one. Men and women dodged back into their houses and closed the doors in deadly fear. Children screamed and cried in fright, but the outlaws with their campaign clear in their minds in a moment had reached the bank, which was in a tiny stone building in the center of the town.

Jesse James swung from his horse, followed by Frank, throwing the reins of their respective animals to Clel Miller, who was assigned to act the part of outside guard, and who steadily fired his weapons right and left thus keeping the vicinity clear of all interlopers. Jesse James rushed to the bank door and thundered upon it with the butt of his revolver.

Frank stood right behind him. Within the bank an aged night watchman, half deaf, who had not heard the shots and screams of the approaching outlaws, gingerly opened the door. In a trice, Jesse James's sinewy brown hands closed around his throat. The unfortunate watchman who was dragged out of the bank door much as though he had been a stray cat who had been dragged out of an ash barrel by an angry dog, was trussed up, gagged and bound in a moment.

"Oh, Clel," bawled Jesse, "watch this fellow! If he moves, kill him!"

Jesse James then strode into the bank. He held his heavy revolvers, one in each hand, and remorselessly as fate clicked across the marble flooring of the bank and swept around behind a counter where an elderly man sat at a desk with amazement on his face.

"Hands up!" hissed Jesse. "If you dare to move, I'll kill you!"

The frightened bank official started involuntarily to put his hands toward a revolver that lay on the desk before him, but one glance at the evil eyes of the outlaw peering through the slits in his mask told him that an action of this kind would be the last one he'd take in this world. With a choking cry, the bank official held up his hands.

"Give me the combination to the safe!" sneered Jesse.

"The safe is open," cried the banker, his face distorted with fear.

Jesse started towards the safe. Just then he saw a form dart behind him toward the door of the bank. It was that of the bank messenger, a young man about twenty-five years of age.

Jesse raised his revolver with the same action pulling the trigger. As the deadly weapon belched forth the shot, the unfortunate messenger crumpled up like a dry leaf and staggered against the bank railing and then fell in a heap with his shoulder broken by the bullet.

"You lie still or I'll kill you!" muttered Jesse, his face distorted with wrath.

Now an entire master of the situation, Jesse dashed

to the safe, a great steel vault in the rear of the bank, while Frank James stood with his two revolvers trained upon the bank official and the wounded messenger.

In a second Jesse came out of the bank vault with his pockets filled with money, and bearing in his right hand a sack filled with gold.

The two outlaws then with flying steps hurried out of the building, mounted their horses and still carrying their plunder, dashed into the darkness and disappeared.

The town awoke with a roar. Men came running from every corner of the tiny town and soon willing hands had raised the bank messenger, while a physician leaned over him and staunching his wound.

The citizens hurriedly organized a posse and rushed away after the bandits, but Jesse and his band had made their escape, and soon the bank officials who had hurriedly rushed to the beleaguered institution, gave up the pursuit and another bank robbery had been added to the crimes of Missouri.

Highly elated at their success, the three outlaws rode speedily toward St. Louis.

"Well, we turned that trick," said Jesse. "I got that bank messenger all right."

"What's the matter with your gun?" asked Frank James. "You got that fellow in the shoulder."

"My gun carried to the left," replied Jesse. "I didn't see that fellow until he ran crosswise from me, and I didn't get a good shot at him. I suppose it's just as well that I didn't kill him under the circumstances."

"It is only one more deed charged up to our account," ventured Clel. "How much do you think we got?"

"I don't think there was more than ten or fifteen thousand dollars in that bank," replied Jesse. "I took every cent I could find, and didn't leave anything but the books."

The trio of outlaws then hurried back to the haunted cabin where Jesse placed the money in a hole he dug in the hard earth floor.

"Why don't you carry the money with you?" asked Clel.

"I don't want to have any money found on me in case I am arrested when we go to old Meg's house to-night. You see I'm not dead sure that this thing isn't a plant. If the old woman is giving us a false steer, she must be dealt with, but if we are trapped to-night, it's a pretty sure thing that one of us will get away. Whoever knows of us, knows that we usually carry the plunder that we secure about us. In this case, I'm going to fool 'em. Now this is the understanding, boys. Whichever of us gets away, in case of a plant, must hurry back here, dig up this cash and hustle back home. My plan is to have all three go to old Meg's house. She is our next live wire. If we're surprised the only thing to do is to fight our way out, if we can, and the survivor must get back here to the cash. That is the quickest way out for us all. Come on now."

The three outlaws then hurried back to the home of the old fortune-teller.

There they found old Meg awaiting them, she having resumed her make-up, and the three outlaws filed into her room and sat down, Jesse James peering at the woman with his cold, fishy eyes.

Old Meg smiled at them and then resumed the rôle

of a fortune-teller and began questioning the three men.

"So you brought your friends with you, did you?" she said, turning to Clel.

"Yes," that outlaw replied.

"Well," said the hag, "I'm ready to do business with you. I have managed to arrange with you so far as the cash end is concerned. Now it's up to me to deliver the girl."

"That's about the size of it," replied Jesse.

"Where is the girl?" asked Clel.

"She is not far away," replied Meg.

"No, I don't think she is," put in Jesse with a cynical grin.

As he spoke the outlaw arose from his seat and approached the fortune-teller. His long arm reached forth and grasped the woman by the throat. Frank James, seeing the action of his brother, rushed to his side and caught Meg by the arm. Clel stood in open-mouthed amazement.

Quick as thought, Jesse thrust a gag in the mouth of Meg, put his arm around her waist, plucked her from her feet as if she had been a feather, and throwing her over his shoulder, rushed out of the room, followed by his two companions.

The three men hurried to their horses which were hitched to a post in front of the house, just as the form of Maxwell Hyde was seen approaching. In a moment Maxwell Hyde sensed the situation. His revolver tipped his hand in a second and with a loud shout he dashed at the three outlaws, firing his revolver as he ran. The semi-darkness only lighted up by the fitful gleam from a lamp-post near at hand disconcerted his aim, and as he hurried along, he did not see that Frank James had stepped to the gutter and was awaiting his approach. Instead of shooting him, Frank James brought the butt of his revolver down upon the head of Maxwell Hyde. As the sky and the earth clashed together, Hyde fell prone upon his face, a senseless mass, while with a wild hurrah, the three outlaws bearing the form of old Meg in their arms, mounted their horses and darted up the solitary silent street at top speed.

"What in thunder did you do that for, Jesse?" asked Frank, as they sped along. "What do you want that old hag for?"

"Shut up!" rejoined Jesse. "Don't you see I have no hag? This thing is a plant. This girl, instead of being old Meg, the fortune-teller, is the missing heiress. The millions are in our grasp!"

CHAPTER V.

MAXWELL HYDE AWAKES.

For several moments after the terrible blow that had been dealt him by the outlaw Frank James, Maxwell Hyde lay as one dead.

Then slowly consciousness returned. For a moment he lay staring vaguely up at the clouds which were charging in the sky above him, and then struggled to a sitting position. The detective put his hand to his head. His fingers were covered with his blood. He feebly managed to crawl up the steps. So sudden and crashing had been the onslaught upon him that his eyes refused to believe what they had seen, and he was confident in his own mind that he had not witnessed the forcible abduction of the fortune-teller, but

that all the whirling facts that rushed upon him were the result of an ugly dream.

But when he weakly tottered into the fortune-teller's home, he began to piece out the story that the mute evidences of upturned furniture told him.

"They have captured old Meg," he muttered, in dire dismay. "Somebody hit me on the head!"

Maxwell Hyde put his hand to the deep scalp wound he bore, and laughed bitterly to himself at his remark.

"When a man has got a hole in his head," he murmured, "that made him see all the stars in the firmament, for him to say that somebody hit him is a trifle funny."

Maxwell Hyde had been a bit late in keeping his appointment with old Meg, unfortunately. If he had not been late, the scheme of the James brothers would not have been accomplished. Jesse James, without consultation with his companions, had deftly made up his mind that Meg, the fortune-teller, was really the heiress in disguise. He had not known absolutely that this was so until he had entered the fortune-teller's home. Then his keen eyes had searched the woman's face, penetrated her disguise, and he had quickly understood that he could only win the campaign upon which he had embarked by abducting the girl. Jesse did not know why the heiress to so many millions had thus disguised herself, and this mooted nothing to him. He made up his mind quickly to capture the girl, and thus place within his own hands the power to extort from her dead father's estate every dollar that he could for her safe return.

The appearance of Maxwell Hyde upon the scene had astonished Jesse. The quick action of Frank James which had extricated the gang from a perilous position, had greatly pleased him.

"That was good work, Frank," he said to his brother. "But then you always were there with the goods, when an emergency arose."

"I never saw a man get his nicer or neater than did Maxwell Hyde," chimed in Clel. "I hope you killed him."

"He's too thick-headed for that," laughed Jesse. "Frank, you used the wrong end of your revolver. Why didn't you shoot!"

"I was afraid of making too much noise. It seemed to me that the quickest way out of it was to hit that fellow a belt over the head. Like everything else in this world, if I was going to do it again, I would do it different. Anyway, I knocked the detective out, and we have the heiress, if what Jesse says is straight."

"She's a pretty bum looking heiress at that!" cried Clel, who was carrying the form of the girl on the pommel of his saddle.

"Anyway, we've got her," rejoined Jesse.

And the party then proceeded at the best speed possible under the circumstances, to the haunted cabin.

As soon as they reached the deserted spot, the girl was released from her bonds and the gag was taken from her mouth. The sight of a revolver gleaming in the hands of Jesse was enough to intimidate the girl, had she wished to shriek or cry for assistance.

But the heiress was too frightened and bruised by her terrible ride to do more than utter a faint protest. Her mind was in a whirl of excitement. There had been certain reasons which she would not communicate to any one at present why she had disguised herself. These reasons had much to do with her not

revealing herself to the executor of her father's estate, although she had known for some years that she was the heiress to his millions.

When Jesse James tried to ask the girl the reasons for her disguise, she firmly refused to answer. Instead, she sat and stared at the outlaw, her face showing white beneath the paint with which it was enveloped.

"Well, my girl," laughed Jesse, "welcome to our home. It is a temporary home, and we are not in possession of much antique furniture in it, but if you don't mind, I will ask you a few questions."

"Ask them," replied the girl. "I do not agree to answer them."

"Why did you disguise yourself as old Meg, the fortune-teller?"

"That is my secret," the girl replied. "You may kill me, but I will not explain to you."

"You are bright enough to know that we will not harm you," Jesse laughed. "You are worth too much money to us as you stand. If you will remain here and not try to make trouble by screaming, crying and wailing, we will guarantee you safety at least for the present. Will you tell me whether you are Edna Thomas, the missing heiress?"

"I am," the girl replied.

Jesse laughed and winked at his companions.

"Didn't I tell you so, boys?" he said. "This matter now requires quick action on our part. I am going to write a note to Anderson Fish, whom I happen to know is the executor of the Thomas estate. In it I am going to tell the lawyer that the heiress is our captive and I am going to tell him how he can make terms with us. If he puts up three million dollars cash, he can have this girl."

Frank James drew his brother aside and engaged in a whispered conversation with him.

"I'll take that note all right," he said, "but suppose Fish won't come over with the cash. What are we going to do then?"

"The only thing for us to do then will be to take that girl over to the river, tie a couple of big stones about her waist and drop her in. If Fish won't give us the money, the girl is no good to us. We might as well kill her and at least get revenge out of this whole affair."

"I guess you're right," replied Frank. "You scribble that note as fast as you can, and I will take it to the lawyer. In the meantime, it seems to me that you and Clel had better remain here and guard the girl. This is the safest place there is about here. There is no danger in any way of that detective finding where we are."

Jesse James nodded and then hastily scribbling a note to Anderson Fish, handed it to Jesse, who rapidly disappeared in the direction of St. Louis, spurring his horse to his utmost endeavor.

While this little drama was being enacted, Maxwell Hyde had bound up his head, hurried to the nearest telephone and had called a cab which he had entered and had ordered the driver to hurry to the home of Fish. Maxwell Hyde had immediately decided in his own mind that the James gang having abducted Edna Thomas the heiress, their next step would be to inform Anderson Fish of the capture of the girl and thus pave the way for the beginning of negotiations that might end in the payment of a reward for the return

of the heiress. It was past midnight when Maxwell Hyde arrived at the beautiful home of Mr. Fish. It required repeated ringing of the bell at the residence before any one answered, but when a sleepy butler had been induced to take a message to his employer by Maxwell Hyde, Mr. Fish immediately ordered that the detective be brought to his room. The lawyer gave a cry of astonishment when he saw the white face of the detective with his head bound up in a bloody bandage, and when he had learned of the abduction of the heiress, his astonishment knew no bounds.

"You must let me telephone for the police," Fish advised.

"Not much!" cried the indomitable detective. "I still insist upon carrying on this matter alone. My idea is that you will receive from the James brothers shortly some information as to where the girl is. When you get this information, I feel sure that we can devise a plan that we can carry on much better without police interference. Have you got a good fast horse in your stable?"

"Some of the best in the country," replied the lawyer, who was a lover of good horses and had his stable filled with them.

"Order me one quick, saddled and bridled," snapped Maxwell Hyde.

Within a few moments, upon the command of the lawyer, a horse was led to a side entrance to his house, and Maxwell Hyde mounted the animal.

Just as he was rushing away, he was stopped by the voice of the lawyer.

"A message has just been handed in at the front door," the lawyer cried. "Wait!"

In wonder the detective stopped. He did not know that Frank James had craftily ridden to the end of the street and had walked to the front door, slipped the note which Jesse James had scribbled in the haunted cabin under the door of the banker's house, rang the door bell and rushed away.

Mr. Fish ran out of the house and handed the note to Maxwell Hyde. By the faint radiance from a gas jet near at hand, the detective read the note.

"It says that the outlaws are willing to give up the girl for three million dollars. I think——"

As he spoke Maxwell Hyde happened to look across the street and caught sight of a man hurrying along in the shadow of a stone fence which surrounded the grounds to the Fish estate. Maxwell Hyde in a moment made up his mind that the furtive form was that of a messenger from the James's den. Drawing his revolver, he leaped from his horse and silently stalked after the flying figure. A moment later, as the man he was pursuing turned so that the light fell upon his face, Maxwell Hyde saw that he was upon the right track and that the figure was that of Frank James.

Looking on all sides as he proceeded, the keen glances of Frank James did not see the following detective. Believing that he had been entirely secret in his mission, Frank James mounted his horse, and wishing to spare the beast on his return journey, proceeded down the street not knowing that in the shadow that lay at his right, in the depths of the misty darkness, he was being stalked by the detective.

So the chase swept on. Utterly unconscious that he was being pursued, Frank James proceeded along until he had turned into the Natural Bridge Road.

Then he spurred his horse to a faster pace and vanished into the darkness, while Maxwell Hyde retraced his steps to Lawyer Fish's home, which he again entered for a further conversation with the lawyer.

"You remind me of a vanishing lady show," cried the lawyer merrily when he saw the detective. "What on earth did you run away so quickly for?"

"I was after the man who had delivered that message."

"I saw no man."

"But I did."

"Who was he?"

"Frank James."

"What, Frank James, the outlaw?"

"That was the man."

"Did he bear that note to me?"

"He did."

"Why didn't you arrest him?"

"What good would that do me?"

"You would have had at least one of the outlaws in your grasp."

"I have been looking for outlaws for years. My point of view has changed. At present I am engaged in looking for an heiress. Had I arrested Frank James, the secret of where the missing girl is to be found we never could have extorted from him. Wherever she is, she is in the possession of Jesse James, and that thug would immediately have spirited her away. I took care not to let Frank James see me. I followed him as far as the Natural Bridge Road and I figure in my own mind that the girl has been hidden by the outlaws in some unfrequented spot somewhere along that thoroughfare. My plan is to mount that horse of yours and hurry out along the road which Frank James has taken. Somewhere or other a few miles from St. Louis, I feel confident that I can find the missing girl. When I do, I may have to call in the assistance of the local police, but until I find her and the place of her concealment, it is better for me to work alone. If I should call upon the police here in St. Louis and ask them to go out of the town in search of the outlaws, they would laugh at me, believing that there were no outlaws to be pursued. They would turn me over to the county authorities, and by the time the county authorities in whose jurisdiction the bandits now are had taken action, the outlaws would be hundreds of miles away from here. Great bodies move slowly, and county officials are too great a body to move swiftly."

Anderson Fish saw the force of Maxwell Hyde's argument. While he felt that it was a dangerous mission that the detective had planned for himself, he could not help but think that the campaign of the detective was shrewdly laid, and so he acquiesced in what was said with a nod.

In spite of the pain of his wound, Maxwell Hyde mounted the staunch thoroughbred furnished to him by Anderson Fish, and soon found himself on the Natural Bridge Road, heading in the same direction that Frank James had taken hardly an hour before.

"I must approach this situation," murmured Maxwell Hyde to himself, "by a process of elimination. The James boys, I figure, would not dare come into the open and go to any farmhouse with Edna Thomas. They therefore have gone to some unusual place. I worked over this route three years ago in search of a band of counterfeiters, and it seems to me that I

remember a story of a haunted house that was situated somewhere in this vicinity. I believe in my heart that the James boys have taken that girl to that house. I wonder if I can find it?"

For the purpose of keeping his horse fresh, Maxwell Hyde did not hurry in his outward journey. He had kept to himself one part of the note received from the James gang by Anderson Fish, and this part was of the greatest importance. It had briefly instructed Anderson Fish to deposit a note in the United States mail addressed to Thomas James. The note was to bear further the simple superscription St. Louis, and thus, Maxwell Hyde knew, would go into the general delivery of the post-office of that city, and he felt sure that, eventually, one of the gang would call at the post-office and get the note. It was Maxwell Hyde's plan to answer the missive of the James boys with one that would acquiesce apparently in their plans and would offer a million dollars for the return of the girl. But pending the sending of this note, Maxwell Hyde had decided that he would find the hiding place of the gang if possible. He then planned in his own mind to arrest the messenger just as he turned away from the general delivery window in the St. Louis post-office, for he would then have upon his person the incriminating letter that Maxwell Hyde proposed writing to him, and at the same time, he designed, if he could gain the information, to round up the members of the gang and the missing girl at the same time. This would insure a long term of imprisonment for Frank James and Clel Miller for the abduction, while Jesse James could be tried and executed for the many murders he had been known to have committed.

"It now seems to me," said Maxwell Hyde to himself, "that my objective point at present should be the haunted house where the gang, if I know anything about bandit nature, is probably hidden."

Keeping a sharp watch over the surrounding country, the intrepid detective at length managed to get to a point where his general recollection of the country told him the house he was in search of could be found. He stopped his horse at the top of a short rise of ground and peered hither and thither around the murky landscape. A stifled cry escaped him when he saw far to the right, shining brightly, a light which he felt confident came from the window of a house. Maxwell Hyde tied his steed to a tree and softly hurried through the gloom up to the side of a house through which he had seen the light streaming. With infinite caution he raised himself on his tiptoes and looked into the cabin. Within the house he saw the forms of the two outlaws for whom he was searching, while in the fitful light he discerned the white face of the missing girl.

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT.

Maxwell Hyde fell to the ground and began speeding backward toward the shelter of a chestnut tree.

He had not proceeded but a few feet when he felt himself grasped by a gigantic hand. He wormed himself around and made a grab for a huge shape that stood over him. He missed grasping the man by the throat who was holding him, and in the next second felt himself pinioned by the arms while his revolver was torn from his grasp.

"I've got him!" howled a voice.

The door opened with a crash and out streamed the two outlaws, Jesse and Frank James.

Maxwell Hyde saw that he was a captive in the hands of Clel Miller. He gave himself up for lost. He felt himself grasped by all the outlaws and roughly hurled into the cabin. The door was shut with a bang and without ceremony Maxwell Hyde was bound and gagged.

The detectives saw the grinning countenances of the three bandits turned upon him.

"I was out there on watch," Clel Miller explained, "and I saw this fellow come stealing across the prairie and peep into the window. I just naturally got behind him, threw my arms around him, took his revolver, and yelled to you fellows inside."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Jesse James. "Was there ever such luck? I've been wanting to get that fellow Maxwell Hyde in my clutches for some time. Now I've got him and I've got the girl, too! If we can't clean something out of this situation, I'm a Dutchman!"

Clel Miller drew his revolver from his belt and with a fiendish expression on his face, stepped over toward the detective.

"You hound pup," he shrieked. "I've got an old score to pay off on you myself! You put a bullet in my arm back there at this girl's house, and I'll get even with you by putting a bullet through your head!"

"None o' that!" put in Jesse James, as he caught Miller by the arm. "Don't make a fool of yourself. There's plenty of time to kill this fellow. I can make him useful in this round-up."

"I don't see how you can!" hissed Clel.

"You don't, eh?" This fellow is employed by the Western and Southwestern Bankers' Guild, and Anderson Fish is the lawyer for that organization, and he also is the executor of the Thomas estate. I guess I can get the Bankers' Guild to put up a bundle of cold cash for their detective's worthless life. If I can't, I can kill him a week from now just as easy as I can now."

"That's right!" put in Frank James. "What's the use of killing this fellow, Clel, when we have him in our power? Don't make a fool of yourself. Just hang onto this fellow for a few days and let us see where we're at. He can't get away any more than the girl can."

Clel Miller hated to be dissuaded from his purpose, but he saw the force of the argument presented by his leader, Jesse James.

"All right, just as you fellows say," he growled. "The only thing I want you to do is to promise me that if it does come to a killing, that I may be selected to fire the shot that snuffs this fellow's candle out!"

"I'll agree to that, old fellow," replied James. "Now the best thing for us to do is to stand these two people up in line and talk turkey to them. You go out, Frank, and get some dry wood. We can build a nice little fire in the center of this cabin, and I'll put that detective in the middle of the fire, and after he's been scorched some, I guess he will talk. You go too, Clel, and help Frank bring in some wood."

But the outlaws had not counted upon the dauntless courage within the heart of Maxwell Hyde.

While the outlaws had been debating what to do with him, and Jesse had been calming his infuriated

iated associate, Maxwell Hyde had been secretly straining at the new rope with which his hands had been confined and had wrenched himself loose. With the bound of a tiger he flashed down upon Jesse James. His great fist shot out and caught the outlaw directly upon the point of his jaw. Jesse was out in a moment. His head struck the ground some seconds before his heels and he lay insensible, as cleanly knocked out as if the blow had been dealt by a pugilist.

Maxwell Hyde who had been deprived of his arms when the James boys captured him, looked around the room and seeing a butcher knife laying on the sheet-iron stove, grasped it and with swift blows severed the bonds that bound the girl, Edna Thomas. Maxwell Hyde, in the semi-darkness of the cabin supposed that he was rescuing old Meg, the fortune-teller. He gathered the girl up in his stalwart arms, and with fleet steps, darted through the doorway and in a breath had buried himself beneath the shade of the chestnut trees that surrounded the solitary cabin.

"Crouch down, Meg!" he murmured. "Hide behind the roots of that big tree."

Utterly bewildered at the suddenness of her rescue, Edna instinctively followed this advice. Maxwell Hyde crept forward until he could see over the timbers and noticed that the two outlaws Frank James and Clel Miller were approaching the cabin with their arms filled with bits of dry wood which they had gathered for the purpose of torturing the detective.

Maxwell Hyde stole back to the side of Edna and motioned her to follow him. Edna obeyed, and the couple, secreting themselves as well as they could in the high grass and weeds, ran at their utmost speed toward the Mississippi River which could be seen winding along about half a mile distant under the stars which dotted the horizon.

"We will have to hurry," said Maxwell Hyde to the girl. "There will be things doing in that cabin in a moment or two."

The detective spoke truly. Shouts and oaths rang through the atmosphere and told the detective that Clel Miller and Frank James had found Jesse lying insensible upon the floor, and had immediately understood how the detective had effected his escape.

The noise made by the outlaws in their mad pursuit of the fleeing couple indicated to the detective the fact that the three bandits had separated and were threshing the bushes, each for himself, at divergent points.

"That's right!" said Maxwell Hyde. "Waste your time around the cabin and possibly we may escape!"

"How are you going to cross the river?" asked the girl in a low tone. As she spoke she turned half away from the detective so that he could not see her face. There was something in her tone and attitude that puzzled Maxwell Hyde. The voice in which the girl spoke, although her tones were low, was not that of a querulous old hag who spoke in the shrill tone of age, but was a full, round voice that smacked of youth.

"Is this old Meg?" murmured the detective to himself. "Who in the world have I rescued? Is there some deception here? What does this mean? Who is this girl?"

But the thoughts of the detective were turned in another direction immediately by the sound made by an approaching man. Maxwell Hyde and Edna ran

at right angles to the sound, the detective's eager eyes searching the river bank in the hopes of finding a boat.

"I remember reading once about an English King who was willing to give his crown for a horse," murmured Maxwell Hyde to himself, "but I'd give a good share of the fortune I hope to win for a forty-cent dugout!"

Indeed the detective's plight was one that would stir the most phlegmatic heart. He was unarmed, having in custody a woman who was distraught with fear, and he was far from St. Louis in a country of which he knew little, and was being pursued by foes who were pledged to murder him.

"Wherever there is life there must be some hope left," laughed the indomitable detective. "I am not going to give up yet!"

As he spoke these words, upon a little bluff above him, silhouetted upon the background of the night sky, appeared the form of a man whom Maxwell Hyde saw at once was Jesse James.

Maxwell Hyde gave one despairing glance around. What could he do now? He was unarmed and Jesse was armed! He was encumbered with a woman he was bound to protect and save, and Jesse was alone and thirsting for his blood. Times like these make men in whose veins run good red blood think quickly. The detective shed his coat and kicked himself out of his boots, almost with the same motion. Grasping Edna Thomas by the arm, he whispered to the girl.

"Can you swim?" he said.

"A little," replied Edna.

"The Mississippi River is nearly a mile wide here. It looks to me as if I'll have to swim for both of us. Come on!"

Edna boldly waded into the water until it reached above her waist. The unpleasant sensation seemed almost to make her heart stop beating. She made one wild scramble for land, but with the least ceremony in the world, Maxwell Hyde pushed her ahead of him into deep water. The current of the sluggish and muddy river caught her frail form in a trice, and she was whirled out beyond her depth. Edna tried to swim, but she discovered that the current seemed to tug and pull at her with such mighty strength that she could not breast it. The girl murmured a prayer and in her own mind decided that she must die. She stopped swimming and slowly began to sink beneath the water. The horrible sensation as the stream closed over her head made her struggle upward again, and then she felt herself supported by a strong arm. She turned feebly to the right to see swimming along by her side the stalwart form of the detective.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "and for goodness sake don't swallow any more water! You've shipped enough now to last you the rest of your life. Try to turn over on your back."

Edna succeeded after a mighty effort and found to her surprise that her clothing instead of dragging her down to a watery death in the position she had assumed buoyed her up.

Maxwell Hyde dove down far beneath the girl, and when he came up her arms were resting on his shoulders, and adopting the over-hand English method of swimming, he began cleaving the water like an infuriated motor-boat.

To her intense surprise, Edna found not only was her head out of water and she could breathe freely,

but that she was darting through the waves at a speed that she never would have believed possible, had she not experienced the sensation. Edna breathed a sigh of relief, which was not however, echoed by Maxwell Hyde. It is no easy matter to carry a hundred and thirty-five pound girl across a rapidly flowing river, knowing at the same time that an outlaw, one of the deadliest shots in the world, is standing on the river bank awaiting an opportunity to lodge a bullet in one's back. So Maxwell Hyde put as great distance between him and Jesse James as he possibly could. His efforts soon got them to the middle of the river, and then he allowed the current to carry him down stream, he merely swimming enough to keep them both afloat, and at the same time to allow him to fill his lungs with air. He had not the slightest idea in the world where he was, but he decided that it was safer to put himself on the shore opposite the dangerous bandits as quickly as circumstances would permit.

So the detective cut across the water, bearing his burden and trying to use the current itself to aid him in his endeavor. In the course of fifteen minutes he raised himself in the water and glanced at the opposite shore. He gave a cry of joy, for he saw that it was only two hundred feet away. Directly in front of him loomed a pier, and to this haven he directed his efforts. In the course of a few moments, his perseverance was rewarded with complete success. He felt his feet touch the muddy bottom of the river, and a few more strokes placed him in shallow water. He picked the girl up in his arms and splashed and stumbled ashore and finally reached the pier, and grasped a bit of board to which he clung with the tenacity of a drowning man. By this time Edna had managed to gain some of her needed courage, and she grasped the pier also, and with the assistance of Maxwell Hyde, managed to crawl up on a planking. She was quickly followed by Maxwell Hyde.

"We're wet, but anyway we're safe," remarked the detective with a smile. "I think I know of better places on this fair earth than the Mississippi River at about two o'clock on a summer morning. But we must not wait here. Are you able to walk?"

The girl nodded. Without further words, the detective led the way down the long pier and up a road to a point where he saw a light.

"You wait here," the detective whispered. "I don't know anything about who may be in that house, but I'll steal up and see what I can discover."

As he spoke, Maxwell Hyde happened to look at the girl he had rescued. In the course of his long career, Maxwell Hyde thought that he had reached a point where he was not to be surprised, but when he looked at the woman he had rescued, he received the greatest surprise of his life. Instead of the wrinkled aged face of old Meg, the fortune-teller, he looked into the clear brown eyes and regular features of a remarkably pretty girl.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Who are you? I knew you were not old Meg, but I'll be—what does all this mean? Who are you, anyway?"

In spite of her bedraggled condition, Edna Thomas burst into a merry laugh.

"Who am I?" she repeated, with a roguish twinkle in her fine eyes. "Oh, I am Edna Thomas, the missing heiress!"

For the second time in his life, Maxwell Hyde again was introduced to a feeling of surprise. He stuttered and stammered, his eyes resembling the harvest moon, while his wide-open mouth and utter bewilderment so appealed to Edna that she again burst into a merry laugh.

"Yes," she repeated, "I am Edna Thomas, the missing heiress. But don't you think you had better go up and find out who occupies the house in which we see a light? And by the way, if you can get a pair of curling irons and a powder puff, I shall be obliged to you."

Maxwell Hyde dumbly shook his head, looked at the girl, smiled and hurriedly walked toward the light, leaving Edna standing alone in the shadow.

The detective looked into the house through a window and saw that it was an old frame shack, occupied by Italians whom he surmised were employed in some road improvement near at hand.

"I don't like the looks of that gang," he muttered to himself. "I think I'd better go back and ask Edna Thomas if she's strong enough to walk further down the roadway, because I do not think the shelter afforded by a gang of Italian road-workers is quite the place to introduce a beautiful heiress to."

Maxwell Hyde hurried back to the point where he had left Edna Thomas. Right then and there he received the third surprise of his life. The heiress was missing!

Maxwell Hyde's face turned white with suppressed emotion. Like an old hound, with his head in the air, he beat over every inch of ground within a circle of half a mile. No trace of the girl could be found. Was she again the victim of the James gang? Had she purposely deserted him? Why had she figured in the amazing disguise she had assumed? Why had she revealed her identity to him? How had the Jesse James gang penetrated her disguise and captured her so easily? These thoughts went whirling through the detective's mind, but no solution appeared to him. The more he delved into the mystery, the greater the mystery became.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOWNFALL OF JESSE JAMES.

If ever there was an angry outlaw on the face of the earth, it was Jesse James when he came to himself and found that he had been neatly put out of business by a well-directed blow delivered on the point of his jaw by Maxwell Hyde. Never in his life had such a circumstance happened to him. He had not been given one second's opportunity to draw his weapon. He had vanished into by-by land with a wholesome suddenness that had jarred his self esteem.

When Clel Miller and Frank James had returned to the cabin, they found Jesse insensible, and it took several moments to resuscitate him. It was just these few moments that gave Maxwell Hyde and Edna Thomas the opportunity to escape. When Jesse jumped to his feet, a roaring furnace of anger, his wits came back with a rush.

"Spread out!" he snarled at his comrades. "Beat every inch of ground around this cabin. Kill that blank-blank detective on sight!"

Eager to retrieve the error into which they had been led by leaving Maxwell and Jesse alone, Clel Miller

and Frank James, followed by Jesse ran from the cabin and began beating the immediate vicinity in every direction. The outlaws spread out like a fan and they expected that they would immediately find the couple they were pursuing. But fate was against them. No trace could be found of Maxwell Hyde or Edna Thomas. They had vanished completely.

With angry oaths, Jesse instructed his companions to hurry to the river because in his mind he figured that this would be the objective point of the detective. Jesse surmised that Maxwell Hyde would not take to the high-road, knowing that the outlaws had horses with which to pursue him. It lacked only a few hours to morning, and Jesse knew that if Hyde remained in the vicinity, in a country prairie-like in its character, that when the morning broke, he would be immediately discovered. The only bit of woods within many miles surrounded the haunted cabin from which Maxwell Hyde had escaped. It was therefore a safe proposition to assume that the detective would hurry to the river.

In his wish to recapture the detective and the heiress, Jesse outstripped his companions in the race and reached the river bank far in advance of them. His sharp eyes, however, did not see the detective and the heiress struggling in the middle of the river, nor did he see the gallant landing made on the opposite shore.

"Tricked!" hissed Jesse, with many fierce oaths. "Where in the world could that couple have gone to? They have certainly escaped me this time!"

Jesse remained for nearly an hour, hoping against hope that from some hidden nook he could see the two beleaguered people issue. But his hopes met with disappointment, and he retraced his steps and rejoined his companions who had been equally as unsuccessful as he.

"I haven't seen a single trace of them!" growled Clel Miller.

"Nor I!" snapped Frank James. "It looks to me as if they had gotten clean off."

Jesse said nothing, but with his head bowed walked gloomily back to the cabin. He immediately dug up the money obtained in the loot of the bank, and which he had buried, and concealed it in his money belt.

Frank James watched him with curious eyes.

"Well, that detective put one over on us that time, didn't he, Jesse?" cried Frank.

"He did!" vindictively replied Jesse, as he felt of his sore and swollen jaw. "Maxwell Hyde has got the punch all right!"

"Well, what are we going to do now?" asked Frank helplessly.

"Oh—" snarled Jesse, "we're going to do the best we can. Clel, run out and get the horses ready. We've got to dust out of here in a hurry!"

"It's all right to dust out of here," sarcastically rejoined Frank, "but where are you going to dust to?"

"To St. Louis."

"What for?"

"I'm going back to old Meg's house."

"You've got a button loose somewhere!"

"I'm not as crazy as I look."

"Why aren't you?"

"You don't suppose that I'm going to allow one rebuff to daunt me, do you?"

"When everybody is killed and wounded more or less, what are you going to do?"

"I don't see any killed and wounded around here. I can do some shooting yet, if my jaw is sore!"

"Of course you can, Jesse, but don't you see that your plan is a foolhardy one?"

"Why?"

"That detective will beat us into St. Louis, and when we get there he will have stirred up the local authorities so that we will be in the position of the small boy who poked his finger into a hornet's nest."

"That's all very well, but we can sting some ourselves."

"That's true, but how many men do you suppose three men can sting?"

"Just as many as we have shots in our revolvers."

"Yes, but don't you see, Jesse, Maxwell Hyde will raise a hue and cry against us and we will have to face a posse of forty or fifty men? How long do you think we'd last under those circumstances?"

"I don't care. I'm going back to St. Louis, and I'm going to go back to old Meg's house! I'm going to get to the bottom of this mystery if I die with my boots on. No twenty year old girl and a bum detective can euchre me out of those millions."

"Oh, very well, I'm ready to start any time you are."

The three outlaws accordingly started back over the Natural Bridge Road to St. Louis. By the time they reached that city, it was broad daylight. In spite of that fact, with a desperation born of the situation, the three men went directly to the home of old Meg.

Leaving their horses in the street, Jesse, who as usual, planned the campaigns of the gang, instructed Clel Miller to remain with the animals and guard them. Frank James was told to stand on the stoop of old Meg's home and bar the progress of any one who might try to go out of or into the house, and Jesse himself took up the dangerous mission of entering the room from which he had abducted the heiress now no longer his prisoner. With his eyes blazing with wrath, Jesse James gave a resounding rap upon the door of old Meg's house.

"Enter!" sounded a voice in a cracked treble.

Jesse tore open the door and stalked in, and then he staggered back in utter amazement. Seated on a chair in the center of the room, wearing a long red robe, her hair flying down her back, sat old Meg, the picture of the Witch of Endor. Around her waist was wound a great serpent, and her rheumy eyes peered at him from out of her wrinkled face.

"Well, of all the nerve!" cried Jesse James.

"Who are you and what do you want?" the old woman asked.

"Never you mind what I want. I'm Jesse James!"

"I don't care who you are," the woman said. "How dare you come into this room?"

"Jesse James dares anything!"

"I'm not going to fool with you a minute. Take that make-up off!"

The rage of the old witch, Jesse saw, was not assumed. He stepped over near her and rudely extended his hand and grasped what he had supposed was a wig, and gave it a stout pull. The genuine shriek that resulted, evidenced that Jesse was mistaken again, and that he was pulling the real hair of the old witch. In one second, old Meg jumped upon Jesse like an infuriated cat. Her nails dug into his

face and drew the blood in a moment. The horrible serpent twined about the woman's waist awoke, and with shining eyes began hissing violently. Fearless as he was, Jesse staggered back utterly astonished. He threw his hands back to grasp his revolver, when into the room there rang the sound of a cold, deadly voice.

"Hands up!" came the swift command.

With the words, Jesse felt the cold pressure of a revolver barrel upon the back of his head. He knew in a moment that he was a prisoner. He dared not make a grab for his revolver, for out of the corner of his eye he saw gazing at him the mocking face of Maxwell Hyde.

"Put up your hands quick!" added Hyde. "You are my prisoner, Jesse James!"

With the swagger of the born outlaw, Jesse James thrust his hands high in the air. There was a startling click, and his wrists were decorated with handcuffs. Now utterly unable to move, Jesse felt Maxwell Hyde relieve him of his revolvers, and he knew that the fate he had so long dreaded had overtaken him. Famous bandit as he was, he had fallen a prey to the plot of Maxwell Hyde, the detective, and was his prisoner!

Jesse looked around with a sneer on his face and saw that the room was filling up with armed men. But he breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs in the street and knew that Clel Miller and Frank James had escaped, evidently having gained knowledge of the dread drama that had been enacted in the silent room.

Jesse looked at Maxwell Hyde and growled one request.

"You've got me right," he scoffed, "and I suppose I'll have to take my medicine, but will you tell me who this old witch is?"

"Certainly," replied Maxwell Hyde. "I don't know what her real name is, but in the fortune-teller's profession, where she is more or less known, she is called 'Old Meg, the Witch of the Serpent.'"

"But isn't she Edna Thomas, the heiress?" cried Jesse James. "Isn't she disguised as an old woman?"

A gleam of merriment showed in the eyes of Maxwell Hyde.

"Dreams, Jesse James," he remarked, "dreams! I would advise you to change your brand of liquor. The only disguise that old Meg bears is that of old age. I repeat, Jesse James, don't dream!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN JAIL.

The fate of Jesse James can easily be imagined. Bound and manacled and placed in the center of a guard of men with drawn revolvers, all knowing his desperate character, Jesse was marched to the jail where he was received with great pleasure.

His bonds were removed and he was taken to a steel cell in the upper tier of cells of the innermost prison. The newspapers issued extras at lightning speed, detailing the story of his capture, but Maxwell Hyde carefully eliminated from the story of the capture, which he gave to the host of reporters who besieged the jail, any information of the appearance and disappearance of Edna Thomas, the heiress.

The reporters, therefore, only knew that old Meg,

the Witch of the Serpent, in some unknown way, had lured Jesse James to her room, and that she had thus allowed a posse of detectives, headed by Maxwell Hyde, to arrest the desperado.

Maxwell Hyde had spent some time at the pier on the Mississippi River where he had last seen Edna Thomas, in a vain search for her.

When he found that she had utterly disappeared, he reverted to his old outlaw days, walked down the thoroughfare toward St. Louis until he came to a farmer's house, broke into a barn, secured a farm horse, and made the astonished beast travel to St. Louis at a pace he had not taken since his colt days. Maxwell Hyde hurried to police headquarters, explained the fact that Jesse James would soon be a caller on the old fortune-teller, had secured a posse of fifty detectives and plain clothes men, had hurried back to the fortune-teller's home, and with great adroitness had succeeded in arresting the chief of the desperado gang.

While he was overjoyed at the arrest of Jesse, there was a fly in the detective's honey-pot. He could not reconcile the situation with what he knew of the facts. He was partially in the dark regarding the disguise assumed by Edna Thomas, but he had made up his mind after thinking over all the circumstances in his possession, that for some reason he could not fathom, the girl had disguised herself as old Meg, but he was utterly at a loss to understand why she had taken this course. After the arrest of Jesse, he had closely cross-questioned old Meg, and she had denied any complicity in the disguise. Her story, briefly told, was that on the day that Clel Miller had called at her home, she was visiting a friend, another fortune-teller in a distant part of the city. Old Meg said that she had left the house early in the morning, and had not returned to it until late at night. When she had returned, she said that she was utterly amazed to find the house upturned, showing signs of a struggle, and she had thought until Maxwell Hyde had called upon her two hours before the arrival of Jesse James, that her home had been visited by sneak thieves. Old Meg denied absolutely knowing anything about the missing heiress, Edna Thomas, and her sincerity seemed to be so apparent, that in spite of himself, Maxwell Hyde almost believed her. When he had visited the fortune-teller with whom old Meg claimed she had passed the fatal day, he was greatly surprised to learn that old Meg's story was entirely substantiated.

Groping in the dark, and trying to piece out fact and suspicion, Maxwell Hyde saw one clear light. He knew that Jesse James had abducted the heiress from old Meg's room.

He further knew that he had rescued the heiress and at imminent risk had negotiated the dangerous Mississippi River, had talked with the girl, who had admitted her identity, and who had then disappeared. Yet here before him was what appeared to be a complete chain of evidence indicating that the missing heiress had never been in old Meg's house.

"Whatever is behind all this mystery," argued Maxwell Hyde to himself, "I am left wholly in the bag so far as the heiress is concerned. I've got Jesse James all right, but I'm no nearer the fortune and the heiress than I was when I started. It seems to me, however, that the only thing left for me to do is to try

somewhere else to find a way out of this labyrinth. I do not think that Clel Miller and Frank James will dare to remain longer in this vicinity. Bold and desperate as they are, the two men are not going to try to rescue Jesse, and from my standpoint, it looks to me as if Jesse James was in jail to stay. I think I'll go to my hotel and get some rest. To-morrow morning I'll go and see Anderson Fish, tell him all I've discovered, and get his advice as to what course I had better pursue."

Meanwhile Jesse James sat in his cell, torn by angry emotions. He knew that he was in a situation that required all his ability to extricate himself from, but from the moment of his arrest, he began to plot how to free himself from this dilemma. A man not of the criminal world would have thought it impossible for Jesse James to escape from his cell. He was in the strongest cell of a strong jail, well-guarded by many brave men. Not a single opportunity seemed apparent that would lead to his escape. In front of his cell door stood an armed guard. He had no weapon and he had no friend who could smuggle one in to him. Nevertheless, he did not despair, but he waited until night before putting into execution a plan that his brain had conceived.

When the jail had sunk to slumber and there was only to be heard the soft breathing and inarticulate murmurs of the prisoners within its confines, Jesse began to take action. He sharply watched his guard and saw that the man had secured an iron chair in which he had seated himself. Occasionally Jesse noticed that the guard would drop into an uneasy slumber, but would quickly awaken himself and would peer into the cell from where he sat, and upon seeing the form of Jesse lying upon a cot within the cell would drop off to slumber again.

This gave Jesse an idea. He stealthily arranged the clothing on the cot so that it assumed the form of a man. It required intense deftness to accomplish this purpose. The action had to be taken in the few seconds of slumber which the guard permitted himself, and by great care Jesse placed a bundle of clothing on the cot and dodged back out of the line of vision of the guard, during one of the lapses of his momentary slumber.

Jesse hardly dared breathe when he had accomplished the preliminary step in his plot. He watched the guard narrowly from around a corner of the cot and saw that the official had not discovered the transposition.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still Jesse lay coiled like a great snake, awaiting his opportunity to take one more step toward his liberation.

"Oh, if I had a gun," he murmured to himself. "Just one shot would do me a lot of good, just now."

Jesse looked with longing eyes at a silver mounted revolver which dangled from the guard's belt, and he vowed to himself that he would get that weapon, if he ever succeeded in breaking out of his cell.

A distant clock outside the jail boomed the hour of three before Jesse took further steps. Then he carefully wrenched the heel of his right boot off. In a little hollowed out space within the bit of leather lay a tiny steel saw. It was splendidly tempered and although it was only three inches long, Jesse smiled when he saw it. The outlaw crept noiselessly to the door of his cell, crouching toward one side so that

he lay in the shadow. His nervous sinewy fingers grasped the bit of steel and he inserted it within the lock of the door. His joy was boundless when he discovered that he was confined in a steel cell which had been locked separately from the other cells, the jail at that time not having been fitted out with the new interdependent locking system whereby the action of opening one cell door will open all the other cells in a tier of steel structures, and thus in the very act of opening, alarm the prison guards.

Jesse felt with great care along the side of the lock with his steel saw, until he reached the little wheel which moves the lock backward and forward. He pressed his steel saw firmly upon this wheel to the right and to his great pleasure, saw the bolt noiselessly shoot backward. He knew that the steel door to his cell was now open, and that it needed but one slight push to allow him egress to the corridor where sat the guard.

Jesse's next step was to crouch low and slowly wiggle up to the cell door. The guard had relapsed into slumber, and unfortunately for him, had taken a longer time than usual for his excursion into dreamland. This was Jesse James's opportunity.

He stepped noiselessly into the corridor. With a bound he stood over the sleeping guard. His hands closed around the man's neck, and with the strength of desperation he pulled the guard back bodily. So sudden was the attack that the guard did not make a single sound. Jesse carried him into the cell, gagged and bound him, laid him on the cot, plucked his revolver from its holster, searched the man's pockets until he found the key to the cell door and then again he stepped out into the corridor and locked the door as he did so. The outlaw picked up the guard's cap and placed it on his head. Fortunately for Jesse, the guard was not in a uniform but wore a dark suit of clothes, and as Jesse also wore dark clothing and he and the guard were about of the same height and build, Jesse felt that in the half-darkness of the corridor he might escape.

Jesse started down the corridor toward the main door at its extreme end, and just as he did so, he saw a man coming toward him. Here was a situation that the outlaw had not bargained for. He knew that the oncoming figure was that of the guard who was to relieve the one he had captured. What was best to be done? Should he attack the guard? If he did so, would there not be an alarm given? Jesse stood irresolute and then Dame Fortune concluded to smile upon him.

"Is Jesse James asleep?" murmured the oncoming guard.

"Sure," whispered Jesse. "What made you so long?"

"I overslept. I wasn't due until three o'clock and it's only ten minutes after three now. What you kicking about?"

"Oh, nothing. I guess I'll turn in and get some rest."

The relieving guard glanced into the cell and seeing a figure lying on the cot, felt sure it was that of Jesse James. Jesse walked slowly down the corridor where a man sat at the outer door, half asleep in a chair.

"Good-night," whispered Jesse, as this guard opened the door.

Half-awake himself, the guard nodded sleepily and

allowed Jesse to proceed on his way. Jesse found himself in a room which was untenanted. At one end of the room he saw narrow staircases, and he boldly walked down the stairs and found himself on the main floor of the jail. At this point, another dilemma confronted him. He did not know whether the guard of the jail slept within it or not, but he made up his mind that in all probability, the guards when off duty, left the building, so Jesse calmly walked forward until he had reached the main door fronting the street. He saw a man sitting in a chair by this door, holding in his hand a large key which Jesse knew at once was the key to the door itself, and as Jesse turned around, he saw that the man was looking at him, and to his horror, discovered that the guard was a young man from Jesse's own Jackson County, in Missouri.

"That fellow knows me all right," Jesse muttered to himself, but there was no opportunity for him to hesitate. Hesitation would mean instant discovery. Discovery would mean his return to his cell, so Jesse slouched along, keeping in the shadow as well as he could, and hoping that the single gas jet which lighted up the dismal place would not betray him to the guard.

The guard looked at Jesse, and seeing the prison official cap upon his head, thought at first that Jesse was the guard on his way out of the prison to his home. This allowed Jesse to get within a few feet of the guard, but this action brought Jesse's face into the relief of the light, and the outlaw saw from the expression on the other man's face that his identity had been discovered.

"Jesse James!" murmured the guide.

Jesse hurled himself upon his opponent, grasped him by the throat and bore him backward. The action made a tremendous noise in the narrow space, and Jesse felt the man's form under him begin to writh as he tried to escape the encircling hand about his throat. The outlaw's blood was up, however, and awaiting an opportunity he brought his fist down upon the guard's face with all his force. The blow was sufficient. The guard stretched out insensible. Jesse robbed him of his key, in a trice opened the big door to the jail, stepped out into the free air of the street, and rapidly, yet not at top speed, was lost in the gloom of the early morning. Jesse plunged into a network of streets at the left, and as he did so, he heard the jail become the scene of a wonderful turmoil. A shot or two rang out. He heard wild cries and the booming of a deep-toned bell. Jesse James laughed to himself in sardonic fashion as he plunged deeper and deeper into the city's streets. Maxwell Hyde's prisoner had "broken jail."

CHAPTER IX.

OLD MEG AND THE HEIRESS.

Edna Thomas, the heiress, when she was left alone on the pier by her gallant rescuer, Maxwell Hyde, had not melted into obscurity without having a reason for such strange action.

Although Maxwell Hyde did not know it, as soon as he had left her, she had hurried to the main road, and had walked back to St. Louis until she reached a line of street cars, and had then gone to the Union station where she passed an hour or two walking up and down. Her brisk walk had somewhat dried her wet clothing, but there were many curious glances

directed toward her as she entered the station, but no one spoke to her. She availed herself of the facilities in the station to make herself presentable, and as soon as daylight broke, she left the Union station and went to a restaurant and got something to eat. After a substantial breakfast, she called a cab and hurried to a dry goods store. There she purchased a trunk and a quantity of clothing and ordered the cabman to place the trunk upon the box of the cab and to return to Union station. The girl then sent her trunk to the baggage room and re-entered the station and remained another hour, dismissing her cab meanwhile. She called another cab, secured her trunk and drove at once to the Planters' Hotel, where she engaged a room, sending her card to the clerk at the desk, which bore the name, "Miss Edna Thomas, St. Louis."

The girl went at once to her apartment and then sat down to think over her situation. The heiress had a well defined plan in her mind as to her future actions. She had learned through a newspaper extra edition which she had purchased, of the arrest of Jesse James and of the fact that Frank James and Clel Miller had escaped. She read with some amusement the accounts which in no way implicated her, and she was highly amused at the astuteness of Maxwell Hyde. Then Edna wrote a note to old Meg, which she mailed as soon as she left the hotel, about an hour later, and then after a short walk she returned to the hotel and waited until her watch told her that it was eleven o'clock. The girl called a cab and ordered the driver to go to the office of Anderson Fish, whom she well knew was the executor of her father's estate.

She was told that Mr. Fish was in his office, but that he was very busy. Edna looked at the clerk who spoke to her, fished a five-dollar gold piece from her pocket-book and handed it to the clerk with a dazzling smile.

"Tell Mr. Fish," the girl said, "that a lady has called upon him for the purpose of giving him information regarding matters concerning the estate of the late Franklin Thomas."

The clerk was greatly mystified at the message, but the five-dollar gold piece and his own curiosity caused him to take the message to his employer.

Mr. Fish was seated in his office, and when Edna entered, he arose from his chair and looked at her in open-mouthed amazement. He recognized in a moment the likeness the girl bore to the dead banker, her father. He did not know how to act. He felt that he was in the presence of a woman who was going to give him some astounding information and Edna, seeing the expression on the lawyer's face, plunged immediately into her subject.

"I think, from your expression, that you know me," she said.

"No, I do not know you," the lawyer replied, "but I can fancy who you are or who you claim to be."

"I am Edna Thomas," the girl said.

Lawyer Fish looked incredible.

"If you are Edna Thomas, why do you come to me in this mysterious fashion?"

"I can only give you the usual woman's reason—Because!" smiled the girl.

"That is not a reason. It's a phantom."

"It is the only reason I will give at present."

"If you are Miss Thomas, the heiress to the millions

left by Franklin Thomas, you doubtless can tell me some method that you have outlined which will fully convince me of your identity."

"I did not come to-day to make any claims upon my father's estate. I understand that you are attorney for the Western and Southwestern Bankers' Guild and that you know Maxwell Hyde."

The lawyer nodded.

"I do not know whether you know or not, but Mr. Hyde rescued me last night from the Jesse James gang by whom I had been abducted."

"I did not know of that fact."

"I think that I am not yet safe from further attempts to abduct me, although I have escaped this time, and my visit to you has more to do with the Jesse James gang than it has with the question of obtaining my father's estate."

"Before we discuss the question of your protection, I would like to ask you a few questions."

"Ask all you wish."

"Do you intend filing a claim for the estate?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"Exactly. I don't know."

"That is a strange answer."

Edna did not reply for a few moments. She did not wish at the present time to do more than declare her identity to the lawyer. Her course of action was due to a secret which she wished to keep within her own possession for the present. She knew that if she told the lawyer just why she was in the frame of mind that made her weigh a claim to millions, he would with his natural shrewdness pick her mind of her secret. This she did not propose to have happen at present.

"You may think it strange, Mr. Fish," the girl continued, "for me to sit here and calmly tell you that I do not know whether I want my father's millions or not. With your materialistic mind you probably do not know that there are other things in this world besides mere money."

"Yes," drily replied the attorney, "I have always found that the lack of money is sometimes harder to bear than its possession."

"That is the answer that I would have supposed you would give me. I want to say to you, however, that I am not averse to regaining possession of my father's millions if I can do so along a line that I have marked out for myself. All my life I have had sufficient. Sufficient money is better than too much. If I should inherit my father's money, I may have to change my standard of living, and I may have to take up a new phase that I do not like. I am going to tell you, however, that I know all the circumstances surrounding my abduction when I was an infant. I know who stole me, and why. The people who stole me have all their lives cared for me. If I were to claim my fortune, can the law touch those who stole me away from my father in my infancy?"

Lawyer Fish was surprised at the words of the girl. In his mind he saw why she was hesitating, but he did not betray this knowledge upon his face.

"As a lawyer," he replied, "I do not think that there would be any danger attending the person who stole you in infancy at this late day, in case you were able to substantiate your claim. The only person who would be liable to take legal action, would be

yourself. From what you have told me I do not think that you feel like taking such action."

"No, I do not," murmured the girl.

"Then the reason why you do not claim your father's estate is because of the fear you have that the law might step in and touch those who abducted you in fancy and who since then have cared for you, educated you, and, while they may have done you a wrong by taking you from your natural environment, appear to have succeeded in producing quite as charming a young woman, and I may say as ingenuous a one, as your dead father could have done. But whatever pain he may have suffered in the years that have gone by, are buried with him in his grave. My advice to you, young lady, is to resume the natural position which your fortune gives you, and to immediately employ an attorney to substantiate your claim in the courts of Missouri."

"Thank you," replied Edna. "I will think over your advice and will give you my answer later. In the meantime I want you to consider what I have told you to be a professional communication. We both know what that means to a good lawyer."

"I see, young lady, that you are somewhat versed in the law. The communications of a client to a lawyer, those made to a religious adviser, or to a physician, may not be revealed unless with the consent of the person interested. I will respect your astonishing communications to me, but my advice to you is—Get a good lawyer and get one quickly!"

"We will now take up the question of Jesse James, if you do not mind," the girl said.

"Very good," replied the lawyer.

"Of course we both know," the girl went on, "that when Jesse James robbed the bank at Cemetery Hill, Missouri, he learned the fact that I was heiress to my father's estate. Could you tell me how it was that all the facts were in a tin box inside the vault of the robbed institution?"

"My dear young lady, did you not know that your father owned the Cemetery Hill Bank when he was alive, and that the major portion of the stock in the Bank is now a portion of your father's estate?"

"I did not know it."

"It is so, nevertheless. Nearly all of your father's personal papers have been stored since his death in the vaults of the Cemetery Hill institution. It was an unlucky moment that turned the attention of Jesse James to that bank. But if I were you, I would not mourn over the loss of the papers in the tin box which Jesse James has, for after all, they consist of merely reports of detective agencies, all of which showed that old Meg, the Witch of the Serpent, could, if she chose, tell where you were to be found. Now tell me, please, what is the inner cord that binds you and that fortune-teller together?"

"No, no, no!" rejoined Edna, "I will not tell you."

"Why not?"

"I have reasons which I propose to keep to myself. If at any time that I can unseal my lips and tell you what those reasons are, I assure you that I will do so. At present, my lips must be sealed. What I want you to do is to take some step to protect me from Jesse James. I have passed one night as his prisoner and I assure you that the night was not happily spent. I do not want to be captured again by him. And therefore I ask you what to do."

Mr. Fish turned to a bell on his desk and rang it sharply. When an office boy entered the room, the lawyer instructed him to go immediately to the hotel of Maxwell Hyde and instruct that detective to hasten without delay to his office.

"There is only one man who can save you, that I know of, from Jesse James and his gang," the lawyer said. "That man is Maxwell Hyde. Go back to the Planters' Hotel, where I think you said you were stopping, and as soon as Maxwell Hyde comes to this office, I will send him to you. You may have every confidence in his discretion and ability to aid you."

CHAPTER X.

THE JAMES GANG AT BAY.

Jesse James hurried away after his escape from jail until he reached a saloon in the lowest quarter of St. Louis.

When he entered the saloon it was vacant save for an old colored woman who sat behind the bar awaiting customers. The woman was an extremely fat negress about sixty years of age. Jesse James, as he entered, looked at the old woman narrowly to be sure that he knew her, and when he had identified her in his mind, he walked up to the bar.

"Hello, Mammy Sue!"

"Ef it ain't Jesse James!" the negress said. "How in the worl' did you break jail?"

"Never mind. What I want to get is a horse. I want a good one and I'm willing to pay for it."

The negress explained that there was a horse in the stables that she had bought of a negro horse thief for one hundred dollars. She offered to sell the horse and a saddle and bridle to Jesse for two hundred and fifty dollars. The outlaw embraced the opportunity with alacrity and, as soon as the woman had gone to the stable, saddled and bridled the horse and brought it around to the front street upon which the saloon stood; Jesse counted out the money into the avaricious palm of the saloon keeper and mounted his horse.

It was with a feeling of joy that he found he was riding a Kentucky thoroughbred not more than five years old, and from the springy step of the beast he knew that the animal had been bred in the famous blue grass region of Kentucky.

"It does a man a lot of good to throw his leg over a good horse," murmured Jesse to himself: "I can get away from every man, woman and child in St. Louis with this beast. If I knew where Frank and Clel Miller were, I could join them, and we three, in spite of the troubles that we've been through, might get our hands on the millions after all."

Jesse rode through the streets of St. Louis but with a puzzled mind. He did not know whether it would be wise for him to return to the vicinity of the Natural Bridge Road, or to branch out in a different direction. He knew that his escape from the jail in St. Louis was by this time a matter of common property. In fact, a newsboy darted out from a sidewalk and tried to sell him a paper. Jesse stopped his horse and bought the paper and saw the great staring headlines of block type which announced "Jesse James Breaks Jail!"

Jesse noticed that the newsboy stared at him critically, and then he remembered that he was riding through the streets without a hat. With the town

around him alive with his enemies, he knew that anything in his attire that excited criticism or laughter would end in his identification. Jesse, however, was a man of resources, and he waited until he had ridden about a block further and then, seeing a young man with a broad white felt hat on his head coming down the deserted street, Jesse rode over to the man, leaned down, plucked the hat from the stranger's head, and placed it on his own forehead.

"How dare you!" cried the stranger. "Who are you, anyway?"

Jesse drew a five-dollar gold piece from the pocket and dropped it at the feet of the stranger.

"There is money to buy you a new hat," the outlaw laughed. "You go home and tell your wife that Jesse James bought you a hat in exchange for your old one!"

Leaving the white-faced and astonished stranger standing aghast on the sidewalk, Jesse spurred his horse into a gallop and launched off down the street at a speed that defied pursuit.

In turning all the evils of his position over in his mind, Jesse decided that he probably would be able to rejoin his companions somewhere near the Natural Bridge Road. At the end of an hour's riding, he saw the forms of two men mounted on horses coming along the thoroughfare, and when the horsemen had approached nearer, to his intense joy the men proved to be his brother Frank and Clel Miller.

Jesse waved his stolen hat, and Frank James gave a loud shout when he saw his brother, and in a few moments more, the three outlaws were again together. Jesse explained quickly how he had escaped from jail, and the pleasure of the outlaws over the escape of their leader was intense.

"I figured they wouldn't keep you in jail long, Jesse," said Frank.

"The only way to keep Jesse in a cell," laughed Clel Miller, "would be to put him in a cell after he was dead."

"I'm not so sure I wouldn't get up then and get out," remarked Jesse. "I am out, but by this time, there must be any number of posses searching the town for me."

"What of that?" said Frank. "We three fellows have been chased before. A good many men who chased us aren't chasing anybody any more. If I were in your place, Jesse, I'd hike for old Jackson County. Those fellows won't dare to follow us there, and I think it's getting pretty dangerous to be laying around here. Let's start for home."

"Not much," said Jesse. "I'm going to get that girl yet and get that money! Don't you think that I'm going to let the fact that there's two hundred men, more or less, after me, stop me in this dash for millions?"

"It seems to me, Jesse, that we're going too far in this thing," remarked Clel Miller. "We have made some money out of this trip. What's the matter with drawing out of this game, letting all this hue and cry die away, and coming back and getting the girl afterwards?"

"You talk like a crazy man!" replied Jesse. "Maxwell Hyde, by the time we could get back, would have got to that girl, turned her over to that lawyer who's running her father's estate, and would have cleaned up the reward. If we're going to get

her at all, we've got to get that heiress now. Tomorrow will be too late, perhaps. Don't you see that the only chance we have to get a piece of that fortune is by capturing the girl again, and then re-opening negotiations with the executor of the estate whereby he will be willing to pay us money for the return of the heiress?"

"But don't you see," expostulated Frank, "that when Maxwell Hyde took the girl away from us, he figured on doing just what we propose to do? How do you know but that by this time Maxwell Hyde has not escorted the girl to the office of Anderson Fish, revealed the identity of the girl to the lawyer and cleaned up that reward?"

"I know better than that," said Jesse.

"How do you know?" interrogated Frank.

"Because I bought an extra edition of the newspaper, issued not an hour ago, and while I find plenty of news about the escape of Jesse James, not one word do I find relating to the return of Edna Thomas. If the girl had been returned to Anderson Fish, it would have been such an astounding piece of news that the papers would be filled with it."

"Jesse is right," remarked Clel. "But what do you propose to do?"

"I'm going to strike across country," said Jesse, "until I can get around St. Louis and come into town by another route. We can't hope to get back again as we are now. My plan is to raid some farmer's house and get some different clothing, and when we are able to disguise ourselves, make a circuit of the town, cross the river far above St. Louis, and get into the city by an entirely different route."

"But, Jesse, won't the authorities be watching for you that way?"

"No," answered Jesse firmly.

"Why not?" asked Frank.

"I fixed all that," said Jesse.

"How?" asked Frank.

"When I pinched the hat off that fellow I told him to go home and tell his wife that Jesse James did it."

"What a confounded fool trick that was!" sneered Frank. "You have brought down the police upon us by that act."

"Not much I haven't," rejoined Jesse. "That fool stranger has told by this time at least a hundred men that Jesse James took his hat. At least seventy-five of those hundred men have sent this word to the police. Every — policeman in town will hurry out here, expecting to capture me here in this vicinity."

"They'll do it all right," whispered Clel.

"No, they won't!"

"Why not?" asked Frank.

"Because I don't propose to remain here to be captured. I'm going to find how fast this horse that I have bought can carry me in a few hours. Your fellows turn my horse loose. The police will find the animal grazing along the roadside, and after they have got it through their fool noddles that it is Jesse James's horse they will spend valuable time in hunting for Jesse, which will give said Jesse plenty of time to arrive hence. Come on, boys!"

Jesse put spurs to his horse, and the party were soon many miles from the scene which the police, several hours later, as Jesse had predicted, selected as the very spot in which they would recapture the outlaw. There was much beating of bushes, ridings to and fro on the

part of the police, and finally they came across Jesse James's horse, which one member of the posse pronounced after an examination, to be one of the favorite steeds of the infamous outlaw. This identification whetted the curiosity of the authorities, and they became sure in their own minds that Jesse was secreted somewhere in the vicinity. They soon learned, however, that while they had arrested Jesse James's horse, they had not arrested the animal's outlaw rider, and crestfallen, they returned to the jail in St. Louis and admitted to a horde of waiting reporters, that they did not have the slightest idea as to where Jesse James could be found.

By this time, Jesse and his two companions were within twenty miles of St. Louis, riding along a country road. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of an extremely hot day.

"Better ride around that village ahead of us," cautioned Frank James.

"I think not," replied Jesse. "Any of you fellows know the name of this village?"

"I don't know its name, but it looks like a tank town," replied Frank.

"I don't think anybody around here is liable to know us," said Jesse. "Let's us ride right into the town, go up to a store, walk in, hold up the store proprietor and get some food. I'm hollow down to my bootheels."

It was a noticeable fact about Jesse James that no matter how much money he had, nor how much he secured in his lawless career, he had made up his mind never to part with a cent for the purchase of anything if there was a fair chance of getting it by some deed of crime. Jesse James ought to have known better than to engage in the petty robbery of a country store when his easiest way would have been to have gone to the store and for a few dollars, made all the necessary purchases.

So the entire party started down the main street of this unknown to them, sleepy, contented little old village, in a quiet part of the country where no one for a moment dreamed that the quiet riders entering their peaceful village were the bandits of the bloody band of Jackson County. At the store, Jesse swung off his horse and walked within it with his revolver in his hand. The outlaw ordered a gray-bearded half-farmer, half-merchant who stood at a desk in the store, to hustle out some food for him. Clel Miller and Frank James remained on their horses outside of the store in the street, awaiting the return of their fellow desperado.

By one of those intangible flashes that seem somehow in quiet communities to communicate from man to man, citizens in the town became cognizant of the fact that Jesse and Frank James and Clel Miller were figuring in a hold-up at the only large store in the village.

Men were seen running across the fields bearing rifles, and soon a fringe of fire began creeping from the underbrush, as citizens under cover commenced shooting at the outlaws.

Doctor Manson Wheelock, a physician in the town, who was across the street in an upstairs room, fired a revolver at Frank James's horse, hitting it in the neck. Frank James returned the fire with lightning rapidity, smashing the windows all about the doctor, and Jesse, who heard the shots, rushed out of the

store, not stopping to get the bundle the storekeeper had put up for him. As soon as Jesse reached the street, he cut loose with his revolver. A young man who resided in the town fired at Jesse James. The outlaw's hat went spinning away with the shot, and Jesse returned the fire, shooting the young man through the lungs. The young man staggered a few feet and fell on his face, but as he did so fired two rapid shots at Clel Miller. One of the bullets struck Clel in the wrist, breaking it.

By this time, Jesse had remounted his horse and ordered an instant retreat. Clel Miller shifted his revolver to his left hand, and as the three outlaws spurred their horses to their utmost endeavor in a mad effort to get back into the country, a negro fired from a doorway at Clel. With quick flash Clel returned the shot, his bullet cutting a furrow through the negro's cheek, but not killing him. The outlaws, however, had had enough. They retreated rapidly, and were soon out in the country again, a dilapidated trio. They had been caught almost for the first time, but it was possible that swift and sharp punishment would be meted out to them at any moment.

The outlaws knew that they would be pursued, and while Clel Miller bound up his arm as well as he could, the entire party scampered away with such speed that they soon distanced their pursuers. After a fifteen mile ride, they found themselves in one of the suburbs of St. Louis, but on the opposite side of the river to the city. Here they turned their horses loose in a lonely field to graze, hiding their saddles and bridles in the underbrush which skirted the field, and Jesse James led the way to the river where after some difficulty they secured a boat. It was decided on the way over that Clel Miller, who was not known at all in that vicinity, had better return at once to Jackson County by rail, as far as he could go. All around the home section of the Jesse James gang, they had many friends and admirers. Jesse examined Clel Miller's wound, but he did not think that it was serious. The bullet had broken one of the small bones in the outlaw's right wrist, but it lay so near the surface that Jesse picked it out with his penknife. He roughly bandaged up the injury, and, as soon as the party had reached the St. Louis shore, Clel Miller stole away in the darkness of the early evening intending to board a late train out of the town for Jackson County.

Frank and Jesse James were therefore left alone, and in spite of the fact that they had not secured a suitable disguise, as they had planned, decided to immediately re-enter the city, and trust to luck.

This luck came to them in an astonishing fashion. A trifle cowed by his last attempt which bordered upon the realms of petty thievery, Jesse and Frank entered a clothing store and although a clerk in the store was so filled with the story of the escape of Jesse James from the jail that he could hardly have time to negotiate a sale of goods, the two outlaws purchased two suits of clothing entirely different from the ones they were wearing. They also bought two derby hats, and as they always wore the western style of wide felt hat, this in itself changed their appearance materially.

The two outlaws changed their clothes in the store, and after the clerk had bundled up the clothing they

wore into the place, meekly paid for the articles and left.

Jesse rapidly retraced his steps to the river, and after he had well weighted his and his brother's clothing with heavy stones, dropped the respective bundles beneath the water into which they disappeared forever.

Jesse could not help but laugh at Frank as he saw him in his new neat gray suit and black derby hat.

"You look like a whiskey salesman," Jesse laughed.

"You look like a psalm singing parson," replied Frank.

"At all events," returned Jesse, "I think we are effectually disguised. I think we are safe to go anywhere in town we may feel like going to."

The two outlaws had no trouble from this time on, at least for the night in question, in roaming about St. Louis unobserved. Everywhere they found the town ringing with their story. They drifted from saloon to saloon, from dance hall to dance hall, from theater to theater, walked about hotel lobbies, as free as any citizen in St. Louis.

"There is more in this disguise business than people think for," murmured Jesse to Frank, as they turned into Vine Street, and saw knots of excited citizens standing on street corners discussing their deeds of blood.

"What are you going to do next?" asked Frank. "It seems to me that I'm always asking that question of you, Jesse. I seem to have lost all my originality. Say, wasn't that a hot brush we had back there in that town?"

"We certainly picked up a lot of live wires there. Who would ever have thought such a lot of country-men could have been so handy with their guns? When I came running out of that grocery, I was dead sure that we were all going to see our finish. I'm sorry Clel got hit, but between us, I was awfully glad to ship him off home. Clel is a good fellow, but he isn't much good any more to us in this campaign. We have got to a point where we can't do anything by shooting. The minute we open up with a gun, we're marked men, and I don't want the contract of shooting up all of St. Louis. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do, Frank. We will drift around toward that fortune-telling joint."

"Suppose the old dope ain't there?" asked Frank.

"Then it's up to us to find her," replied Jesse.

CHAPTER XI.

MAXWELL HYDE SEES A LIGHT.

Maxwell Hyde, the detective, when he received the message from Anderson Fish, immediately went to the lawyer's office.

"I have news for you," Fish said, the moment he was closeted with the detective.

"Good news, I hope?" asked Maxwell Hyde anxiously.

"In a measure."

"Tell it to me quick, please."

"I had a caller to-day."

"Who was it?"

"Edna Thomas."

"The devil!"

"Oh, no, only Edna Thomas—or at least a girl who said she was Edna Thomas."

"Where did she come from?"

"Heavens only knows!"

"Did she have a big snake with her?"

"Did she have what? What do you mean by that?"

"Did she show signs of having been in the river?"

"Snakes! River! What in the world are you talking about? Who said anything about snakes or rivers? I just told you that Edna Thomas had been here."

Maxwell Hyde grinned sheepishly. In his amazement at the astonishing news imparted to him, he had forgotten that Anderson Fish knew nothing of the fact that the heiress had disguised herself as old Meg, the fortune-teller, had wound a hideous snake around her waist, and had fooled him as well as Clel Miller. Nor did he know that possibly Mr. Fish was holding back the information regarding his bold deed in rescuing the heiress.

"It seems to me that there isn't very much more for me to do," Maxwell Hyde remarked. "You have gotten in touch with Miss Thomas, now, and doubtless she is ready to throw off her disguises and claim her father's fortune. What else is there for me to do except to try to recapture Jesse James."

"There's a good deal more for you to do than you think there is," returned Mr. Fish. "Miss Thomas is at the Planters' Hotel. She is registered there in her own name, or at least, in the name that she says is her own. She wants someone to protect her against any future attempts of the Jesse James gang to abduct her. I have told her that if you would consent to take the question of her protection upon your shoulders, that she could depend upon your fidelity and discretion."

"That's all right, Mr. Fish. I am willing to do all I can to aid you and to aid Miss Thomas in any possible way. I am willing to take my chances at getting killed by taking Jesse James or any member of his band, but I don't want to act as fighting attendant to any woman on earth, if I can possibly escape it. I've had much experience in this world, and I'll take my chances with any gun man on earth. I know pretty near what a gun man will do. I can watch out for any of his tricks, but I'm not smart enough to figure what Miss Thomas will do next. If you don't mind, and you can get somebody else to act as her squire, I would prefer to have you do it, but don't stack me up against any maiden who one moment receives me as an old fortune-teller, and the next moment makes me fish her out of the river at the imminent peril of my life. That young lady's entirely too swift for a poor detective like myself."

Anderson Fish laughed loudly and long at the remark of Maxwell Hyde. He saw in a moment that Hyde was in deadly earnest, and did not relish the job of further protecting Miss Thomas. But after a great deal of argument and much persuasion, the detective accepted the duty thrust upon him, and Maxwell immediately repaired to the Planters' Hotel where he sent his card to Miss Thomas.

The young lady received him in the public parlor of the hotel, and immediately began thanking him for saving her life.

"Don't mention it!" stammered the detective.

"I know that it was a little thing," the girl rejoined, "but I think I'm going to ask a greater service of you, although I see that you lightly value my life, which, while it may not be particularly valuable to you, I assure you is necessary to my continued exist-

ence. Now I want to tell you something that will surprise you."

"What is it?" asked the detective, nonplussed at the tone of raillery adopted by the girl.

"I am informed by the clerk at the hotel, that two men clad in gray suits of clothes, and wearing derby hats, have been asking after me at the hotel desk."

Maxwell Hyde flashed a glance at the girl's face.

"What kind of looking men were they? Did the clerk describe them to you?"

"I sent for the clerk myself," replied Edna, "and gained from him an accurate description of the two men."

"Describe them."

"One man is said to have been tall, broad shouldered, with brown hair and eyes."

"Ah!" breathed the detective.

"The second man is said to be a little shorter than his companion with light hair and blue eyes. He wore a tawny mustache."

"Oh!"

"Do you know," continued Edna, "that I believe those two men were Frank and Jesse James!"

Maxwell Hyde nodded.

"They certainly in some ways fit the descriptions of the two outlaws," the detective said. "But I have yet to see Jesse James and Frank James dressed in the manner described by the clerk. Do you know any young men that would answer the description of these two callers?"

"I do not," replied Edna. "I do not believe that I know a dozen young men in the world. My life has always been a sheltered one, and I am confident that there is no one who would know me who would in any way answer the description of those two callers."

Maxwell Hyde paced back and forth in the wide parlor, immersed in thought. He had not yet received the slightest atom of information as to the whereabouts of the James brothers since he had arrested Jesse James at old Meg's home, and at which time Frank James and Clel Miller had escaped upon their horses. In the last analysis of all the facts surrounding this mysterious case, Maxwell Hyde felt confident that Edna Thomas had not seen the last of the James boys. Maxwell Hyde believed that the stupendous amount of money involved would lead the outlaws to take the most desperate steps to recapture the girl. She was the crux of their campaign. Without her, there was no possible chance of their getting at the banker's money. Maxwell Hyde believed that in his effort to protect Edna Thomas, he would once more have to try conclusions with the James boys. He felt sure that he was correct in assuming that the callers were Frank and Jesse James. He communicated this conclusion to Edna. The girl's face turned white, but after all she knew that Maxwell Hyde had only voiced her own opinion. She gave the detective an appealing glance.

"What step had I ought to take for you to protect me from the James boys?" she asked.

"I went to the theater the other night," replied the detective, "and I saw a five-act play. After twenty-five words had been spoken by the actors on the stage, had one man been possessed of the simplest common sense, the play could have closed there without the other four acts. But none of the characters appeared

to have the necessary common sense to end the dilemma and the play went on to the end."

"I see your application. You mean that if I had a little common sense, this play, as you call it, which may end in a tragedy for me, might be ended before the other four acts are finished?"

"Exactly!" replied the detective.

"I will admit that I haven't much common sense, and I must ask you to furnish me with some."

"Very well! I will try to do that very thing. All you have got to do, Miss Thomas, is to send for the chief of police of this town, and he will guard you safely against all of the Jesse James gang."

"Nonsense!" replied the girl. "Do you mean to tell me that I am safe when guarded by the police, who did not seem to be able to guard Jesse James when you delivered him over into their hands?"

"Don't knock the police, please. It is the fashion just now to criticize policemen, but in this particular case, the escape of Jesse James was due to the jail authorities and not to the police."

Silenced, although not convinced, Edna waited a few moments before replying.

"Perhaps after all there is a good deal of truth in what you say. But I have a personal reason for keeping to myself, and from the public, at least for the present, all knowledge as to my identity."

"You mean to say, therefore, that you do not wish to take the common sense plan that I have presented to you?"

"I do."

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"Tell you why? You are worse than Anderson Fish! He did nothing but ask me why. Can you men do nothing but ask questions? Is there no other word in the English language save 'why'? You may think me a very foolish girl, but I tell you at the present time it is as impossible for me to appeal to the St. Louis police for protection as it is for me to tell you why I am not willing to reveal my identity, or for the present to substantiate my claim to my father's fortune in the courts as Anderson Fish proposed to me."

"Then there is nothing more for me to do, except personally to try to protect you as well as I can. Having told you that I think you are a very foolish girl, for the attitude you are taking, I am willing to take on the difficult proposition of again saving your life."

"Do you think I am safe in this hotel?"

"I do not."

"What shall I do?"

"I don't know."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"You are the most exasperating man I have ever met."

"Not to be impolite, I must say that you are the most exasperating woman I have ever met. Now, my dear young lady, do you not see that it is impossible for us to do anything? If anything is going to be done, it will be done by Jesse James's band. We have got to remain quiet and act upon the defensive. They are the flying artillery of this campaign. When they start anything, we've got to be ready to meet it. So far as you are concerned, I think you had better remain in this hotel. It is a public place, and I do not

think that either Frank or Jesse James would dare to attempt to attack you here——"

As the detective spoke, on the marble corridor outside of the room he heard the click of bootheels. There was something ominous and sinister in the footfalls. Maxwell Hyde jumped to his feet just as a crimson silk portière which hung in the door of the room in which he and Edna Thomas were seated, parted, and there, framed in the background of the blood-red curtain, stood a man with a revolver in his hand. With a cry, Maxwell Hyde darted at the figure.

"It's Jesse James!" he shouted.

CHAPTER XII.

A LAST FIGHT FOR THE FORTUNE.

Edna Thomas gave a wild shriek.

She saw the dilemma in which she and the detective were placed in a second. The outlaw, in some unknown way, had discovered that she and Maxwell Hyde were together in the public parlor, and he had calmly walked up the marble staircase leading to the first floor of the Planters' Hotel, and had entered the room with the determination in his mind to kill the detective, and again make the girl a prisoner.

The quickness of mind of Maxwell Hyde had made him see instantaneously that the figure in the doorway was that of the outlaw. Although no man lived at that time who was quicker with his revolver than Jesse James, the detective with his vast experience in man to man fights, had embraced the only chance that life held for him. With the speed of thought, he jumped over the intervening space between himself and the outlaw and grasped the revolver far back from the muzzle, and with a quick wrench threw it upwards in the air.

Crash! The weapon exploded with a deafening report. Exerting all his strength, the detective pulled the revolver out of Jesse's grasp. Jesse caught the detective by the arm and by the throat with the same motion, and a titanic struggle began. The two men wrestled over the room, upsetting furniture, while Edna shrieked at the top of her voice, thus hoping to bring immediate assistance. Maxwell Hyde, in his anxiety to get the revolver away from Jesse, had not time to draw his own weapon until it was too late. In fact, in the fierce situation that confronted him, he had not for a moment thought of drawing his weapon. When he did think of this action, Jesse had him by the throat and by the arm, making it impossible for him to get at his weapon, which was in his hip pocket. In their struggles, the two men fell over a chair and came down with a tremendous crash, Jesse James on top.

Although extremely excited, Edna Thomas acted with rare discretion. On a mantel of reddish marble in the room stood a gilt clock. The girl rushed to the clock, picked it up, dashed back to the struggling forms on the floor, and raising the clock in her white hands, brought it down with all her strength upon the back of Jesse James's head. It was fortunate for the outlaw that the clock was made of flimsy material. Had it been the average bronze clock, Jesse James's head would have been split open by the force of the girl's blow, and he would have been immediately killed.

As it was, the blow covered his head with glass, and in his fierce rage, he turned to grapple with the girl. At this critical moment, men came running into the

room, headed by the clerk of the hotel, who, as soon as he saw the struggling men on the floor, began wildly firing a revolver at them. Edna Thomas was in imminent danger of being killed by a stray bullet, but she had presence of mind enough to fall to the floor, and the missiles harmlessly whistled over her head. Detective Maxwell lay on his back choked almost into complete insensibility. Following the hotel clerk, came a horde of men, all shouting and gesticulating, and when Jesse James saw them, without attempting further attack upon Edna or upon the detective, he rushed to an open window at one end of the room, and vaulted out into the night. The desperado knew that directly beneath the window was a long, low building only one story in height, and he dashed along the roof of this building, let himself down by his hands from its eaves, and dropped into the street, mingled with the crowd hurrying backwards and forwards, and disappeared.

By this time, detective Maxwell Hyde had regained possession of his faculties, and he ran to the window just as Jesse James dropped into the street below.

Edna Thomas followed him quickly, and her detaining hand stopped the detective from vaulting through the window after the flying outlaw.

"He has escaped you," the girl murmured. "Do not try to follow him! Stay here and get me out of this room as quickly as you can."

"You're right," cried the detective. "It is my duty to remain here. Come this way!"

Rapidly threading the crowd of men who gazed at her curiously, but who did not dare ask the detective in whose hand was a revolver what the trouble was, Maxwell Hyde and Edna managed to escape from the room and get out into the corridor of the hotel.

"You're not safe here," said the detective. "That's evident."

"Are you hurt?" asked the girl.

"The only thing that's hurt about me," the detective said, "is my feelings. My throat is a little bit sore and I am slightly bruised, but the only thing for us to do is to get away from this hotel just as quickly as we can. Never mind my injuries."

When Maxwell Hyde and Edna reached the lower floor of the hotel, they found it crowded with men which a squad of policemen were trying to beat back into some semblance of order. A police captain saw Maxwell Hyde and rushed up to him.

"What's the trouble, Maxwell? Do you know?" asked the police captain.

"I don't know," calmly answered Maxwell Hyde. "There seemed to be some kind of a domestic disturbance up stairs there somewhere. I heard some shots, but I didn't go up to see what it was about. It wasn't any of my business, you know."

"I guess you're right," rejoined the police captain. "It's better for an outsider not to mix in any shooting scrapes in which he's not personally concerned. But Maxwell, what are you doing here?"

"I'm escorting this young lady, who is a friend of the family of Mr. Anderson Fish. I am anxious to get a cab, Captain. Can you send one of the boys out to get one for me?"

"Certainly," replied the captain. "I know Mr. Fish very well indeed, and I would be glad to assist any friend of his family."

In a few moments Maxwell Hyde and Edna were

placed in a cab by the police captain, and at the request of the detective, a plain clothes policeman was placed on the box of the cab and a uniformed officer got in with the couple, and the driver was instructed to hurry to the residence of Anderson Fish.

"You see, Miss Thomas," whispered Maxwell Hyde to the girl, "that it is possible to place you under police protection without revealing the secret that you are so carefully concealing!"

The girl smiled.

"What is your idea," she said, "in taking me to Anderson Fish?"

"I haven't any idea," he said, "in that. It is certainly impossible for you to stay in that hotel, now that we know Jesse James is after you. The only place of refuge that I can think of is in the home of Mr. Fish."

"Very well," replied Edna. "I suppose it is a matter that in a good many ways is out of our hands. I suppose that you know I called on Mr. Fish?"

"Yes."

"And of course you know what I said to him. Under the circumstances do you think that he would receive me?"

"I think that he would."

Edna said no more, and the cab soon stopped at the home of Anderson Fish. Maxwell Hyde briefly related the circumstances surrounding the renewed attack on the part of the James band upon the girl, and Mr. Fish in a tone of surprise asked many questions. In spite of himself, Mr. Fish felt that Edna Thomas was telling the truth. His mind was in a chaotic state because while he did not think it possible for the girl to produce the necessary legal proof that she was the daughter of Franklin Thomas, yet at the same time Mr. Fish felt in his innermost heart that the girl was telling the truth. Under the circumstances he decided that after all, it would be best to receive Edna and, as Mrs. Fish was of the same opinion as her husband, the beautiful girl became a member of his household temporarily.

Maxwell Hyde, to whom had been assigned the uniform and plain clothes policemen, ordered the two officers to maintain a close watch by patrolling around the outside of the Fish residence, and then Maxwell resigned his active participation in the protection of Edna to these officers and after a few words with Mr. Fish, started away to continue active search for the James boys.

Jesse James, meanwhile, had been hurrying away from the scene of his last attack upon Edna Thomas. The outlaw reproached himself for having allowed himself to be betrayed into the position of attacking the girl in such a public place. As a matter of fact, he had not intended to make the attack. He was spying about at the hotel in an effort to get the lay of the land, and his sudden coming upon Maxwell Hyde and Edna had caused him to lose his hair-trigger temper. Jesse had made his escape from the hotel without difficulty, and after he had searched through the crowd about him, rejoined his brother Frank, and the two outlaws walked hastily away together.

"You certainly got into trouble that trip, Jesse," said Frank in a laughing tone of voice.

"I certainly did," replied Jesse. "I know it was a foolish thing for me to do, but when I saw that infernal detective, I lost my head completely."

"Well, it's the first time on record."

"Why didn't you use your gun?"

"I didn't have time. That fellow Hyde got me quicker than a flash, and then that girl dropped a clock on top of my head and it was all off with me."

"It's a wonder she didn't kill you!"

"She would, if the clock had been heavier. As it was, I am pretty well cut up on the top of my head. Do you know, Frank, that girl's got an awful temper!"

"I don't know much about her temper, but if she fires clocks like that very often, she'd need to get her father's fortune to pay up the expenses—a girl who fires a forty-dollar clock at a man will eat up a lot of furniture at the end of a year. But look here, Jesse, what are we going to do?"

"I'm going back to see old Meg, that fortune-teller."

"Why, you're crazy! I'll bet you that fortune-teller's joint is alive with policemen."

"I don't believe so. Those policemen never would suspect that we'd have the nerve to go back to see old Meg, and I'll bet you seven dollars that we will find her unprotected. If we do, I'll warrant it'll be a bad five minutes for her."

"What are you going to do with her?"

"I'm ashamed to tell you. I'm going to make her tell me first what charm she uses to make her appear as an old woman one moment, and a pretty young girl the next. When I get that out of her, I'm going to make her cough up all the facts about that missing heiress. If she don't tell me where I can find that girl, people will be walking slow behind her and there'll be a wreath of immortelles on her coffin in about four minutes."

There was a deadly light of anger in Jesse James's eyes as he spoke. Jesse always, in his career, had resorted to unnecessary cruelty. Frank thought of the days when he and his brother had tortured to death a Pinkerton detective whom they had captured in a vain effort to make their captive divulge the plans of his employers. Frank drew a long breath and looked at Jesse. He knew when he saw a flickering light that glanced in the outlaw's eyes, and a sudden tightening of the thin lips of his brother, that the devilish nature of the man was in the ascendency. Frank knew further that it was impossible to thwart his brother when he had thrown every consideration to the winds, except that of revenge.

"All right, old man," Frank laughed. "All I can say is that I hope old Meg has made her will! It seems to me that the old hag has been cut apart from human life and is standing in the shadow of her grave."

The two outlaws soon reached the home of old Meg. Utterly careless of consequences and with but a brief investigation, they decided that old Meg's home was unguarded, and the two men entered the house and knocked at the fortune-teller's reception parlor on the first floor. Old Meg opened the door. She staggered back, her face white, drawn, and tense with fear. She knew Jesse James in a moment, and she identified the tawny mustached man with him as Jesse's no less dangerous brother Frank.

With a faint smile on his face, Frank James held a revolver at the cowering and trembling old woman's head. Frank locked the door, the grating of the lock sounding like a knell of doom.

"I want you to answer some questions," Jesse murmured in his low, deep voice, which at times seemed

to contain the same notes that make up the snarl of a wild beast. "You sit down, and don't you try to make a fuss!"

The unfortunate fortune-teller sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Frank posted himself near the door.

"Now look here, Mother Meg," said Jesse, "I want you to tell me how you changed yourself from an old woman to a young one, and thus deceived my side partner, Clel Miller."

"I didn't!" replied Meg.

"You lie!" returned Jesse.

"I swear to you I didn't!"

"Then how was it," asked Jesse, "that when Clel Miller came here he talked to a woman he supposed was you? She looked exactly like you, yet when I came here, I quickly found that the woman Clel had talked to was disguised and was the missing heiress."

"I tell you, I don't know anything about it," answered old Meg. "Maxwell Hyde asked me these same questions. I answered him as I am answering you. I don't know."

Jesse laughed sarcastically.

"Nonsense," he said. "You can't fool me! You tell me where that girl, is or I'll kill you."

Old Meg jumped to her feet. She threw all discretion to the winds.

"If you touch a single hair of that girl's head, I will put the great curse upon you, outlaws that ye are!" howled the Witch of the Serpent.

Jesse James raised his hand. There was a sharp report, a burst of flame, and old Meg pitched forward on her face dead.

"Good God, Jesse, what did you do that for!" gasped Frank.

"There was no use fooling with that old hag," murmured Jesse. "You hurry up and search this room and see if we can't get some trace of where that girl is. This is our last chance for the million. This game is too hot for us. We don't stand the shadow of a look in."

With frantic haste the two men searched the room. A desk in one corner of the room was broken open by Frank with his Bowie knife. Papers within the desk were quickly scanned, but not one single thing was discovered that in any way threw light on the mystery.

"Foiled!" hissed Jesse, with a blood curdling oath. "Frank, it's no use. The jig is up! All St. Louis is up against us. All Missouri is aflame with the desire to exterminate us. It's back to old Jackson Country for ours!"

"I don't know whether we'll get there or not."

"I don't much care. Here's the biggest scheme we were ever in ending in nothing. Was there ever such hard luck!"

"Let's dust out of here quick," said Frank. "Somebody may have heard your shot."

The outlaws quickly left the house, paying no attention to the silent form lying face downward on a rug. Jesse James had secured his revenge and cared nothing for the life that he had taken.

As the two men issued from the fortune-teller's home, Jesse grasped Frank by the arm.

"There comes Maxwell Hyde!" snapped Jesse.

At the same moment, the two men saw coming from an opposite direction a squad of blue-coated policemen.

Maxwell Hyde saw the outlaws almost at the same instant that Jesse discovered him. In a moment Maxwell Hyde let fly with his revolver, just as Jesse raised his pistol to shoot. The bullet from Hyde's revolver struck the weapon of Jesse, but did not harm the outlaw. But the shot tore Jesse's gun from his grasp, and the impact of the shot caused the outlaw to stagger backwards, while his revolver rang upon the stone pavement, and again exploded, the shot, however, harmlessly burying itself in a tree.

Frank took a flying shot at Maxwell Hyde, but missed. The posse of policemen rushed forward as they heard the shots and a fusillade of bullets came tearing towards the outlaws.

"Back, Jesse, back!" howled Frank. "Into the house, quick!"

Jesse did not stop to pick up his revolver, but disappeared with Frank again into the fortune-teller's home. The outlaws ran through the house, leaped into an area or courtyard in the rear of the dwelling, scaled a fence with remarkable agility, and disappeared down the street as the howling mob of police, headed by Maxwell Hyde dashed through the front door in pursuit.

The policemen commanded by Maxwell Hyde, searched every nook and cranny in the building and made a house to house canvass in a gallant effort to round up the outlaws. They were unsuccessful. Maxwell Hyde, baffled again, felt that the two outlaws had made their escape, and although he did not tell his companions so, felt sure that they had made off and he surmised that the outlaws had given up their too dangerous plot and had returned to Jackson County, where the detective knew that they were perfectly safe, surrounded as they would be there by a multitude of friends and confederates. But Maxwell Hyde's indomitable perseverance made him once more swear to himself that come what might, he would catch the outlaws, and with bowed head and in no amiable frame of mind, he returned to the home of Anderson Fish to acquaint him and Edna Thomas with the terrible story of the death of old Meg, the fortune-teller, and the escape of her murderers.

CHAPTER XIII.

EDNA THOMAS REVEALS HER SECRET.

On the same evening of the day in which old Meg had been so foully assassinated, Anderson Fish, Edna Thomas, and Maxwell Hyde sat in the library of Mr. Fish's home listening to the story of the death of the fortune-teller.

Edna's face was white with suppressed emotion, and it was with difficulty that she restrained her tears. Neither Maxwell Hyde nor Anderson Fish, under the circumstances, felt like pressing Edna for the explanation that they felt was their due as to her strange conduct in not only refusing to claim the fortune which awaited her, but in her association with the fortune-teller.

Edna, however, felt that the time for concealment on her part had ended. Her heart was torn with sorrow over the death of old Meg, and in a faltering voice she told Mr. Anderson that the death of old Meg had removed from her lips the seal of secrecy which would have bound them not to answer any questions as long as the old woman was alive.

"I do not know how to begin my recital," Edna faltered.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to ask you questions," rejoined Mr. Fish.

"For some reason or other, I believe that we can more quickly arrive at a solution of the mystery in this manner than by asking you to tell the story, which I doubt in your nervous and grief-stricken state you could easily do."

"Thank you," Edna replied. "I will answer your questions as well as I can."

Maxwell Hyde folded his arms and stared into the flickering flame of the lamp that stood on a table. Mr. Fish folded his arms also and began pacing up and down as if he had been in a court-room examining a witness, while Edna sat in a chair in the center of the room, her white face turned in appeal to the lawyer.

"First, Miss Thomas," asked Mr. Fish, "who was old Meg?"

"She was my father's only sister," replied the girl.

Anderson Fish wheeled around and looked at the girl with amazement on his face.

"What!" he said, "are you mad? The only sister of Franklin Thomas died many years ago. I know this to be true because Mr. Thomas told me so."

"I know that my father did not know that his sister was not dead. Mr. Fish, as you are conversant with all my dead father's affairs, you know how fond he was of hunting wild game, and how, every summer, he used to go on hunting expeditions to the shores of Coronation Gulf far away out in the remote frontier of British North America."

"Yes, yes, I know that," answered the lawyer.

"Very often my father's sister Ethel Thomas accompanied her brother to those inaccessible wilds as she was equally as fond of an out-door life as he."

"I did not know that," the lawyer returned.

"On one of the summer trips, my aunt met on the shores of Coronation Gulf, a young man with whom she fell in love. This young man, Rudolph of the Long Knife, as he was called, was a member of the band known as the *Outlaws of Blue-Waters*. The band was not much better than that now surrounding Jesse James. Of course my father, as soon as he heard of the foolish love escapade of his sister, attempted to break up the friendship. Possibly, if my father had been a little wiser, he would not have combatted the friendship quite so strenuously. Resistance on the part of the family of a girl to the man she thinks she's in love with, usually makes the girl stick to the man she has selected. My father tried every means possible to break up the marriage that he saw foreshadowed, but he was unsuccessful. His only sister eloped and married the outlaw, and my father never communicated with her or had anything to do with her after the marriage. This treatment rankled in the mind of Rudolph of the Long Knife, who was a thoroughly bad man, and one night he conceived the plan of stealing me, who was then an infant. I was born some time after the marriage of my father's sister to the outlaw Rudolph, and Rudolph thought that his revenge upon my father would be complete by stealing me. Old Meg was not old Meg then, and I am sorry to say she assisted in the plot of her husband, as she was bitterly angry at her brother for not accepting her husband, and for casting her off and leaving her out of his will, as she well knew that he done."

Anderson Fish was utterly dumbfounded by the revelations of the girl, but he felt sure from some facts that he knew, that Edna was telling the truth. He listened intently while Edna continued.

"After my abduction," the girl continued, "I was taken charge of by old Meg, and for several years lived with her on the shores of Coronation Gulf. Of course, my treatment was of the best. Old Meg did all in the world that any one could do for a child. After the death of her husband, who was shot when I was five years old in a battle with revenue officers, who wished to arrest him as a smuggler, old Meg came to St. Louis."

"Did she bring you with her?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes."

"What did she do with you next?" questioned the attorney.

"She educated me here in St. Louis. In my younger days she maintained me at a convent, and as the money she had brought with her soon dwindled, she resorted to the occupation of a fortune-hunter to gain enough money for our support."

"Old Meg revealed all these circumstances to you, did she not?" asked the lawyer.

"She did, as soon as I was old enough to understand them. We talked the matter over thoroughly, and old Meg, my aunt, often assured me that she bitterly regretted her part of stealing me from my father. So far as I was concerned, my father was more a vision to me than an actuality. I had never seen him, my mother died at my birth, and of course, I had never seen her. I had always been reared with more or less luxury, and I did not care for my father's millions. You can see how, torn by conflicting feelings, it would be impossible for me to claim my father's fortune. If I had made this claim, I would have to tell the scandalous story of how my own aunt abducted me, of how she had made an unfortunate marriage, and I preferred to allow the skeleton in our family closet to remain closely locked in, rather than to unleash it and allow it to dance in the sight of all mankind."

"Well," replied Anderson Fish, "it was very loyal in you, of course, but at the same time, slightly—ah—Utopian!"

"Of course, you do not see the sentimental standpoint with which I view this circumstance," the girl replied. "Men and women do not look upon problems of this kind from the same angle. I felt that it was my duty not to cover old Meg, who had sheltered, fed and educated me, with the mantle of her crime merely to gain possession of money that I did not need, and which I am not sure that I want now."

"Your feelings were laudable, at least," said the lawyer, "but when did you finally decide to make the claim upon your father's millions?"

"Not until I read in the newspapers of the raiding of the bank at Cemetery Hill by Jesse James and his companions. Then old Meg, my aunt, told me that my father's private papers were there. I then knew that it was time for me to take action. I suspected that Jesse James would secure the documents which would lead him to make a dash for the Thomas millions, and I assumed a disguise that made me look like my aunt on the day that Clel Miller called in the hopes that I could throw the outlaws off the scent, and could protect my aunt and myself from their dastardly attempts to blackmail you, Mr. Fish, as executor of the estate, into paying them a tremendous reward to reveal my identity and my whereabouts. But the further I got in this plot, the more mixed it became."

Maxwell Hyde leaned forward earnestly as the girl finished speaking.

"Did old Meg know of your disguise, Miss Thomas?" Maxwell Hyde asked.

"She did not. She told the truth when she said that she was away from her home that day, visiting another friend who was also a fortune-teller. She did not lie to you, Mr. Hyde, when she made that statement. She

knew nothing at all of my attempts to save her from the consequences of her own misdeeds."

"I suppose of course that you have records that will prove the truth of your story?" said the materialistic lawyer.

"I have," replied the girl. "My aunt, old Meg, has a safe in a Safe Deposit Company's vault here in St. Louis, and all the facts that I've related to you can be substantiated by those records."

Anderson Fish studied over the words of the girl for some time. He knew in his own mind that she spoke the truth. He had accepted her story as being true, but he felt that after all the anguish and pain she had suffered, that he would like, if possible, to reinstate her in the possession of her father's millions without in the slightest degree shedding upon the terrible story the fierce light of publicity.

"It would seem to me that the best thing for us to do now," the lawyer said, "will be for Miss Thomas to go quietly away from St. Louis without making any claim at present upon her father's estate. I think she had better go to New York, and after several months, when the escape of Jesse James from jail, his flight and his return to his home in Jackson County have become mere memories in the public mind, then Miss Thomas can make a claim upon the estate. This she can do through counsel to whom I will send her in New York, and it need not be known in any way that I, as executor of the estate of Franklin Thomas had any knowledge of the heiress prior to the time that the New York attorneys make the claim upon the estate."

"I am in your hands, of course, Mr. Fish," the girl replied. "And possibly the proposition that you have made is the best one for us all."

"Have you any money?" asked the lawyer.

"I have fifty thousand dollars," replied the girl, with a gleam of amusement in her eyes. "It was paid to me by Clel Miller as what you—er—lawyers say—well, as a retaining fee, so as to speak."

"And like all good lawyers," answered Mr. Fish, "you have retained the fee."

"But I suspect," answered the girl, "that this money was part of the loot taken from the Cemetery Hill Bank. Rightfully, of course, the money should be returned to the bank."

"As your father's estate holds all of the stock in the Cemetery Hill Bank, with the exception of a few shares held by dummy directors, it would appear to me, as a lawyer, that Jesse James, when he robbed the Cemetery Hill Bank, robbed you of fifty thousand dollars."

"And when he retained me with that fifty thousand dollars, he was simply paying me back my own," remarked the girl. "Do you know what I am going to do with that money, if you think I may as well retain it?"

"I paid over a few years ago from your father's estate, the sum of fifty thousand dollars in a draft made payable to the president of the Cemetery Hill Bank to reimburse depositors for the money of theirs stolen by Jesse James and his gang. I think then you can retain the fifty thousand dollars given to you by Clel Miller as a retaining fee, without taxing your conscience very much."

"There now remains little for me to do except to see that the deserving poor is rewarded."

"Are rewarded, you mean, do you not?" asked the lawyer.

"No, I mean *is* rewarded," laughed the girl. "I'm going to give that money to Maxwell Hyde for his bravery in protecting me from the Jesse James gang, and also for saving my life, which, between us, I do not think is worth fifty thousand dollars."

"You probably would not sell it for fifty thousand dollars, would you?" asked the lawyer.

"Of course not," answered the girl.

Anderson Fish turned toward the chair in the shadow where Maxwell Hyde should have been seated. He gave a gasp of astonishment when he found the chair tenantless.

"Where is Maxwell Hyde?" the lawyer asked in astonishment.

"He certainly is not sitting in that chair where he was five minutes ago, and I do not remember seeing him steal out of the room," Edna Thomas replied.

"There's something white in that chair," said the lawyer. "It looks like a card."

Edna ran to the chair and picked up a card. She carried it to the lamplight and read it aloud to Anderson Fish.

"I can do no more good here. I have gone to find Jesse James—Maxwell Hyde!"

These were the words that Edna Thomas read:

"Maxwell Hyde is a remarkable man," murmured Edna. "Alas, his mission is a dangerous one!"

THE END.

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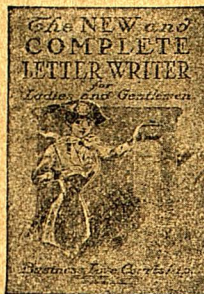
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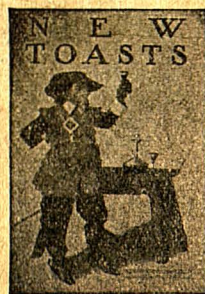
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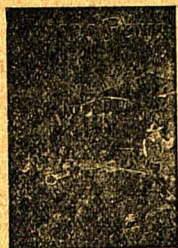
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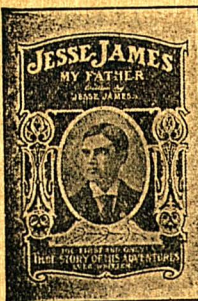
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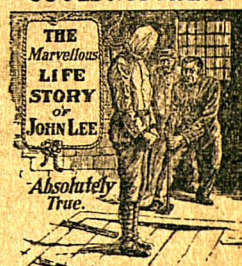
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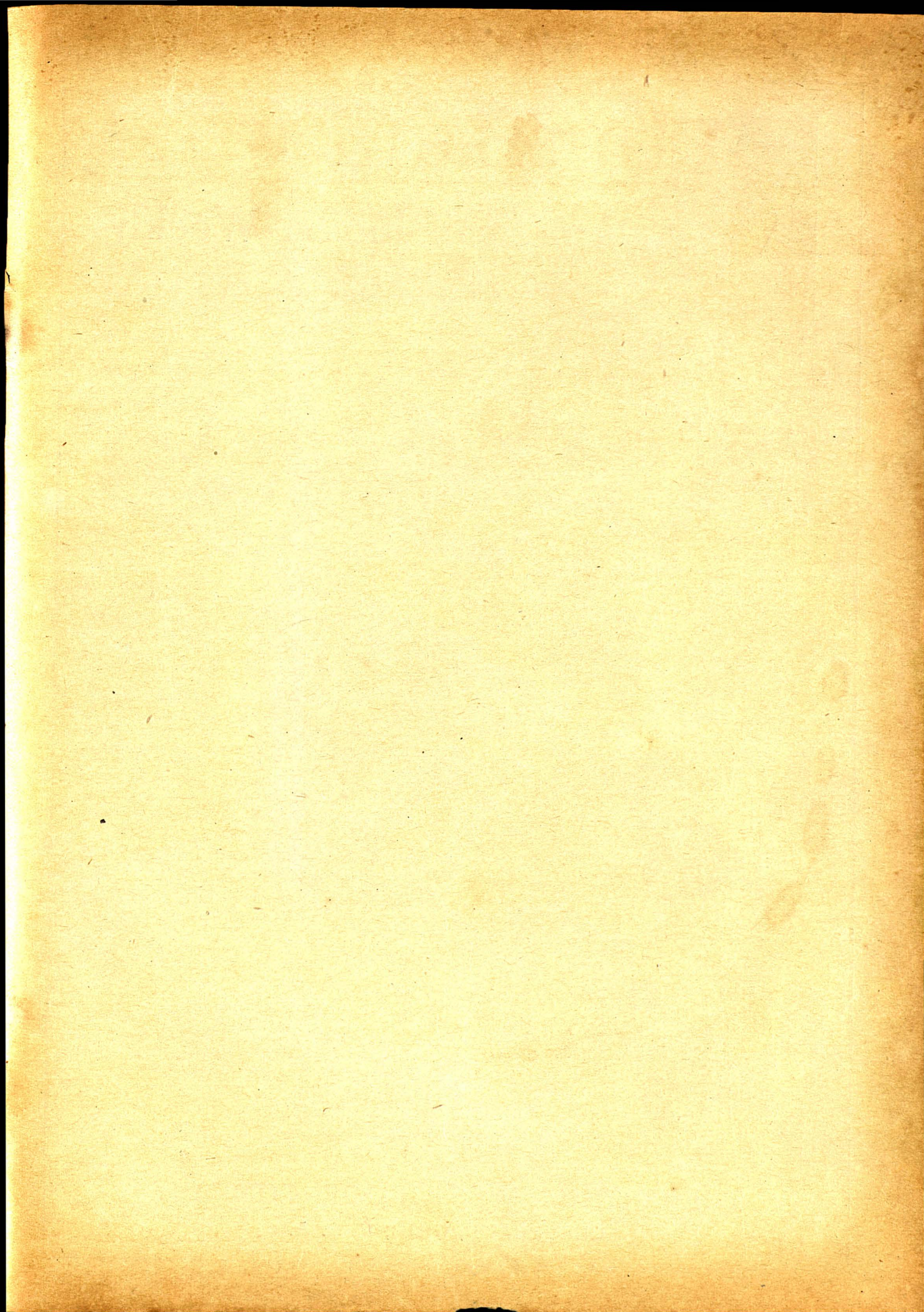
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No. 2. TRACKED TO HIS LAIRor The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider
No. 3. THE BLACK DEATHor The Curse of the Navajo Witch
No. 4. THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGEor Kidnapped by the Piutes
No. 5. TRAPPED BY THE CREESor Tricked by a Renegade Scout
No. 6. BETRAYED BY A MOCCASINor The Round-Up of the Indian Smugglers
No. 7. FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STANDor The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon
No. 8. A DASH FOR LIFEor Tricked by Timber Wolves
No. 9. THE DECOY MESSAGEor The Ruse of the Border Jumpers
No. 10. THE MIDNIGHT ALARMor The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp
No. 11. THE MASKED RIDERS.....or The Mystery of Grizzly Gulch
No. 12. LURED BY OUTLAWS.....or The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride
No. 13. STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE.....or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake
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No. 16. HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN.....or The Renegade's Death-Vote
No. 17. THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH.....or The Desperado of Poker Flat
No. 18. THE RED MASSACRE.....or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands
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June 1—No. 27. THE CURSE OF CORONATION GULF.....or The Outlaws of Blue Waters
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