

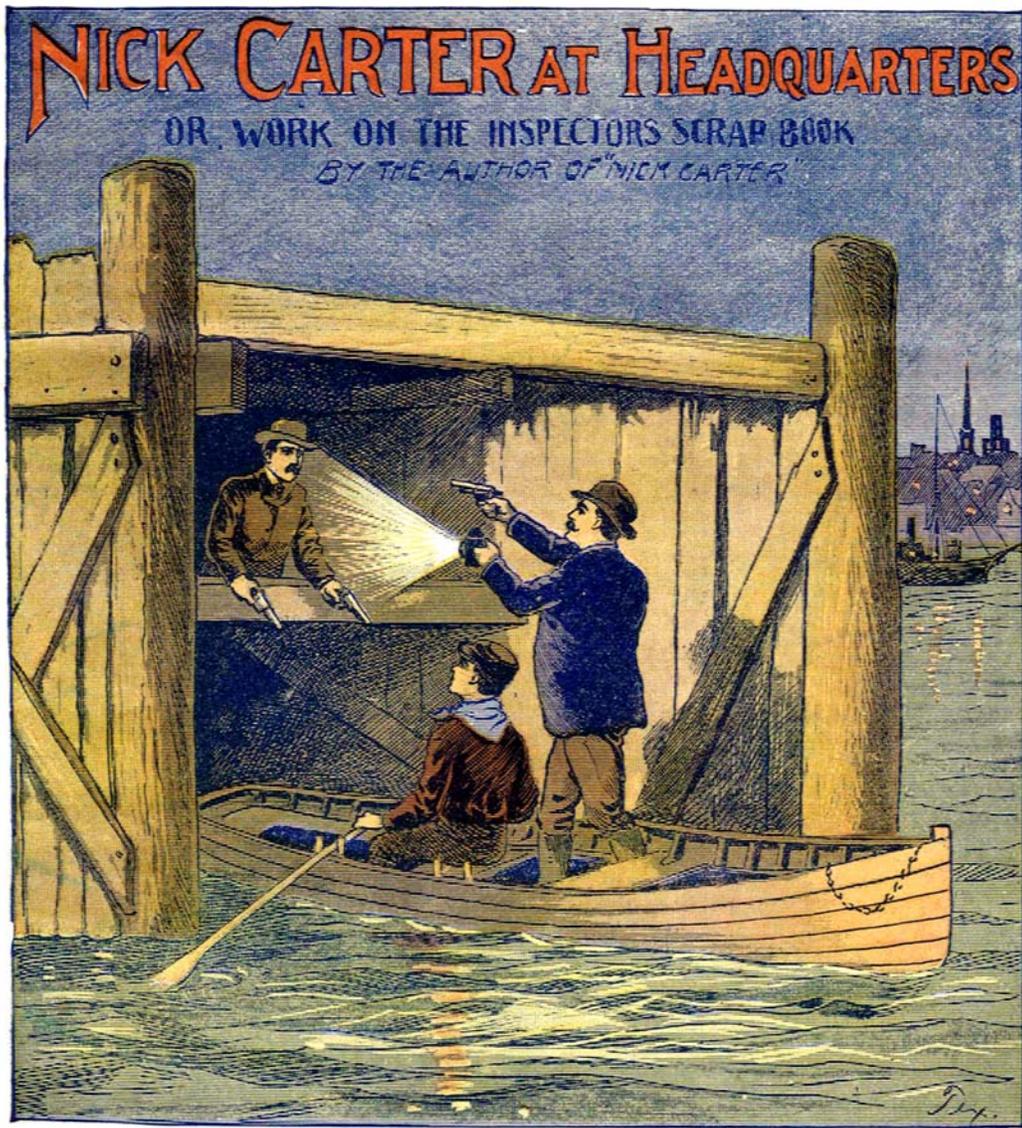
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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

No. 41.

NEW YORK, October 9, 1897.

Price 5 Cents.



"HANDS UP!" ORDERED NICK, "OR I'LL BORE YOU. SEE!"

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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

Issued weekly.

October 9, 1897.

No. 41 STREET & SMITH, Publishers. NEW YORK. 29 Rose St., N. Y. 5 Cents

Nick Carter at Headquarters ; OR, WORK ON THE INSPECTOR'S SCRAP BOOK.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I. AN INTRICATE CASE.

A gentle tap sounded at the door of the inspector's private office in police headquarters in the city of New York.

"Come!" exclaimed the inspector.

The door opened and a sergeant entered.

"Someone to see you, chief," announced the sergeant.

"Who?"

"Says his name is Jingle. He's a countryman."

"Show him in."

The sergeant departed; but two minutes later he returned accompanied by an unmistakable specimen of the Connecticut farmer.

"Take a seat, sir," said the inspector.

Then, as soon as the sergeant had withdrawn, he added:

"Now, what can I do for you?"

"The question is, what can I do for you," was the reply, in the unmistakable tones of Nick Carter, the great detective.

The inspector's face changed. He smiled broadly.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Why did you

assume a disguise in order to come here, Nick?"

"Oh, I happened to be rigged out when I received your message, so I came along just as I was."

"Then you are busy now?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry that you are not free."

"Why?"

"Well, I had a matter on hand that I wished you to take in charge. Is this case, upon which you are already engaged, important?"

"It seems to be."

"What is it?"

"A disappearance. A beautiful girl, just of age, rich, accomplished, about to be married to the man she loved, is missing from Philadelphia."

"Who engaged you in the matter?"

"The man she was to marry."

"How long has the young lady been among the missing?"

"About a month."

"And they have just begun the search?"

"So it seems. I gather from the facts as they were related to me, that not much importance was attached to her disappearance at first.

"She was or is a girl who was or is singularly independent in her actions, and—Well, the young

man has finally made up his mind that there has been foul play, and engaged me to find out the truth.”

“Give me the story.”

“It is short. Sara Varney was left an orphan and an heiress at the age of sixteen. At twenty-one she came into full possession of her property, which was partly in real estate and the balance, about \$58,000 in cash, in bank.

“She reached her majority six weeks to a day before her disappearance, and had drawn about four thousand dollars from the bank, by checking against her account.

“Since her disappearance three checks, which either bear her signature, or are very expertly forged, have appeared. Each is for fifteen thousand dollars. The first two were paid, and the third, by my advice, was pronounced a forgery and held.

“She disappeared just a week before her prospective wedding day.

“A messenger came to the house where she lived on Chestnut street, soon after dark. She read the message, and ordered her carriage at once.

“She was driven to the Pennsylvania depot. There she told her coachman to return home, and added that she would not be back until the following day, or perhaps even later. She has not been seen since.”

“Looks as though she went away of her own accord, does it not?”

“That was my first idea.”

“And you have since changed your opinion?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Well, I began just as she did.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Why, I started from her house in the same carriage that she used, and was driven to the Pennsylvania depot.”

“But my dear Carter why—”

“One moment. I have found that the best way in which to think out a difficulty is to begin at the beginning and follow the footsteps of the person in whom I am interested just as far as I can. While I am on what I call ‘certain footing,’ I have a good chance to think.

“I stood in her room, where, with the help of Sara Varney’s friends, I had already made a

thorough examination of her effects.

“I discovered, for one thing, that she had not taken her check-book—that is, the one which contained the stubs which represented the four thousand dollars already drawn from the bank.

“I found, in her escritoire, a letter proposing marriage to her. It was signed ‘George Hatfield,’ and was written in unmistakable terms of passion and fervor.

“I also found a letter that she had written in reply, but which she had evidently decided not to send, for it was torn into four parts. I put it together and read it through. I never saw such biting scorn embraced in a few words, as she managed to incorporate in that reply.

“The blotter that she had used was also in the writing desk, and by subjecting it to a very powerful magnifying glass I found not only the greater part of the letter I had already perused, but a sentence like this: ‘Mr. George Hatfield: The proposal made by you is peremptorily declined with scorn. Sara Varney.’ To the point, wasn’t it?”

“I should say so.”

“I asked Grayling—”

“Who is he?”

“The man to whom she was engaged, Arthur Grayling. I asked him if he knew Hatfield. He replied that he had heard of him, but had never seen him.

“Then, to be consecutive in my account, I ordered the carriage. When it came to the door I entered it, and was driven to the station. On the way I began to think, of course.

“The first thing that occurred to me was that I would like to know what was contained in the message that called her away from home so suddenly.

“Women are proverbially careless with their letters. It occurred to me that she might have lost that particular one in the carriage.

“I found two tiny scraps that had been crowded down between the cushions, and each one bore a part of a word. On one I found the letters ‘Ar——’ and on the other ‘rk.’ “

“Not much clew in that.”

“Considerable, I thought.”

“Why?”

“Well, for one thing, ‘Ar——’ are the first two letters of the name Arthur, and ‘rk’ are the

last two letters of New York.

"The date of Sara Varney's reply to George Hatfield's proposal was two days before her disappearance."

"Well, what had that to do with—"

"Excuse me. I returned at once to the house and found Grayling still there.

" 'Mr. Grayling,' I said, 'where were you at the very hour when Miss Varney was last seen?'"

" 'In New York,' he replied.

"I had expected the answer, and without questioning him farther I set about reading the character of George Hatfield."

"But—"

"My dear inspector, Hatfield wrote a letter asking for Miss Varney's hand in marriage; she declined with scorn; that was two days before she received a message which was the cause of her disappearance. Grayling, whom she loved, was in New York; he sent her no message at that time. Sara Varney drove to the depot just in time to catch an express train for New York. Since Grayling sent her no message, who did? Without knowing anything whatever concerning Hatfield, let us suppose him to be a villain. He knew that Sara loved Grayling; he knew that Grayling was in New York; he had received a note which made him furious; he acted upon impulse, perhaps, and sent word to Sara that Grayling had met with an accident; he asked her to come at once, and she started without a word. He, or someone who represented him, met her in Jersey City, and she was seen no more."

"Quite a romance, Nick."

"Wait. I thought this all out while in the carriage; believed that the theory was good, if Hatfield's character upheld it."

"And you find—"

"Nothing to make me think that he is incapable of such a crime, and I must confess, nothing to convince me that he would commit it. Since that time I have made Hatfield's acquaintance, and I have found out nothing. There are a good many smaller details, such as tracing the checks, etc., but as the case stands, I believe that Sara Varney came to New York, and that Hatfield knows what became of her. Now, we will return to this subject later, if you like, but I would, in the meantime, be glad to hear why you sent for

me. Perhaps, between Chick and me, we can manage both cases."

"This of mine is entirely different."

"What is it?"

"A number of yachts have lately been robbed by river-pirates, and I want you to run them down and break up the gang. The finishings, the pictures, plate, and in short, everything transportable, have disappeared, and there is no doubt in my mind that it is all the work of the same gang."

CHAPTER II. FOLIO XI—G.

"H'm! Tell me about the case which you have principally in mind."

"Are you acquainted with Jasper Gregory?"

"I know who he is."

"He owns the schooner yacht Twilight. She is a beauty. She cost Mr. Gregory over a hundred thousand dollars all told.

"About a week ago the river pirates got at her.

"They took away everything of value that they could find; in fact, about fifteen thousand dollars will be required to replace what was stolen."

"So much?"

"Yes. Gregory does not mind the loss of all that so much as he does the disappearance of a small steel casket, which was in one of the cabin lockers."

"A small steel casket?"

"Yes, and of chilled steel at that. Gregory says the robbers cannot break it open with anything short of dynamite. As soon as he discovered the loss he advertised in the Herald, offering five thousand dollars for the return of the casket and no questions asked."

"And received no reply?"

"On the contrary, he did"

"Ah! What was it?"

"The writer said that the casket would be returned to the owner if he would pay the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars for it; that he would wait fifteen days for a reply, and that at the end of that time if Gregory did not agree, the casket

would be sunk in the middle of the East river.”

How was Gregory to reply?”

“In a curious manner. He was simply to wear a blue ribbon in his buttonhole.”

“Has Gregory taken any notice of the letter?”

“No.”

“How many days have elapsed? I mean, when did he receive the letter?”

“It will be one week to-morrow.”

“And then he came to you?”

“Yes. He came yesterday.”

“What did he say?”

“That he would give ten thousand dollars to the man who would return that casket to him.”

“It can be done, inspector.”

“Will you do it?”

“I will take charge of the case and give it as much personal attention as I can.”

“Very good; that will be satisfactory.”

“Did Gregory say what the casket contained?”

“He said the contents could make no difference in the search for the casket itself, and would form no clew to the matter, and added:

“I am not ready yet to say just what my little strong box did contain. If the knowledge becomes necessary, we will make use of it.”

Rather odd, that.”

“Yes. Gregory is a queer fish, but a very good fellow.”

“He is rich?”

“Very. A million or two.”

“He described the casket?”

“He did better, for I have a photograph of it.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes. He thought that some such necessity as this one might arise, and he had the casket photographed a year or two ago.”

“Did you ask him how long the casket had been in his possession?”

“Yes.”

“How long?”

“Five years.”

Nick was silent a moment.

“Inspector,” he said, presently, “how long have you known Gregory?”

“Several years.”

“Has he always lived in New York?”

“No, I believe not.”

“When did he come here?”

“A few years ago.”

“Then his record must be in this office.”

“True.”

“Let us glance at it.”

“Certainly; though why——”

“Simple curiosity. I like to know for whom I am working. Byrnes, when he was inspector, was very particular to take the pedigree of everybody who interested him. His system of notes was the most perfect I ever saw.”

At that moment the sergeant appeared at the door.

The inspector glanced at a small book, which he took from his desk; then, looking up, he said to the sergeant:

“Bring me ‘Folio XI—G.’”

The sergeant in a moment re-entered with a volume in his hands that looked like a huge scrapbook.

On the back were letters “XI—G.”

The inspector spent several moments in turning over the pages.

Suddenly he said:

“Here we have it.”

“Read it aloud,” replied Nick.

“‘Gregory, Jasper,’” read the inspector; “‘mem. May 1, 1887. Age, 46. Height, 6 feet 1 inch. Dark, muscular, smooth face, big hands, walks like a soldier, rich. Made his money in Nevada, mining. Worth a million or more. Hails from Nye County. Once a cowboy, prospector and miner. Struck it rich. Came to New York to settle down, April, 1887. (Above, his story.)’

“That’s straight enough, Nick.”

“Yes, read on.”

“‘Mem. from Nevada. Known as ‘Jap’ Gregory and ‘Big Jap.’ Known here ten years or more. Quiet and mysterious; feared somewhat. Super of mine in Smoky Valley; bought interest in the mine. Partners quit suddenly in ‘85. Big Jap operated the mine. Early in ‘87 said he had made his pile, sold out and left. But little known concerning him.

“‘There is a rumor concerning him as follows, which, however, has not been substantiated. Said to be an ex-convict who came to America from Australia. Rumor comes from a half-crazy fellow who worked in the mine. Note:

The only suspicious thing concerning J. L. G. is the mystery which surrounded him. T.B.’

“That’s all,” added the inspector, looking up.

“Thanks! I’ll just copy that, if you will permit me.”

“Can’t do that, Nick. Learn it by heart, if you like. Here,” and he passed the book to the detective.

Nick spent three or four minutes in reading over the memoranda, and then returned the book to the inspector.

“Got it?” asked the chief.

“Yes,” and then Nick repeated the notes word for word, just as they had been ready to him.

“You’re a wonderful fellow, Carter,” murmured the inspector, with undisguised admiration. “Now, tell me what you make of all this?”

“Not much—yet.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that while I am looking for the steel casket, I shall make an effort to find out something more concerning Mr. Jasper Gregory.”

“How? Byrnes probably exhausted every resource.”

“I have one that he could not use.”

“Ah!”

“Chick came from Nevada. He was a boy there, in this same neighborhood, when I picked him up. He has continued some of his friendships of the old days, and—Well, I will talk with him a little before I say more.”

“All right.”

“By the way, is Barney engaged now?”

“No.”

Barney was one of the attaches of the central office. A little, thin, weasel-faced individual, who never had an original idea, and whose entire ambition was summed up in the word obedience. Given an order, and he would obey it with the unswerving determination of a machine. As a shadow, he had no superior, but he had never in the world been guilty of advancing a theory upon any case in which he was engaged.

Taken originally to the scene of a crime, or asked to unravel a mystery, he was as helpless and incompetent as a schoolgirl; but let someone direct him, tell him what to do, and how to do it, and he had no equal for methodical tenacity and

slyness.

Nick sometimes made use of him, and now he said:

“Keep him free for a day or so, inspector; I may want him.”

“I will.”

Nick left the central office, and repaired at once to his own home where he found Chick.

“I want you, lad,” he said.

“Ready—always ready,” and the younger man followed his master to the little study.

“Chick, have you finished the Morrison case?”

“No, not quite.”

“Much more to do?”

“Nothing but shadow work. I know the culprit. It only remains now to catch him spending some of the money.”

“Patsy can do that as well as you. Put him onto it.

“I’ve got two cases on hand now; both important.

“I have made a few notes regarding one of them. Here they are,” and Nick passed several slips of paper to his assistant.

“Read them in the order in which you find them, Chick,” he continued. “Read them aloud.”

“‘Sara Varney,’ began the assistant in the monotonous tone always assumed by one who is reading data, ‘twenty-one years old, five feet three inches; one hundred and forty pounds; dark, beautiful teeth, all sound, gray traveling dress, no jewelry except watch with monogram in diamonds; watch No. 55,555, made by Jerguson. Gold chain, with hollow guard shaped like a pear. Guard contains—’”

“What does the guard contain?” asked Chick, looking up.

“Read on,” was the response.

“‘—orphan, wealthy, money and estate left by father who accumulated same in the West, presumably in mining, etc.’”

Chick laid aside the first slip of paper, and passed to the second.

“‘Arthur Grayling,’ he read, ‘thirty-two, prospective husband of S. V. Good character. No fortune, but good salary from employers. Engaged by A. G. to find S. V.’”

Chick laid the second slip aside.

"I have left the remainder of that page blank for you to fill up for me," said the detective. "Read the next."

"George Hatfield, thirty-five, tall, dark, no fortune, no visible means of support; always supplied with money. Ran away to sea when a boy; spent much time in South America; came back to Philadelphia in '84. Presumably a gambler. Man of strong character for good or evil. Would hesitate at nothing determined upon. An athlete, drinks moderately, but never too much. Sometimes seen in questionable company. Spends much time in New York. Frequently disappears for two or three days, and always when in New York. Affects yachting—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Nick, suddenly interrupting the reading.

"Eh?" said Chick, looking up.

"Nothing. Go on."

"Owns a sloop yacht called the Mystery. Sometimes sails in her between P. and N. Y."

Nick was rubbing his hands together with an air of such intense satisfaction that Chick again paused in his reading and looked up.

"Continue," was all that the detective said, and the assistant complied:

"Belongs to several clubs in N. Y. and in P.," continued Chick. "Is not popular, though nothing tangible against him. Rarely gambles at the clubs. Never talks about himself. In love with S. V. Proposed to her by letter. Rejected with scorn. Was playing billiards at club when letter reached him. Read it between innings, and continued play unmoved. Have found four specimens of handwriting of G. H. No two alike; fact worth remembering. Never was known to pay for anything by check. Always uses cash. Bills usually new, and evidently fresh from bank."

Chick laid aside that slip and passed to No. 4, which was a system of points numbered with Roman characters, as follows:

"I. Theory of voluntary flight. No cause assignable except insanity; not tenable.

"II. Theory of abduction for purposes of extortion.

"A. Supported by the checks for \$15,000, but not tenable, because of expressions used by S. V. to coachman.

"B. Abduction might have taken place en

route to N. Y., but that gives rise to

"III. Theory of detention—viz.:

"A. Letter written by person unknown containing false information. S. V. met in N. Y. and conducted voluntarily but unwittingly to place of detention. Compelled to sign checks perhaps by threats, etc. Letter probably referred to A. G.

"B. A.G. in N. Y. at time. Might have written decoy himself. May know where S. V. is now. Motive for such theory—none found.

"C. G.H. in N. Y. at time. Might have written decoy letter. If so, is aware of fate of S. V. Motive for such theory. Revenge for scorned proposal; desire to force S. V. to become his wife by fair means or foul; scheme to become possessed of her fortune—that is, a. by making her wife; b. by securing her signature for purposes unknown; c. by putting her effectually out of the way—that is, murder—and then forging signature, etc., which lead to—"

CHAPTER III. "ROUGH ON RATS."

The note came to a close so suddenly that Chick looked up in astonishment.

"Why didn't you go on?" he said.

"Well, the next theory is embraced in that one."

"Murder?"

"Yes."

"Humph!"

"What do you think of it all?"

"Decoy letter written by Hatfield. Girl detained somewhere—probably on yacht Mystery—"

"The Mystery has been searched."

"Well, somewhere."

"That's the point—where?"

Chick looked up with a quick smile.

"When I mislay anything," he said, "I stop and try to think of all the most likely places where I might have placed it.

"Then, before beginning my search I think of all the most unlikely places.

"And I begin with the unlikeliest of the unlikely, see?"

"Yes."

“On the theory that if I had placed the article in a likely place it would not have been lost.”

“Exactly.”

“Hatfield is a shrewd fellow, I take it from your notes.”

“Very.”

“Let us suppose that he is the guilty man.”

“Very well.”

“If he is responsible for the disappearance, where would he have hidden her?”

“In the most unlikely place for her friends to search without doubt.”

“Go on, Chick; I’m proud of you.”

“Where does he keep his yacht?”

“Just below Erie Basin on the Brooklyn shore.”

“How long has he owned the yacht?”

“Two or three years.”

“Where would be the most likely place for him to conceal his prisoner?”

“Answer the question yourself, Chick; you’re theorizing now, not I.”

“Well, then, on board the Mystery.”

“Good!”

“She is not there.”

“No.”

“Where then is the most unlikely place?”

“You answer again.”

“Why, the answer is plain enough to my mind, and so it is to you, I believe.”

“Never mind me; I want to hear what you have to say.”

“Very well. Let us go back again a little.”

“As you please.”

“Hatfield has no visible means of support; always pays with greenbacks and new ones—by the way, is there any suspicion of counterfeiting?”

“No.”

“Then he gets his greenbacks from a bank.”

“Probably.”

“He keeps an account and gets his own checks cashed; he is a gambler, but he doesn’t get all his money in that way, or he would not be so particular about keeping the place of his account a secret.”

“Right. Go on.”

“It follows that he’s engaged in some crooked work.”

“Very likely.”

“Which accounts for his frequent disappearances.”

“Probably.”

“I’d like you to answer one question.”

“What is it?”

“What impression as to his destination is created among his associates at the clubs, etc., when he is missing?”

“The yacht.”

“I thought so. Now, what reason do they give?”

“A quiet spree.”

“Does he go to the yacht?”

Yes.”

“And stay there?”

“No.”

“You have found out that much?”

“Yes.”

“Then we return to my original question. If he is the man we suppose him to be, he is mixed up with a gang of crooks, of which he is probably the king pin. Those crooks are either burglars, counterfeiters, confidence men, forgers, or—or—what else shall I say, Nick?”

“Suppose you include river pirates.”

“Good! Let us drop the others and cling to that.”

“Why?”

“Well, I’ve read the papers, and the wharf-rats are gnawing big holes just now.”

“Right.”

“Let us say that he’s a river pirate.”

“Very well.”

“River pirates are mostly of the class known as wharf rats.

“Where do wharf rats live? Why, beneath wharves, mostly, I believe.

“To return: If Hatfield is a river pirate he is a wharf rat. If he is a wharf rat he is a king among his fellows. If he is king pin, he has got a place somewhere that is fitted up for his especial benefit where he can hide without fear of discovery, and where he can interview the other rodents without trouble. Again, if he is in that business the most unlikely place for us to search for Sara Varney—not being aware of Hatfield’s profession—would be at the same time the most likely place for him to conceal her.”

“Well?”

"The most unlikely place for us to search," continued Chick, "is underneath the Brooklyn wharves; and by the same token if we are right in our surmise regarding Hatfield, the most likely place for him to conceal her is—underneath a Brooklyn wharf in some den that he has fixed up for his own accommodation."

"Well?"

"I've got through."

"Oh! You don't go any farther?"

"No."

"Then we will drop this subject and take up another."

"Correct."

"Forget, for the moment, all that has passed."

"My mind is a blank."

"I have just returned from an interview with the inspector. He is bothered with rats."

"And he wants you to transform yourself into 'rough-on-rats,' and exterminate them."

"Exactly. A man named Gregory lost a steel casket from his yacht Twilight."

"By Jove! You mean Big Jap Gregory, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I know him. He's from Nevada. Knew him when I was a kid. He's a bad egg, if I'm not greatly mistaken. I worked for him once."

"Tell me what you know about him."

"Almost nothing in fact, and considerable in theory. He was 'super' of a rich mine, and his partners suddenly disappeared. Things seemed all right enough, but I always thought that he laid 'em out, see?"

"Yes. Any reason for thinking so?"

"No. If I had known as much then as I do now, I'd have better reasons or none at all for my suspicions. I was a kid then. Big Jap was a terror, and as a matter of fact, he's walking through the world to-day believing that he killed me."

"Tell me about that."

"I was in his cabin asleep one day just about nightfall. It seems he came in while I was sleeping, and something was said or done which he didn't want me to know.

"The first thing I knew I was shaken by the shoulder, and Big Jap stood over me with a bowie in his hand and a scowl on his face as black as a thunder cloud.

"How long have you been here, you young coyote?" he growled.

"Since five,' I answered."

"Were you asleep?" he continued.

"Now, as a matter of fact, I had been as sound asleep as a church in the middle of the week all the time, but thinking he was mad I thought I'd lie out of it, so I said no.

"Not at all?" he demanded.

"No."

"Do you know what has happened here?"

"Well, I ain't blind nor deaf, you bet!" was my reply, and then before I had a chance to dodge he brought the heavy handle of his bowie down upon my head.

"When I awoke I was in total darkness. My head ached and I felt weak. I groped around, and finally discovered that I was in an abandoned gallery of the mine.

"I crawled toward the outlet, only to find that it had been clogged with rocks since I was placed there.

"But I knew that mine better than the super. I knew another way out that had been forgotten by everybody else, and I used it.

"When I got out I made tracks for a new stamping ground, and brought up at Hellion City, where you found me."

"And Gregory doesn't know that you're alive, eh?"

"No."

"Good! We may utilize that fact a little later."

"What is in the steel casket?"

"Gregory won't say."

"Humph! I'd like to go through it."

"The first thing is to find it."

"Right."

"The second, to break up the gang that stole it."

"Sure."

"Then we'll have some fun with Big Jap."

Chick shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd as soon handle a rattlesnake as touch that fellow," he said. "I believe he stole every cent he's got, and that he had to do some killing to get it. Some people thought that he came from Australia. There was talk about his being an ex-convict, but I've heard him drop little remarks

which make me think he came from Brazil. If he weren't so big he'd look like a Portuguese, and I think he's a sort of half-breed anyhow."

CHAPTER IV. A NIGHT EXPEDITION.

Darkness was just becoming a settled fact when Nick Carter, accompanied by Chick, reached that part of Brooklyn which is popularly known as Gowanus.

Both were disguised, and they looked like a couple of city toughs who were bent on mischief.

The detective knew that the part of the river front which they were visiting was that most frequented by the real article of river pirate, and as they were bent upon that identical business they would be much more apt to fall in with the gang for which they were searching.

The tip had been given to the police, and Superintendent Campbell, of Brooklyn, had issued orders in accordance with Nick's plans, which were as unique as they ultimately proved effective.

There was a private yacht in the bay which had not as yet been visited by the wharf rats, and Nick conceived the idea of being detected in the act of looting it himself.

Chance favored him in a way he had not imagined.

His original scheme was to be arrested in the act of robbing the yacht, to make his escape, and to have the papers filled with the story of his exploit.

He knew if there was a regularly-organized gang of river thieves that hearing of his daring they would make an effort to recruit him among them.

But luck, which never deserted Nick Carter, stood him in hand that night, and effectually shortened the time that would have been necessary to carry out his first scheme.

The two detectives found a boat underneath a pier of which they did not hesitate to avail themselves.

"This is a wharf rat's outfit," muttered Chick, who was examining the contents of the craft.

"All the better," was Nick's reply. "Shove

her off."

Young Hercules, as Chick was sometimes called, was about to comply when a voice arrested him.

Nobody was visible, and yet the voice seemed to come from quite near.

"Who's there?" it demanded, in a gruff tone.

"What's that to you?" was the detective's uncompromising reply to the question.

"What are you doing with that boat?" demanded the voice again.

"That's my business, sonny."

"Oh, is it? Well, I reckon it's mine, too."

"Bah!" said Nick. "Shove off, Rattler," he continued to Chick.

"Say, Johnnie Fresh!" shouted the owner of the strange voice.

"Well, what?" replied Nick.

"I've got you covered, see?"

"See? No, kin you?"

"Ef you go out with that boat I'll bore you. Understand that?"

"Rats!"

"Eh? What's that?"

"I said rats."

"What did you say that for?"

"F'r instance. You make me tired, an' jest fur fun I'll show you up, see?"

As the detective spoke he touched the spring of his little bull's eye lantern, and directed the rays straight at the spot from whence came the sound of the voice.

There was a smothered oath from the owner of the voice as the light fell full upon him, blinding him completely for the moment.

"Hands up!" ordered Nick, sternly, "or I'll bore you, see?"

They were all underneath the pier, Nick and Chick being in the boat, and the stranger, with half his body showing above a timber, upon which he was leaning; with a revolver gripped in either hand.

"Now speak 'r down you go," continued Nick. "I mean business, I do, see? I don't want no croakers nur fly cops 'round me to-night."

In spite of the situation the stranger laughed outright.

"That's a good one," he said.

"What is?"

“Callin’ me a cop.”

“Well, mebbly you’re one, an’ ag’in mebbly you ain’t. It’s best to be safest. Who are you? Answer, ‘cos I’ve got the drop now.”

“I’m—say, did you ever hear of Red Rob, hey?”

“No; who’s he?”

“I’m Red Rob.”

“Well, that don’t tell me nothing.”

“You’re a stranger, ain’t ye?”

“Yes.”

“Thought so, and a crook?”

“W’at of it?”

“Where are you from?”

“Say, Mister Red Rob, it strikes me that you’re askin’ a lot of questions. Rattler, jest git up in the boat an’ take away them barkers o’ hisn. Ef he moves I’ll down him.”

Chick arose obediently, and took away the fellow’s weapons.

“Now, climb down,” ordered Nick.

The fellow obeyed. He knew that it would be extremely dangerous to refuse.

“Now,” said Nick, when Red Rob was seated in the boat between him and Chick, “who are you?”

“Red Rob.”

“Who’s Red Rob?”

“If you’ll tell me who you are I’ll tell you who I am.”

“I’m Sneaker, and my friend’s Rattler. We’re from Philadelphia, and we’re away on a trip for our health, see?”

“Work the rivers?”

“That’s about the size of it.”

“And you never heard of Red Rob?”

“Can’t say I did.”

“I’m called the wharf-rat king.”

“Rats!”

“You said that afore, and it means something to me. Did anybody tell you to say it?”

“Yes.”

“Who?”

“A friend of mine in Quakertown.”

“What’s your lay to-night?”

“Business.”

“My pards an’ me hev got some biz on hand to-night, too, that’s why I didn’t want you to take the boat.”

“Oh!”

“A yacht in the harbor.”

“I see.”

“Full o’ good things; belongs to a nabob. I’ve heerd there was some cash aboard of her, too.”

“Look here, Rob!” exclaimed Nick, with an admirable mixture of frankness and caution, “be you on the square?”

“You bet!”

“Got a gang back of ye?”

“Sure.”

“Prove it, an’ we’ll jine hands in this trip.”

“Prove it how?”

“By interdoocing me to ther crowd.”

“Can’t.”

“Why?”

“Boss is too particular.”

“I thought you were the boss.”

“Not much!”

“You said ye war king, didn’t ye?”

“That’s right, too, I be. But not when Gentleman George is around.”

“Who’s Gentleman George?”

“The boss.”

Nick was silent for a moment, and then he said, slowly:

“Look a-here, Rob. I kinder cotton to you. You look square, an’ ye talk square. All the same I ain’t going ter be bamboozled outer my racket for to-night. Do you know what I’m a-goin’ ter do?”

“No.”

“I’m going ter tie ye up an’ take ye along with us, see? You kin stay in ther boat while Rattler an’ me do the biz. Tie him Rattler.”

Chick obeyed, silently binding stout cords around the river thief’s wrists and ankles, while Nick menaced him with the revolver.

A gag was thrust into the prisoner’s mouth, notwithstanding the resistance he offered, and then, utterly helpless, he was thrust into the bottom of the boat.

“Shove off!” again ordered Nick.

This time there was no interruption, and the boat was quickly in the river.

They headed straight for the open bay.

“Curse this place, anyhow!” growled Nick, when they had been running nearly a half hour, and speaking for the benefit of the man who was

bound. "If this was the Schuylkill I'd know where I was."

"We'll find it," replied Chick.

"Maybe we will, an' agin, maybe we won't!"

"Close by the statue, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Queer place fur a yacht to anchor."

They rowed on in silence for some time.

Suddenly Nick uttered a low exclamation.

"There it is!" he cried.

"What?"

"The statue! See it?"

"Yes."

The Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island loomed up before them.

For some reason the torch in Liberty's grasp had not been lighted, but at that instant, as though in response to Nick's exclamation, the light blazed forth and fully illuminated the scene.

The inky waters of the bay, the pelting rain, the crest of each wave, and the statue itself all reflected back the rays of the brilliant electric light, which also revealed the outlines of a beautiful yacht, lying not far distant from the little island.

That yacht was their prey.

It would have been a daring scheme for real river thieves to have ventured to rob that yacht, beneath the brilliant light, but, as the sequel will show, Nick had laid his plans with great care.

CHAPTER V. THE FLIGHT ON THE RIVER.

The boat, by Nick's direction was hastily rowed away from the most conspicuous locality and then brought near the yacht by a roundabout way, in which the supposed river thieves ran less chance of being seen.

It was yet early in the evening, perhaps ten o'clock, but that part of the bay was deserted.

They approached the yacht from the side farthest from the statue, and finally ran up under her stern, where the painter was made fast to the rudder chains.

Then, for many moments, they kept perfectly quiet.

Not a sound disturbed them, and when

seemingly satisfied that their approach had been unobserved, Nick leaned over and whispered in Red Rob's ear.

"We're here, pardy," he said. "I wish I was sure of you, but I ain't, see? Three could do this work better than two; but as it is, you'll have ter stay in the boat, jest as ye are, see? Ef ye croak, er make a sound, I'll knife ye, as sure as my name is Sneaker. Ef ye keep mum, I'll talk to ye later, see?"

Nick turned at once to Chick.

"Rattler," he whispered.

"Yes."

"You stay here till I come back."

"Keyrect!"

"Ef ye hear me shoot, cast off the painter, an' keep ther boat right where it is, see?"

"Yes."

"Grab the oars an' be ready, cos I'll vey ter spring fur it."

Nick seized the chain in his grasp, and in another instant disappeared aboard the yacht.

Nick was gone a very long time. Chick pretended to grow very uneasy, although he knew perfectly well what was keeping the detective.

He knew that Nick was at that moment in the cabin of the yacht engaged in conversation with the men who had been sent there by Superintendent Campbell of the Brooklyn police.

The encounter with Red Rob had rendered a change in their original plans imperative, and the young assistant knew that his chief was at that moment engaged in giving the instructions for the necessary alterations.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, when suddenly the loud report of a pistol rang out on the night.

Chick, with an exclamation of dismay, cast the painter loose, and waited.

The next instant a dark form bounded through the air from the stern of the yacht, and the figure of the detective landed in the boat.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Pull, Rattler! Pull for your life! The yacht is loaded with cops! Pull!"

Chick was quick to obey.

The boat was pushed away from the yacht, and the young detective bent to the oars with all his strength.

A dozen dark forms appeared upon the stern of the yacht and a dozen revolvers blazed forth at them.

But either the officers were poor marksmen or else they did not make a great effort to hit the fugitives, for not a bullet took effect.

Still they continued to fire.

Nick, with a second pair of oars, aided Chick in the effort to escape.

"They're lowering a boat!" suddenly exclaimed Chick, who was pulling the stroke oar.

"Curse 'em!" said Nick, keeping up the character he was playing. "If they chase us too fast I'll let 'em know how a Philadelphian can shoot."

On—on they flew over the darkened waters.

The policemen from the yacht had lowered a boat which was manned by three pairs of oars instead of two.

On—on over the black waters flew pursuer and pursued, and the rain, as if in anger at the outrage, pelted down in torrents upon them.

On, on, straining every muscle and sinew; on, on, and yet the police boat gained.

"They're gaining!" muttered Chick.

Nick suddenly dropped his oars.

With a quick motion he drew his revolver and fired.

There was a loud cry from the pursuing boat, and the bow oarsman disappeared.

Again Nick's weapon spoke, and the second oarsman in the police boat sank from view.

Two others sprang to take their places.

"You've laid out two of 'em," exclaimed Chick.

"Yes, an' I'll do fur two more ef they don't turn back," was Nick's response.

Again Nick raised his weapon, and again he fired twice, this time in rapid succession.

Two more men went down.

"Two more!" cried Chick. "Now we're safe!"

Red Rob could not know that it was all a fake.

He could not know that Nick had purposely fired high over the heads of the policemen, and that those who were supposed to be shot down in cold blood were really lying in the bottom of the boat laughing heartily at the game they were playing.

But Red Rob, who heard the exclamations uttered by the two detectives believed that the man who called himself Sneaker was not only the most daring river thief he had ever seen, but one of the best marksmen as well.

"That settles their hash!" growled Nick.

But at that instant a new danger was announced.

"Halt!" cried a voice ahead of them out of the darkness.

Nick turned in astonishment.

What he saw was a real danger instead of an assumed one.

The regular river patrol was there.

A boat manned by three policemen, all determined men, and men who knew nothing of the plot in which they were about to play an important and serious part.

But the detective had gone too far to think of backing out now.

He knew that they were in the presence of a genuine danger.

He knew that if the men in the patrol boat fired they would shoot to kill.

In an instant he made his plans.

They were desperate, but there was no other way.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

"The patrol! Halt and surrender, or we'll shoot!" was the answer.

"We give in," was the detective's response.

Red Rob quaked with fear.

He believed that Sneaker had already four murders to answer for, and he wondered that so desperate a character should surrender in the face of such a charge.

"Row up to us, then," came the order from the patrol. "We've got you covered."

"All right. We're coming."

Then Nick bent over Red Rob.

"Can I depend upon you?" he whispered, quickly removing the gag from the man's mouth.

"Yes."

"Do as I tell you and we'll escape."

"I'll do it, Sneaker."

"No more shooting, mind. There's been enough."

Then he cut the cords which bound the river thief.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

"Like a fish."

"Good! Obey orders and we'll escape. If you fail we'll be taken, see?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Dump 'em."

"Into the river?"

"You bet."

"Where are the others?"

"Dead; I shot 'em."

In the meantime Chick had been slowly drawing nearer to the patrol boat.

Nick had said nothing to him of his plans, but the faithful-young assistant knew that he had but to follow the lead of his chief, no matter what happened.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the boat which contained the policemen.

"What was that shooting about?" demanded one of the officers, as they drew near enough for conversation.

"The cops!" replied Nick.

"Shooting at you?"

"Yes."

"And you shot back?"

"Not much."

"You lie. We saw and heard you."

"You lie yourself," was the quick response.

"What do you want us to do? Climb into your boat?"

"Yes, one at a time. We'll fix you."

"Oh, you will, eh?"

"Rather. We've been looking for you fellows for some time."

While the officer was speaking Nick raised himself to climb into the boat. He had placed one of his feet upon the gunwale of the patrol when the policeman ceased his remarks.

"Now you've got us, and now you haven't!" cried the detective.

At the same instant he exerted all his great strength, and with a motion as unexpected as it was effective, he threw himself forward in to the police boat with all his weight upon one side.

He knew that the instant the boat began to tip the instinct of self-preservation would compel the officers to lean the other way, and he had calculated upon that.

He was not mistaken.

As the boat tipped the policemen threw themselves the other way to right it.

Then, while with one foot the detective sent his own boat out of the way in safety he allowed himself to pitch across the police boat landing with his full weight upon the opposite gunwale.

The policemen were already upon that side.

The additional weight had exactly the effect that Nick had calculated upon.

The boat was instantly capsized, and Nick and the three officers were tumbled unceremoniously into the river.

The whole thing took place so quickly that the officers had no time to guess what was coming.

Nick, who did it all, took measures to secure his own safety.

As the boat was capsized, he dove like a fish beneath the water.

Then he swam with all his strength before again coming to the surface.

He knew that his own boat had not been overturned, and he believed that he could reach it, clamber in and be rowed safely away before the police would know exactly what had happened.

There were a few sputtering cries of dismay, a few curses, and then silence.

Then four heads bobbed up on the surface of the water.

Three were close to the overturned boat.

The other was close to the boat which contained Chick and Red Rob.

CHAPTER VI. THE RAT-HOLE.

The scheme worked exactly as Nick had planned it.

Dumped so suddenly and so unceremoniously into the river, the police at first were without other thought than that of saving themselves.

When they finally awoke to the reality of their surroundings, Nick was clambering into the boat which contained Chick and Red Rob, and they were assisting him.

It only took a moment for him to get inside.

Rob and Chick seized the oars, and Nick

ordered them to pull as close to the floundering police as was safe.

In reality, he only waited to see that none of them was in danger of drowning, but he guyed them unmercifully while he waited, just the same.

"Nice evening for a bath," he exclaimed, with a laugh.

A curse was his reply.

The three men were clinging to the overturned boat and entirely at the mercy of their enemies, had they been enemies in fact.

"Will you take us in now, or s'mother time?" continued the detective.

"I'll hunt you down, Red Rob, and I'll have you yet," replied one of the officers.

"Bah! In the first place, I'm not Red Rob."

"You're a liar."

"Oh, well, I don't deny that. All the same, I'm not Red Rob."

"Who are you, then?"

"I'm myself. Who're you?"

Another oath from the men in the water.

"Stand up, Rob," ordered Nick.

"This is Red Rob, not I," he continued. "I'm from another town where they know how to down the cops every time. If you ever get word from old 'Philly' to look out fur Sneaker, jest tell 'em he's the chap w'at dumped ye into the wet, will you? So long, boys; better luck next time."

With a laugh, Nick gave the signal to his two friends, and the boat shot away in the darkness.

Nick would not have left the police in their uncomfortable plight, but he felt certain that they were men of sufficient experience to get out of it all right, and the reader may as well know at once that he was not mistaken.

The boat containing the two detectives and the king of the wharf rats was rowed at once back to the pier from which it had started.

"Here we are," exclaimed the detective. "Now, Red Rob, show your hand."

What d'ye mean, Sneaker?"

"We're in the same biz, ain't we?"

"Yes."

"An' you've got a gang back of you?"

"You bet!"

"I want to join."

"Good!"

"Will you take us in?"

"Well, I should smile!"

"I've got to keep dark a while."

"Rather."

"I popped over four cops, but I guess I didn't kill 'em."

"I hope not."

"Why?"

"It makes too much fuss."

"Oh! I thought you was tender-hearted."

"What! Me? Red Rob?"

"Yes."

"Ask the boys when you see 'em."

"When'll that be?"

"Now."

"Where are they?"

"In the Rat-Hole."

"Where's that?"

"Close by."

"How do you get there?"

"From here."

"Well, let's go."

"I've got ter blindfold you."

"What, me?"

"Yes."

"Can't be did, Bobby."

"It's orders."

"Bah! I wouldn't be blindfolded for all the ratholes an' all ther orders in the country."

"S'posen you was chief, Sneaker."

"Well?"

"An' you'd given orders that nobody was to be brought in fur the first time 'thout bein' blinded."

"Well?"

"What would you do if I went ag'in orders?"

"Slit yer wizen."

"Exactly. That's jest what Gentleman George'll do, too."

"Well, I'm cussed ef I'll be blindfolded anyhow."

Red Rob was silent in perplexity.

"Say," said Nick, suddenly.

"What?"

"Go to the rathole alone. Tell 'em your story. Maybe they'll let the rule go for once."

"I'll try it."

"All right. Skip."

They heard him leave the boat, and a moment later Nick touched the spring of his little lantern.

But Red Rob had already disappeared. "They've got a cute trick here, somewhere," he muttered. "No blindfolding for me."

"Worked nice to-night, didn't it?" murmured Chick.

"Sh-h! Somebody may bear you," replied Nick. "Don't talk, wait."

Rob was gone near half an hour.

But at the end of that time he returned.

"It's all right," he said. "Gentleman George is there himself, and he says I can bring you in."

"'Thout bein' blindfolded?"

"Yes."

"Then it's a go."

"He makes a condition."

"What?"

"He says if ye can't give a good account of yourselves you'll never come out ag'in."

"That's O. K."

"The cops are onto a new lay for us."

"What is it?"

"He says they've engaged Nick Carter to track us down."

"Bah!"

"You've heard of him?"

"Yes."

"He's a devil, that feller!"

"Bah!"

"Mebby you never ran foul of him."

"Yes, I have."

"When?"

"A year ago."

"Where?"

"In old Philly."

"How?"

"We had a tussle."

"Honest?"

"Yes, in as barroom."

"An' you got licked, eh?"

"Not much I didn't."

"You don't mean to say that you done him up, Sneaker!"

"He grabbed me, and I slatted him onto the floor, then I sloped and left him. That's all. I kin lick that cop any day."

"Talk's cheap, Sneaker."

"Don't you believe me?"

"Well, I'd rather see you do it than hear ye tell it."

"You're purty stout, ain't you?"

"Some."

"Stick out your two hands."

Nick grasped both the river thief's wrists in one hand and shut his fingers tightly upon them.

"Now break loose," he said.

Red Rob tried.

He tugged and strained with all his strength, but with no avail.

The one hand of the detective held him so firmly that he could not get loose.

Finally after a vain effort he desisted.

"You're a wonder!" he cried. "There ain't another man livin' who could do that."

"Stick 'em out ag'in."

"What for?"

"I want to prove that you're a liar."

"What!"

"No offense, Robby. I know another man w'at kin do the same thing."

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"What, Rattler?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"Try it."

Again Red Rob put out his hands in the same manner as before.

This time it was Chick—Young Hercules—who seized them.

He held them just as Nick had done.

Struggle as he might, the river thief could not break loose.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he ejaculated when he saw that it was no use.

"You see there's two of us," laughed Sneaker.

"Yes."

"And Nick Carter ain't in it."

"Not much he ain't."

"When are ye goin' ter take us to the Rat-Hole? To-morrer?"

"No, now."

"Well, we're ready."

"Come on, then. Where's that light ye had."

"Here."

"Touch it up again so I kin show ye the way."

The light blazed forth, and the two detectives

saw Red Rob seize what appeared to be a protruding knot in one of the timbers and pull upon it.

Instantly a large section of the timber swung loose, working upon concealed hinges, and revealing an opening through which he motioned the two detectives to follow.

The aperture was so small that they were obliged to crawl through, but they found themselves inside the adjoining crib which they traversed, and then passed on to the next in the same manner.

Thus they made their way past all the cribs until the shore was reached.

There the inroads of the waters had been prevented by the erection of a face wall, and from this, by working another secret mechanism, a huge stone was made to swing in out of sight, and they crawled through into a narrow gallery which had been dug out of the solid earth.

Red Rob, after closing the entrance again, took the lead. He preceded them up a steep incline, and at length halted before an iron-bound door upon which he rapped loudly.

The next instant the door flew open, and they passed through into a chamber, created after the same manner as the gallery they had just traversed.

They found themselves in the presence of a dozen men, each of whom wore some sort of protecting mask over his face, evidently improvised for the occasion.

They knew they were in the presence of the gang of river pirates and that the trying moment had come.

CHAPTER VII. THE EXAMINATION.

The men who were assembled in the Rat-Hole were evidently expecting the arrival of their guests, for they had every appearance of readiness to receive them.

"Gents," said Red Rob, when the iron bound door was closed and securely fastened, "low me ter interdooce my friends, Sneaker an' Rattler, from Quakertown."

A man who had been seated in the

background stepped forward when Red Rob ceased speaking.

Nick knew instinctively that he was Gentleman George, and he wondered if he and George Hatfield were the same.

"Stand there," he said, pointing toward the middle of the room.

"Well," growled Sneaker, "ye don't seem overglad ter see us anyhow."

"If you are the right sort we are very glad. If you are not, you will be very sorry that you ever came."

"What'll happen?"

"A calamity."

"Oh. W'at's that? Suthin' good ter eat, maybe."

No impertinence."

Who're you anyhow?"

I'm the chief here, my man, as you will learn to your cost if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head."

"The chief, hey? Why didn't ye say so at fust. I'll be civil. Fire away."

"Who are you?"

"Sneaker."

"What's your real name?"

"I've got a dozen, an' Sneaker es good es any, I reckon."

"Who's your friend?"

"Rattler."

"Has he got another name?"

"Bout es many's I have."

"You're from Philadelphia?"

"You bet."

"What brought you here?"

"The climate," and Nick grinned and winked.

"Where did you hear of the Undine?"

"The what?"

"The Undine."

"Never did hear of it."

"What was the name of the yacht you boarded to-night?"

"Dunno."

"How did you happen to know so well where she was?"

"Rattler an' me took a tour of inspection this afternoon."

"Ah! Is river piracy your business when you're at home?"

“Mostly.”

“When did you come to New York?”

“This mornin’.”

“How do you account for the presence of the cops on board the yacht?”

“I don’t.”

“They were there when you arrived?”

“Very much there.”

“What kept you so long away from your boat, and why did you fire your pistol?”

“Well, I seed ther cops there, an’ I concluded I’d listen an’ hear what they were sayin’. I crept up an’ got a good deal of it, leanin’ over the hatchway.”

“Go on.”

“All of a suddint somebody grabbed me from behind. We had a tussle, and I chucked him down the hatchway.”

“The fellers below had heerd us, an’ they were comin’ up to see w’at was goin’ on. I shoved my gun into the face of the feller ahead, pulled, and then lit out.”

“You say you were listening to what they were saying?”

“Yes.”

“Did you hear anything?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“Nothin’ much, ‘cept that the yacht was a decoy anchored there on purpose to bait us fellers.”

“Ah!”

“Sometybody’s lost a steel casket, an’ ther hull scheme is ter git that back ag’in.”

“Why, when you had already shot four or five men did you not serve the three who headed you off in the same manner?”

“Cos I didn’t wanter. I’d done shootin’ enough.”

“Now, are you disguised?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. Jumping into the water doesn’t improve disguises.”

“Right, pard.”

“Remove your disguise and let me see you as you are.”

“Cert.”

“Rattler also.”

“Keyreckt.”

The two detectives removed the false beards that they wore, but as they had previously darkened their faces with a stain that water would not affect, the revelation did not amount to much.

In fact, except for the color of their complexions, both detectives stood revealed in their proper persons.

Both, however, were as well disguised in that way as in any other, for neither ever allowed himself to be seen by crooks when undisguised, unless, as in the present case, it became absolutely necessary.

“Do you want to stay in New York?” was the next question.

“Yes.”

“And become one of us?”

“Yes.”

“To whom can you refer me in Philadelphia? I know a few people there.”

“I ain’t referrin’ to nobody.”

“Indeed! Why not?”

“Well, if my face an’ what’s happened to-night ain’t enough there ain’t no use ‘n doin’ any more.”

“Suppose I demand it.”

“You kin go ter blazes with yer demand.”

“Men have been found floating in the river for saying less than that to me, Sneaker.”

“Bah! you can’t scare me, cap. I ain’t no spring chicken. If you fellers want to tackle Rattler ‘n me, begin. You’re twelve to two, an’ maybe you’ll down us, but there won’t be six left out of yer twelve when you’re through, you hear me.”

A murmur of approval went up from behind the masks.

Evidently they liked the grit displayed by the new recruit.

The chief himself did not seem displeased.

He took one quick step in advance, and thrust out his hand.

“Well said, Sneaker,” he remarked. “You’ll do, I guess. Now, what has Rattler to say for himself?”

“The same that I say; no more, no less.”

“You ‘re partners?”

“Till death.”

“Well, we’ll take you both.”

“Correct, boss.”

"You may consider yourselves wharf-rats now. When I am away Red Rob is captain."

When Nick shook hands with the chief he noticed that the latter's hand was soft and smooth, not at all the hand of a man who lived the life of a wharf rat continuously.

He was convinced in his own mind that the man before him was George Hatfield, but he had no proof of it as yet.

When the chief remarked that Sneaker and Rattler could consider themselves as admitted to membership of the gang, the men removed their improvised masks, and a more villainous looking set of scoundrels it would have been hard to find.

Gentleman George wore a heavy black beard which the keen eyes of the detective at once saw was false.

He also realized that the men did not know that fact.

"Good!" thought the detective. "I believe my man is George Hatfield, but I've got to find the steel casket and also the girl Sara Varney before I pull him in."

Nick and Rattler were the centre of attraction, for Red Rob had enlarged upon the exploit of the night rather more than the facts warranted.

The men asked Nick hosts of questions about the Quaker City, which the detective's familiarity with that place enabled him to answer.

An hour went by, and then the detective suddenly turned to his companion and said:

"Rattler!"

"Here."

"You'd better stop now, an' git ther kit."

"Keyreckt."

Chick picked up his hat, and started for the iron-bound door.

But Gentleman George was upon his feet in an instant.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Out," replied Chick.

"What for?"

"For our kit."

"Where is it?"

"Over in New York, in West street."

"It can wait, can't it?"

"It can, but it won't," interposed Nick, stepping forward.

"Look a-here, Mr. Gentleman George, I

didn't jine no confounded gang to be made a prisoner in a bole like this, see?"

"If my pard an' me don't come an' go when we please, an' as we please, we both leave now, even ef we have ter fight our way out, see?"

"What's your hurry for your things?"

"Well, w'at money we've got sewed up in 'em, fur one thing, and one thing's enough, see? Go on, 'Rattler; git 'em."

Chick turned to the iron-bound door.

For just an instant Gentleman George hesitated.

Then he made a sign to the guard at the door to open it, and Chick passed through, and was gone.

As soon as he was outside he made a rapid change in his appearance, so that five minutes later he was a negro. Then he started rapidly away.

After walking ten minutes he met a policeman, and he hurried to him.

The policeman waited, seeing that he was about to be accosted, but Chick, without speaking, drew out his watch, and opening the back side of the case drew forth a half sheet of thin paper.

It contained the signature of Superintendent Campbell, and was an order to every policeman to render Nick Carter or his assistant every favor possible.

The policeman was impassive, notwithstanding the surprise he felt.

"Well?" he said.

"Is that all right?"

"Yes."

"Will you do what I want?"

"If it don't take me off my beat."

"Have you got an alarm box and telephone near here?"

"Yes."

"Go to it, call up headquarters, and tell them to repeat your message to New York headquarters."

"All right."

"Here is the message."

"Fire away."

"Send Barney to Erie Basin, Brooklyn, at once. The quicker the better. He must bring bundle containing two suits of old clothes, a river-man's kit. Also set of burglars' tools. Have him

find policeman—what’s your name?”

“Nat Thompson.”

“Policeman Nat Thompson, of the—th Precinct, for further instructions.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Will he find me?”

“If you were in China.”

“All right. What then?”

“Direct him to the old red wharf, but don’t go with him. Keep away from there yourself.”

“All right.”

“Now rush that, Will you, Nat?”

“Yes.”

“One word more. Tell Barney to hang around the old red wharf till somebody says ‘Kismet’ to him, if he has to wait till Christmas.”

“Anything more?”

“No.”

“Then I’m off.”

Policeman Thompson departed, and Chick quickly retraced his steps to the vicinity of the red wharf.

He knew that Gentleman George might appear at any moment, and that he was expected to shadow him if he did.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THAT’S YOUR MAN!”

When Chick again reached the red wharf the time was between one and two o’clock in the morning.

How long Gentleman George would remain at the Rat-Hole, he had no idea, but he did hope that Barney would be on hand in time to do the shadowing, so that he could return to the river-pirate’s retreat to keep Nick company.

Discovery might take place at any moment, and discovery meant a fight.

Not a mere row, but a downright fight, in which lives would be taken; and if such a thing was to occur, Chick wanted to be in it.

He knew that Barney could not possibly reach the place much under two hours, and so he settled himself to wait, prepared to take the shadow business in hand himself, if Gentleman George should leave the Rat-Hole before the arrival of the man from headquarters.

An hour passed, and Chick, from the place of concealment that he had selected among a lot of debris that was lying upon the wharf, saw no sign of life.

But a half hour later, as he was beginning to hope that Barney would reach the scene in time, after all, he saw the chief of the river-thieves come forth, closely followed by Red Rob.

They came upon the pier, and sauntered along until they reached time very pile behind which the detective was concealed.

Gentleman George seated himself upon a piece of an old box, and leisurely lighted a cigar.

“Talk away, now, Rob,” he said, “for I haven’t much time. You have something important to say to me, I think.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I have something important to say to you, but my communication can wait, I will hear you first.”

“It’s about the steel casket,” blurted forth Red Rob.

“Ah!”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“What about it?”

“The boys have been talking it over.”

“Well?”

“They don’t think you’ve acted square with them.”

“Don’t they?”

“No.”

“What are they going to do about it?”

“Nothin’—now.”

“Exactly.”

“But it’s getting in a wedge that will work harm.”

“In what way?”

“They’ll get dissatisfied, and some night there’ll be trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“They’ll give you away, or something.”

Gentleman George laughed.

“Give me away, eh?” he said.

“Yes.”

“How?”

“By informing upon you.”

“Upon whom?”

“You! Gentleman George.”

Again the chief laughed.

“Who knows Gentleman George?” he asked.
 “All of us.”
 “Exactly—and nobody else.”
 “But one of the fellows has a snap-shot photograph of you that he took when you didn’t know it. He would give that in with his information.”
 “Much good it would do him.”
 “Why?”
 “Rob, do you think that I have been fool enough to let you fellows see me as I really am, or even hear my natural voice?”
 “Perhaps not.”
 “Most certainly not.”
 Red Rob looked crestfallen.
 “Now, who took that picture?” demanded the chief.
 “I can’t tell you that.”
 “Why?”
 “Because I promised not to do so.”
 “Are you one of the traitors?”
 “You know I am not.”
 “Red Rob uses better English with the chief than with the others,” thought Chick, as he listened.
 The chief laughed again, sardonically.
 “No,” he said, coldly. “I don’t think you would betray me if you could, Rob. Now tell me why they complain.”
 “They think the casket contained a treasure.”
 “So it did and does—to me; to the men, it would not be worth a dime.”
 “Why?”
 “Because it wouldn’t; that is enough.”
 “Maybe.”
 “Look here, Rob, I made a fair proposition to the boys, didn’t I?”
 “Yes.”
 “I gave up my share of the booty from that affair for the casket, didn’t I?”
 “Yes.”
 “And they all agreed?”
 “Yes.”
 “Good! They must stand by their agreement, that’s all. I have nothing more to say on the subject.”
 “Remember, I have warned yon.”
 “I will remember—never fear.”
 “Now, what did you want to say to me?”

“Do you know who it was that you brought to the Rat-Hole to-night?”
 “Yes. Sneaker and Rattler.”
 “Bosh!”
 “Eh?”
 “Bosh!”
 “I don’t understand.”
 “My dear Rob, you’ve made the greatest mistake of your life.”
 “Have I?”
 “Yes.”
 “How?”
 “Simply because the man Sneaker is Nick Carter, and Rattler is his assistant, Chick, sometimes called Young Hercules.”
 “What!”
 “Didn’t you hear me?”
 “Yes.”
 “Well, what do you think of the information?”
 “Are you sure you are right?”
 “Did you ever know me to make a mistake?”
 “No.”
 “This is not an exception.”
 “Did you recognize Carter?”
 “Yes; by the other one.”
 “What do you mean?”
 “I knew Chick once, and I had not forgotten his face. When he removed his disguise, I recognized him instantly.”
 “And—”
 “Why, simply if he is Chick, Nick Carter’s assistant, the other one must be Nick Carter himself. I have a faculty for never forgetting faces; I knew the young cub the moment I saw him without a disguise.”
 “What’s to be done?”
 “Kill them.”
 “When?”
 “As soon as Chick returns.”
 “Why did you let him go?”
 “For several reasons. They were both armed to the teeth, and would have made a hot fight of it, if I had sprung the information suddenly.”
 “Sure!”
 “Besides, you fellows would have been so taken aback, that three or four of you would have been killed before it occurred to you to fight.”
 “Maybe so, but—”

"But what?"

"This detective will bring back a lot of cops, and take us all in. You should not have let him go."

"Bah!"

"Well, what then?"

"The detectives won't attempt to make trouble until they have plenty of evidence to convict us all, and they haven't got that yet. A good detective always works on the principle that he must obtain evidence which will convince twelve disinterested men besides himself; that is one of Nick Carter's hobbies, and that is why he never fails."

"I see."

"Chick will come back."

"Yes?"

"And he will bring what he went for, a kit of clothes and tools—probably burglars' tools."

"Humph! Well?"

"Neither of them must leave the Rat-Hole again alone."

"Have you got a scheme?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"My first thought was to shoot them down in the Rat-Hole, but I have thought of a better plan."

"Tell me."

"To-morrow night is the time fixed for the 'Nourhemal' affair."

"Yes."

"When we rob her, we will take the detectives with us."

"But—"

"It will be a chance for them to get the very evidence they want, and they will gladly go."

"Well?"

"They will work like beavers, too, for they will want to convince us still more strongly of their sincerity. They will help us rob the ships for she is almost a ship—and will do good work."

"I don't tumble yet."

"Their plan will be to return with us to the Rat-Hole. Then one of them will get out on some excuse, go for the cops, and we will all go to limbo."

"Pleasant prospect."

"Now, hear how I will change it."

"Well?"

"When our work on board the Nourhemal is finished, you will take charge of one of the small boats, and I of another."

"Yes."

"There will be four persons in each of three of the boats, and two in the little one."

"Yes."

"I will make Nick Carter sit in my boat with his back toward me. Chick will be in your boat, in the same position. When we get well into the river, I will sneeze. When I sneeze, plunge your knife between Chick's shoulders, and I will serve Carter the same. Then we'll quietly chuck them overboard, and go ahead to the Rat-Hole. How do you like the plan?"

"Capital!"

"Good! Is it agreed?"

"Yes."

"And we will say nothing to the boys until the job is done."

"Nothing."

"That's the best way."

"When they hear that but for me, Nick Carter would have gobbled them all, they won't think anything more about the steel casket, will they?"

"Not a bit."

"Then we understand each other?"

"Thoroughly."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

Gentleman George turned and sauntered away toward the shore, while Red Rob remained sitting where he was.

Chick backed out on the opposite side of the pile, and glided along in pursuit of the chief.

As he moved on, he saw a figure sitting perched upon the head of an old barrel, near the shore end of the pier.

"Barney," he thought.

But the chief saw him, too, and he paused and spoke to him.

"Hello, Cully," he said; "what are you looking for?"

"Chumps," replied Barney.

"Find any?"

"Not till you showed up."

The chief bit his lip, and moved on. Chick dropped upon his belly, and crawled rapidly toward Barney, keeping a timber between him and

the chief, in case the latter should look behind him.

Presently he was within speaking distance.

"Kismet, Barney!" he said.

"Spake, mavourneen," replied Barney, without moving a hair. "Shure, I'm listenin'."

"That's your man, the fellow who just spoke to you. Don't lose him, and don't let him drop to you."

CHAPTER IX. CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

Chick saw Barney leap down from the head of the barrel, and glide away in pursuit of Gentleman George.

Then Young Hercules turned and retraced his steps, or rather his crawl, until he was once more snugly hidden, directly behind the spot where Red Rob was still sitting, evidently lost in thought.

"Bah!" Chick heard him mutter at last, as he rose to return to the Rat-Hole. "I wonder if he thinks I'm as big a chump as I seem? Wouldn't he rave if he knew that the steel casket was snugly in my possession all this time? You may fool the others, Gentleman George, all you please, but you can't fool me—not quite."

With that Red Rob disappeared on his way back to the Rat-Hole, and Chick again crept away shoreward.

He was gone a long time, but returned just before daylight.

In the barrel upon which Barney had been sitting, he found the kit of things which the professional shadow had brought for him, and then he made his way to the wharf-rat's rendezvous.

He was welcomed most cordially by Red Rob, who repeated to him an order which he had already given put to the others.

"We hey got er big scheme on hand fur to-morrer night," he said, "an' ther boss is fixin' up ther plans, see?"

"Yes."

"He has given orders that nobody is to leave the Rat-Hole till he comes back—me included, see?"

"Yes."

"He says we'll make our fortunes at one whop, see?"

"Yes."

"An' he's bound ter hev his orders obeyed, see?"

"Yes."

Nick was about to offer an objection but he caught a look from Chick's eyes, which caused him to change his remark.

"What's on hand?" he asked.

"A big job."

"What craft is it?"

"Chief didn't say. He called me outside to tell me about it, an' I've given his orders. Any kickin'?"

"Narry a kick."

"Right. You're a lu-lu, Sneaker."

"You bet!"

Time passed slowly enough in the Rat-Hole.

The air was bad, and the place reeked with filth and vermin, but the game was worth the candle, and so the detectives had patience.

The day came and went, and the night of the robbery was upon them.

At eleven o'clock the signal was given at the iron-bound door, and a moment later Gentleman George entered.

"All here?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Red Rob.

"Anybody been out?"

"No."

"Good! We start in ten minutes. Rob, take three men, and get the boats."

"Correct."

"Now, boys," continued the chief, "we have got the biggest job of our lives on hand to-night for we are going to strip the Nourhemal."

"Hooray!"

"Sneaker, I look for great things from you and Rattler."

"We'll do our share."

"Good! Are you ready, boys?"

"All ready."

"Then come."

They were soon in the boats, and gliding over the black water of the bay.

The rain of the previous night had not ceased, but now it had changed to mist, and a fog hung over the river and bay.

The Nourhemal, which they intended to loot, is the largest private yacht in the world, and could more appropriately be called a steamship.

She belongs to the Astor family, and offered a fair prize for the river-thieves, if they could once succeed in boarding her, and gaining admittance to her sumptuous cabins.

During all the time that had elapsed since Chick overheard the conversation on the pier, he had found no opportunity to converse with Nick, so the detective had no idea of the plot against his life.

But that fact did not worry Young Hercules in the least. He knew what he was about, as events will show.

After a long row, the vicinity of the huge yacht was reached.

She loomed up before them, bulky and black, and the dipping oars wielded by the river-thieves made no sound as the four boats drew near to their prospective prey.

Finally they touched the sides, and the grappling irons were thrown up and caught on the sides of the vessel.

Then, one by one, the river pirates mounted to the deck.

One man was left in each boat, leaving ten to do the work aboard the ship.

Both Nick and Chick were of the latter party. Everything seemed silent and deserted.

Not a sign of life appeared aboard the Nourhemal, except for the presence of the midnight marauders who were there to steal.

Gentleman George knew that there were several men there, however, but he believed them to be sleeping, and thought to surprise them in their bunks.

The robbers crept toward the cabin.

Gentleman George was in advance, and he tried the door.

Better luck than he expected was awaiting him, for the door was not fastened.

The fact should have warned him, but it did not.

No one having been allowed to leave the Rat-Hole since his plans were laid, he had no thought of the possibility of betrayal.

He entered, and the others followed, until the ten men were grouped there.

Then the chief, with a low word of command to his men, struck a match.

The scratching of that match had a most remarkable effect.

It seemed to produce a score of sudden sharp clicks, and instantly the cabin was flooded with light from as many bull's eye-lanterns which glared in the faces of the river-thieves.

The cabin of the Nourhemal was filled with uniformed men, who had been silently awaiting the arrival of the river-thieves.

"Betrayed!" exclaimed Gentleman George, with an oath.

"Surrender!" chorused the officers.

The men had no thought of flight, so awed were they by the suddenness of the surprise.

But Gentleman George and Red Rob both made a break for liberty.

They leaped with one impulse for the door.

A policeman barred the way, but Gentleman George's revolver cracked, and the officer fell to the floor of the cabin.

It left the way open for just one instant.

That brief interval served the purpose of the two heads of the gang of wharf-rats.

They leaped through the door, along the deck, and plunged together, headlong into the water.

A dozen revolvers cracked behind them but they did not stop.

Their flight seemed to act like a galvanic battery upon the others.

They also made a dash for the door.

But the policemen headed them off.

Then a fierce fight ensued, in which two of the thieves were killed and four were wounded.

Some of the officers suffered also, but none seriously.

Short as was the delay caused by the fight, it sufficed for the escape of Gentleman George and Red Rob.

The boats in which the robbers had reached the Nourhemal were easily overtaken, having only one man in each.

Their occupants were made prisoners, but there was no sign of the two ringleaders there, nor had the men seen aught of them.

The haul was a good one, but the root of the evil was not yet destroyed.

The men they wanted most had made good their escape.

Nick, who knew nothing of the information possessed by his young assistant, was grievously disappointed.

The moment that the officers made their presence known in the cabin, the detective realized that Chick had planned the thing while he was gone from the Rat-Hole, the preceding night.

"Chick," he said, when they were guiding the police to the Rat-Hole, in order that the place might be destroyed, "we've got our work to do all over. We'll have to begin again."

"Why?"

"Because we've got to run down Red Rob and Gentleman George."

"True."

"Besides, we are no nearer the steel casket, nor to the solution of Sara Varney's disappearance, than we were before."

"I don't quite agree with you," said Chick, quietly.

"Eh?"

"You are partially mistaken."

"How so? Ah! You haven't told all you know, yet."

"Not quite."

"Well, keep it until we are alone. Time enough, then."

The Rat-Hole was visited by the police, and there all the further evidence that could possibly be desired was found.

Then the place was thoroughly destroyed, so that it would never again answer for a refuge for thieves, after which the arrested men were taken to Raymond street jail.

"Now Chick, talk," said Nick, as soon as they were alone.

"I know where the steel casket is concealed," was the reply.

"Where?"

"In the—Hotel."

"What! That is where George Hatfield stays when he's in town."

"Precisely."

Nick shook his head doubtfully. "I've changed my mind," he said.

"About what?"

"About Gentleman George."

"In what way?"

"I thought at first that he was George Hatfield, but I have gotten over that idea."

"So have I," quietly.

"Then what——"

"Nick, I overheard a conversation last night which opened my eyes to a good deal."

"Evidently."

"If I hadn't overheard what I did, we'd be floating face down in the river by this time."

"Humph! So bad as that?"

"Yes."

"Lucky you heard it, then."

"Rather. I heard more, too."

"Well, what?"

"Enough to convince me that Red Rob and George Hatfield are the same, and that he has the steel casket in his possession."

"Red Rob is George Hatfield, eh?"

"Yes."

"I began to suspect it. Who then is Gentleman George?"

CHAPTER X. MIXED IDENTITIES.

As Nick asked the last question the two detectives arrived at the steps of the white building in Mulberry street, New York, which is known as "the central office."

"Wait until we hear Barney's report," said Chick. "I put him on the track instead of following the chief myself, when you sent me out night before last."

"You have a suspicion who our man is, I see."

"Yes."

"Why not speak out?"

"I'd rather hear Barney first, if you don't object."

"Afraid of making a mistake, eh?"

"Yes."

"All right, lad, here we are."

Five minutes later they were in the office of the inspector.

The official congratulated them upon the success of the raid the preceding night, and ended by saying:

“However, Nick, you haven’t found the steel casket yet?”

“No.”

“Do you think you will?”

“Sure to.”

“How soon?”

“Inside of twenty-four hours.”

“Indeed! That will be excellent. Mr. Gregory was here to-day. He hasn’t been gone more than fifteen minutes, in fact.”

“Rather early for him, isn’t it?” asked Chick, dryly.

“It is only just ten o’clock.”

“He is very anxious about the casket.”

“Anything new regarding it?”

“No, only he seemed more anxious than ever.”

“You told him I was searching for it?” asked Nick.

“Certainly. By the way,” turning to Chick, “have you given Nick any further information about Gregory?”

“Not much, sir. I’ll make out a report embracing all I know concerning him, and give it to you.”

“I should be glad if you would.”

“I would like to see Barney,” continued the assistant.

“He’s out on your orders. You sent for him, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“He hasn’t returned.”

Will you send him to me as soon as he shows up?” asked Nick, rising.

“Certainly.”

The two detectives were soon again in the street.

“Now, Chick,” said Nick, “you are placed where you’ve got to reveal your suspicions.”

“So I see.”

“Out with them.”

“Well, when I was listening to the conversation between Gentleman George and Red Rob one of the things that I discovered was that we had been recognized.”

“Well, which one tumbled?”

“Gentleman George.”

“He has probably seen me somewhere when without a disguise.”

“That’s just the point.”

“What is?”

“He did not know you at all, except by implication.”

“Eh?”

“He knew me, and guessed who you were.”

“Oh!”

“In talking with Rob he said that he never forgot a face.”

“Yes.”

“And that he recognized ‘the young cub’ the moment he saw me, see?”

“‘The young cub?’ yes.”

“There isn’t a man in all New York who would know me aside from yourself, Patsy, the inspector and the superintendent.”

“Well?”

“The only person who would stand a chance of recognizing my face because he never forgets one—which implies that he has not seen it in a long time—the only person who would be likely to speak of me as a ‘young cub,’ is one who saw me frequently when I was a boy in Nevada, and who always called me a ‘young cub’ in those days.”

“And that person is Jasper Gregory.”

“Certainly.”

“Good, lad; you’ve hit it. Only——”

“What?”

“Why all this fuss about the steel casket?”

“I think I’ve tumbled to that also.”

“Well, let’s have it.”

“First, I think the casket contains the papers that would prove his villainy about the mining affair in Nevada, and perhaps would explain the fate of his partners.”

“Yes.”

“Second, he robbed his own yacht in order to lead not the public, but his own villains away from suspicion of who he really is.”

“Humph!”

“Third, he did not mean them to get the casket at all, but they found it, and so he traded his share in the spoils for it.

“Fourth, he concealed it, and then the idea occurred to him that it would be a good blind to work the police on, and he applied to the inspector.”

“Well, go on.”

"Fifth, Red Rob—that is, Hatfield—had his eye upon the casket. He followed Big Jap, found where he had hidden it, and stole it. Big Jap has only just discovered that it is missing, which accounts for his call at the central office this morning."

"Good! next——"

"Sixth, Jasper Gregory became a leader of river-pirates simply because his nature demands that kind of excitement, unless, as may be the case, we find that he lost his fortune and took that way to get money."

"Did you learn anything about the girl, Sara?"

"Not a word."

"Well, let's call upon Mr. Hatfield at once. I fancy the interview will be interesting."

The two detectives went at once to the hotel where they knew that Hatfield was to be found when he was in town.

The clerk informed them that Mr. Hatfield had just arrived that morning, and saying that they were old friends, the detectives took the elevator, and went up at once.

In answer to their rap upon the door a voice said:

"Come in."

They entered, and Hatfield looked up in surprise.

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, gentlemen," he said, coldly.

"I am Nick Carter," replied the detective, "and this is my assistant."

"Indeed! To what am I indebted——"

"Mr. George Hatfield, alias Red Rob, the king of wharf-rats, you have in your possession a steel casket which we want. If you move a finger, I will shoot you!" said Nick, sternly.

"There is some mistake!" exclaimed Hatfield, faintly.

"There is no mistake. Own up like a man, and be brave for once. We know what we know, Bobby."

"Well, I will own up," exclaimed the river-thief, boldly, "and what is more you shall have the casket. Take me. You will find the casket in my trunk."

He held out his hands which were quickly and securely manacled.

Then his keys were produced, the trunk opened, and the casket placed on a table before them.

"Do you know how to open this?" asked Nick.

"Yes. There is a tiny hole in the cover. Push the point of a pin in that, and the lid will fly up."

Nick followed the directions, and discovered, as he had expected, a bundle of papers, also a gold chain and locket.

He opened the locket, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Sara Varney!" he cried.

"No," replied Hatfield, "but Sara Varney's mother."

"Then where is the daughter?"

"She is at this moment a prisoner in the house of Jasper Gregory, and what will surprise you still more is the fact that Gregory and I are brothers. He does not know it, for he thinks I died in infancy."

"Ah! You haven't much love for your brother, I take it."

"I hate him. He has always stood between me and success. There are papers enough in that lot there, Nick Carter, to hang him.

"You may as well know first as last that it was I who enticed Sara Varney from her home by sending a decoy letter which said that Arthur Grayling was in trouble—had, in fact, been arrested. I knew that such a story would insure her silence regarding her journey.

"I took her to a woman in Brooklyn, and kept her a close prisoner in an upper room, but the other day, when I went there, I found the house deserted and the woman and Sara gone.

"I traced them to the house of Jasper Gregory.

"A few words will explain why he stole her away. His partners in Nevada, as you will discover by the papers, were Sara's father and brother. He murdered them, and stole the property, although John Varney, Sara's father, had already amassed a fortune which eventually went to his daughter.

"I not only wanted to marry Sara Varney, but I wanted her wealth as well. Jap wanted the same thing. He has made Sara believe that he is her savior and a saint. He has convinced her, by

forged letters, that Arthur Grayling is a scoundrel, and she has consented to marry the murderer of her own father, although she does not suspect him.

"I think the girl is half crazy, or she would not become his dupe."

"And the checks?" asked Nick.

"I have spent the money. Now do your duty, but don't forget that brother of mine."

"Never fear. We will attend to him."

Hatfield—or in reality George Gregory, for that was his name—was taken to a cell, and then the two detectives paid a call upon Big Jap Gregory.

Nick sent in his card, and was admitted at once.

"Ah!" said Gregory, "any news of the casket?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! What?"

"It is found."

"Found! Where?"

"In the possession of of George Hatfield,

otherwise Gentleman George, Red Rob, and so forth, river-pirate."

"Dear me! Well, where's the casket?"

"In the inspector's office."

"Why didn't you bring it with you?"

"He wished me to ask you to step down and identify it—a slight formality, you know."

"Yes—yes—certainly. You have a carriage with you?"

"Yes, at the door."

"I will go at once."

And he did, never suspecting that he went as a prisoner; but when, in the presence of the inspector, he was confronted with his crimes, he knew that he had made a grievous mistake when he pitted his own sagacity against Nick Carter's.

Sara Varney was restored to her home, and ultimately became the wife of Arthur Grayling. Gregory had gone through the property stolen from her father, but the murder was avenged, and another famous case was brought to a successful issue by the great detective and his faithful Chick.

[THE END.]

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "Nick Carter's Brightest Pupil; or, The Great Counterfeiting Case," by the author of "Nick Carter."