

The Secret of Lonesome Cove

By Samuel Hopkins Adams

CHAPTER IX.

Chester Kent Declines a Job.

THIS meeting is a fortunate chance for me," said Blair presently.

"Chance?" murmured Kent interrogatively.

"The car swerved sharply, but immediately resumed the middle of the road. 'Certainly, chance,' said the motorist. 'What else should it be?'

"Of course," agreed Kent. "As you say."

"I said fortunate," continued the other, "because you are, I believe, the very man I want. There is an affair which has been troubling me a good deal. I haven't been able to look into it personally because of the serious illness of my son, who is at my place on Sundayman's creek. But it is in your line, being entomological and perhaps criminal."

"What is it?" asked Kent.

"An inexplicable destruction of our stored woollens by the clothes moth. You may perhaps know that I am president of the Kinsella mills. We've been having a great deal of trouble this spring, and our superintendent believes that some enemy is introducing the pest into our warehouses. Will you take the case?"

"When?"

"Start tonight for Connecticut."

Chester Kent's long fingers went to the lobe on his ear. "Give me until 3 o'clock this afternoon to consider. Can I reach you by telephone?"

"Yes, at Hedgerow house, my place."

"That is how far from here?"

"Fourteen miles. But you need not come there. I could return to the hotel to conclude arrangements. And I think," he added significantly, "that you would find the project a profitable one."

"Doubtless. Are you well acquainted with this part of the country, Mr. Blair?"

"Yes; I've been coming here for years."

"Is there an army post near by?"

"Not within a hundred miles."

"Nor any officers on special detail about?"

"None so far as I know."

Kent produced from his pocket the silver star with the shroud of cloth

hanging to it. "This may or may not be an important clue to the curious death that occurred here three days ago."

"It looks like the star from the collar of an officer. I should say positively that it was from an army or navy uniform."

"Are you yourself an expert in woollen fabrics, Mr. Blair?"

"I have been."

"Could you tell from that tiny fragment whether or not the whole cloth is all wool?"

Without replying Blair gave the steering handle a quick sweep, and the car drew up before a drug store. He took the star and was gone a few minutes.

"Not all wool," he announced on his return.

"Exit the army or navy officer," remarked Kent.

"Why so?"

"Because regulations require all wool garments—and get them. What is the fabric?"

"A fairly good mixture, from the very elementary chemical test I made."

"Thank you, Mr. Blair. You've eliminated one troublesome hypothesis for me. I'll telephone you before 3 o'clock. Good day."

From the woollen manufacturer Chester Kent went direct to the Marlandia Center library, where he interviewed the librarian.

"Do you get the agriculture department publications?"

"Yes."

"Have you a pamphlet issued by the bureau of entomology, Helmond on 'The Swarm Phenomenon in Lepidoptera?'"

"Yes, sir. It was inquired for only yesterday by Mr. Blair."

"Ah, yes! He's quite interested in the subject, I believe."

"It must be quite recent, then," said the librarian. "We haven't seen him here for a long time until two days ago, when he came and put in a morning reading on insects."

"So, Mr. Alexander Blair," said Kent, addressing the last fence post on the outskirts of the town, after a thoughtful walk, "that was a fatal break on your part, that mention of Helmond. Anatomists who have wholly dropped a subject since years back don't usually know publications issued only within three months. That casual meeting with me was well carried out, and you called it chance. A very palpably manufactured chance! But why am I worth so much trouble to know? And why does Alexander Blair leave a desperately ill son to arrange an errand for me at this particular time? And is Hedgerow house, fourteen miles distant and possessing just such an electric car as a woman would use in driving round the country, perhaps the place whence came Sedgwick's sweet lady of mystery? Finally, what connection has all this with the body lying in Annalaka burying ground?"

Elliciting no reply from the fence post, Kent returned to the Eyrle, called up Hedgerow house and declined Blair's proposition.

Early that evening Francis Sedgwick came to the hotel.

"Mr. Kent? I'm afraid you can't see him, sir. He isn't in his room," said the clerk.

"Isn't he about the hotel?"

"The clerk hesitated. 'I ought not to tell you, sir, for it's Mr. Kent's strict orders not to be disturbed, but he's in his special room. Is it anything very important? Any new evidence or something of that sort?'

"That is what I want Mr. Kent to decide."

"In that case I might take the responsibility. But I think I had better take you to him myself."

After the elevator had carried them to the top of its run, they mounted a flight of stairs and walked to a far corner of the building.

"Nobody's been in here since he took it," explained the clerk as they walked. "Turned all the furniture out. Special lock on the door. Some kind of scientific experiments, I suppose. He's very quiet about it."

Having reached the door, he discreetly tapped. No answer came. Somewhat less timidly characterized his next effort. A growl of surpassing savagery from within was his reward.

"You see, Mr. Sedgwick," said the clerk, raising his voice he called. "Mr. Kent, I've brought—"

"Get away and go to the devil!" cried a voice from inside in fury.

"What do you mean by—"

"It's I, Kent, Sedgwick. I've got to see you."

There was a silence of some seconds.

"What do you want?" asked Kent at length.

"You told me to come at once if anything turned up."

"So I did," inferred Kent. "Well, cheer that infernal bellboy to the stairs, and I'll let you in."

With a wry face the clerk retired. Kent opened the door and his friend squeezed through into a bare room. The walls were hung and the floor was carpeted with white sheets. There was no furniture of any kind unless a narrow mattress in one corner could be so reckoned.

"It's happened!" announced Sedgwick.

"Has it?" said Kent. "Lenn up against the wall and make yourself at home. Man, you're shaking!"

"You'd shake, too," retorted the artist, his voice trembling.

"No; anger doesn't affect me that way. Wait! Now, don't tell me yet if I'm to have a report it must be from a sane man, not from one in a blind fury. Take time and cool down. What do you think of my room?"

"What's the game?" asked Sedgwick, interested in spite of himself.

"It dates back to our college days. Do you remember that queer fresh man, Herwind?"

"The mind reader? Yes. The poor chap went insane afterward."

"Yes. It was a weak mind, but a singularly receptive one. You know we used to force numbers or playing cards upon his consciousness by merely thinking of them."

"I recollect. His method was to stand gazing at a blank wall. He said the object we were thinking of would also before him visually against the blankness. Did you ever figure out how he managed to do it?"

"Not exactly."

"For years I've kept a bare white room in my Washington home to do my mind thinking. When your affair promised to become difficult for me, I rigged up this room. And I'm trying to see things against the walls."

"Any particular kind of things?"

Kent produced the silver star from his pocket and told of its discovery.

"Sedgwick, what was it your visitor said to you about Jupiter?"

"He didn't mention Jupiter."

"No, of course not. Not by name. But what was it she said about the planet that she pointed out over the sea?"

"Oh, was that Jupiter? How did you know?"

"Looked last night, of course," said Kent impatiently. "There's no other planet conspicuous over the sea at that hour from where you stood."

That's not important, at least not now. What did she say?"

"Oh, some rot about daring to follow her star and find happiness and that perhaps it might lead me to glory or something."

A kind of snort came from Kent. "Where have my brains been?" he cried. "He thrust the bit of embroidery back into his pocket. Then with an abrupt change of tone: "Well, is your temper in hand?"

"For the present."

"Tell me about it, then."

"You remember the—the picture of the face?" said Sedgwick, with an effort.

"Nobody would easily forget it."

"I've been doing another portrait from the sketches. It was on opaque glass, an experimental medium that I've worked on some. Late this afternoon I went out, leaving the glass sheet, backed against a light board, on my easel. The door was locked with a heavy spring. There's no possible access by the window. Yet somebody came in and smashed my picture to fragments. If I can find that man, Kent, I'll kill him!"

Kent glanced at the artist's long, strong hands. They were clenched on his knees. The fingers were bloodless.

"I believe you would," said the scientist, with conviction. "You mustn't, you know. No luxuries at present. Anything else in your place damaged?"

"Not that I noticed. But I didn't pay much attention to anything else. I came here direct to find you."

"That's right. Well, I'm with you for the Nook."

Locking his curious room after him, Kent led the way to the hotel lobby, where he stopped only long enough to send some telegrams. The sun was still a few minutes short of its setting when he and his companion emerged from the hotel. Kent at once broke into a trot.

CHAPTER X.

The Invasion.

SUCH ruin as had been wrought in Sedgwick's studio was strictly localized. The easel lay on the floor, with its rear leg crumpled. Around it were scattered the fragments of the glass upon which the painter had set his labor of love. A high old fashioned chair faced the wreckage. On its peak was hung a traveling cap. Lopping across the back sprouted a Norfolk jacket belonging to Sedgwick. Chester Kent lifted the coat and after a swift survey let it drop.

"Did you leave that there?" he asked.

"I hung it across the back of the chair," answered Sedgwick.

"North window closed?"

"Yes, as you see it now."

"And was one open?"

"Nothing has been changed, I tell you, except this." Sedgwick's hand, outstretched toward the destroyed portrait, condensed itself involuntarily into a knotty fist.

Sedgwick took the Norfolk jacket from the chair. "Why, there's a hole through it!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly. The path of the invader."

"A bullet!"

"Right again. Instead of murdering, as you plan to do, you've been murdered. That the picture was destroyed is merely a bit of ill fortune. That you weren't inside the coat when the bullet went through it and cut the prop from your easel is a bit of the other kind. Hang up the coat, please."

Sedgwick obeyed.

"There," said Kent, viewing the result from the window. "At a distance of, say a quarter of a mile, that arrangement of coat and cap would look uncommonly like a man sitting in a chair before his work. At least I should think so. And yonder thickened on the hillside," he added, looking out of the window again, "is just about that distance and seems to be the only spot in sight giving a straight range. Suppose we run up there."

Sound as was his condition Sedgwick was panting when he brought up at the spot some yards behind his long limbed leader. As the scientist had surmised, the arrangement of coat and cap in the studio presented at that distance an excellent simulacrum of the rear view of a man lounging in a chair. Ridding the artist stay outside the corpse, Kent extended on hands and knees and made extended exploration. After a few moments the sound of low lugubrious whistling was heard from the trees, and presently the musician emerged leading himself by the job of his hair.

"Evidently you've found something," commented Sedgwick.

"I'm satisfied that some one fired a shot from here. The marksman—a good one—saw you, as he supposed, jerk to the side as if with a bullet through you and went away satisfied."

"Leaving an trace behind him," added Sedgwick.

"No trace that is tangible. Therein lies the evidence."

"Of course you don't expect me to follow that."

"Why not? Look at the ground in the thicket."

"What is there to be seen there, since you've said there are no marks?"

"The soil is very soft."

"Yes; there's a spring just back of us."

"Yet there's not a footprint discernible on it."

"I've got that part of the lesson by heart, I think."

"Use your brain on it, then. Some one designing to make you his target has been in this thicket; been and gone and left the piece trackless. That some one was a keen, soft footed woodsman. Putting it in words of one syllable, I should say he probably had the racial instinct of the hunt. Does that flush any idea from your brain?"

"Racial instinct? Gansett Jim?" said Sedgwick.

"Exactly. If I had found tracks all

over the place, I should have known it wasn't he. Finding nothing, I was naturally pleased."

"That's more than I am," retorted the other. "I suppose he's likely to resume his gunnery at any time."

"Unless we can discourage him, as I expect we can."

"By having him arrested?"

"Difficulties might be put in our way. Sheriff Len Schlinger and the half breed are in some sort of loose partnership in the wrong man."

The half breed made no reply.

"And you, Sedgwick. Here's the destroyer. Do you still want to kill him?"

"I suppose not," replied the artist lifelessly.

"Since his design was only against your life and not against your picture," commented Kent with a smile. "Well, our night's work is done. Lifting the lantern, he held it in the face of the half breed. "Jim?"

"Huh?"

"When you really want to know who made those footprints come and tell me who the body in Annalaka burying ground is. A trade for a trade. You understand?"

The eyes stared, immovable. The chin did not quiver. Reaching for the lantern, Gansett Jim, now nine of Indian to one of negro, turned away from them to the pathway. "No," he said stolidly.

As the flicker of ruddiness danced and disappeared in the forest Sedgwick spoke. "Well, do you consider that we've made a friend?"

"No," answered Chester Kent, "but we've done what's as good. We've quashed an enemy."

Answers to the telegram Chester Kent had dispatched arrived in the form of night letters, bringing information regarding the Blair of Hedgerow house, not sufficient information to satisfy the seeker, however. Therefore, having digested their contents at breakfast, the scientist came about him to supply the deficiency. The feet of hope led him to the shop of Elder Ira Dennett.

Besides being an able plumber and tinker, Elder Dennett performed, by vocation, the pleasurable duties of unprinted journalism—that is to say, he was the semi-official town gossip. There was joy in the plumber-tinker's heart over the visit. Unhappily it appeared that Kent was there strictly on business. He did not wish to talk of the mystery of Lonesome Cove, he knew his acetylene lamp fixed—at once, if Elder Dennett pleased.

Glum was the face of the elder as he examined the lamp, which needed very little attention. It lightened when his visitor observed:

"I've been thinking a little of getting an electric car to run about here in town. There was a neat little one in town yesterday."

"Old Blair's," replied Dennett. "He offered me a lift into town very kindly. He was a stranger to me," said Kent truthfully and with intent to deceive. "Who did you say he was?"

"Gosh, ask! Don't you know who Aleck Blair is?"

"Blair? Blair?" said Kent innocently. "Is he the author of Blair's 'Studies of Neurotopes?'"

Elder Dennett snorted. "He's a millionaire, that's what he is. Ain't you read about him in the fabric trust investigations?"

"Oh, that Blair! Yes, I believe I have."

Kent yawned. It was a well conceived bit of strategy and met with deserved success.

CHAPTER XI.

Hedgerow House.

THE elder traced the history of the Blair in and out of concentric circles of scandal—financial, political, social—and mostly untrue. Those in which the greatest portion of truth interested dealt with the escapades of Wilfred Blair, the only son and heir of the household, who had burned up all the paternal money he could lay hands on, writing his name in red fire across the night life of London, Paris and New York. Tiring of this, he had come home and married a girl of nineteen, beautiful and innocent, whose parents, the elder and innocent, had sold her to the devil per Mr. Blair, agent. The girl, whose maiden name was Marjorie Dorrance—Kent's fingers went to his ear at this—had left Blair after a year of marriage, though there was no legal process, and he had returned to his home of the center until retirement overtook him in the form of tuberculosis. His father had brought him to their place on Sundayman's creek, and there he was kept in semi-seclusion, visited from time to time by his young wife, who helped to care for him.

"That's the story they tell," commented the elder, "but some folks has got suspicions. My own suspicions is that the young fellow hasn't got no more consumption than you have, although he's got a man here. I think old Blair has got him here to keep him out of the papers."

"Fidelity is not to Mr. Blair's taste, then?"

"I don't believe the old man would hardly stop short of murder to keep his name out of print. He's kind of loony on the subject. Sailor Mill Smith is the fellow that can tell you about the family and the place. Here he comes up the street."

He thrust his head out of the door and called. Sailor Smith, stolid and white, entered and greeted Kent courteously.

"Mr. Dennett was saying," remarked Kent, "that you know something of the history of Hedgerow house, as I believe they call it."

"They call it?" repeated the old sailor. "Who calls it? If you mean the Blair place, that's Hogg's haven, that is! You can't wipe out that name while there's a man living as know the place at its worst. Old Captain Hogg built it and lived in it and died in it. The devil he fry'n' bacon out of old Hogg today for the things he done in that house."

"How long since did he die?"

"Oh, twenty year back."

"And the house was sold soon after?"

"S'ood vacant for ten years. Then this fellow Blair bought it. I don't



"Footprint too small," grunted Gansett Jim.

know him, but he bought a weevily biscuit there. A bad house, it is—rotten bad!"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Men's bones in the brick and women's blood in the mortar."

"Was the old boy a cannibal?" asked Kent, amused by the sea veteran's heroes.

"Just as bad—slave trader."

"Have you ever been in the house?"

"Many's the time when it was Hogg's haven. Only once since. They do tell that the curse has come down with the house and is heavy on the new owner's son."

"So I've heard."

The old white head wagged bodingly. "The curse of the blood," he said. "It's on all that race."

"Hogg's oldest sister was the grandmother of this young fellow's mother, wasn't she?" put in Elder Dennett.

"That's right. Wilfred Blair's great grandmother."

"And a bad 'un, too, I guess," concluded the elder reidlingly.

"Don't you say it!" cried the old seaman. "The curse of the blood was on her. Strange she was and beautiful, so my mother used to tell me, but not bad. She came in at Lonesome Cove too."

"Drowned at sea?" asked Kent.

"They never knew. One day she was gone. The next night her body came in. They said in the countryside that she had the gift of second sight and foretold her own death."

"Hum-m," mused Kent. "And now the Blair's have changed the name of the place. No wonder."

"There's one thing they haven't changed, the private buryin' plot."

"Family?"

"Hogg's there, all right, an' never a person in the countryside dared to speak to God about his soul, when they laid him there. His nephew, too, that was as black hearted as himself. But the rest of the graves has got no headstones."

"Slaves?"

"Then as he kept for his own service an' killed in his tantrums. Nobody knows how many. You can see the head of the creek where they lie, from the road, and the old willows that lean over 'em."

"Cheerful sort of person the late Mr. Hogg seems to have been. Any relics of his trade in the house?"

"Relics? You may say so! His old pistols and compasses, guns, nautical instruments and the lended whalebone whip that they used to say he slept with. They've got 'em hung on the walls now for ornaments. Ornaments! If they'd sink the damned things in a hundred fathom o' clean sea."

"Sailor Smith was cabin boy on one of the old Hogg fleet one voyage," explained Elder Dennett.

"God forgive me for it!" said the old man. "There they hang, and with 'em the shains and—"

"Don't that lamp finishing up?" demanded Kent, turning sharply upon Elder Dennett.

Having paid for it, with something extra for his civility, he led the seaman out of the place.

"You were going to say 'and handcuffs, weren't you?' he inquired.

"Why, yes. What of that?" asked the veteran, puzzled. Suddenly he brought his hand down with a slap on his thigh. "Where was my wife?" he cried. "Them iron on the dead woman's wrist! I knew I'd seen their like before! Slave manacles! They must a' come from Hogg's haven!"

"Very likely. But that suspicion had better be kept quiet at present."

"More devilment from the old haven? A bad house—a rotten bad house."

"Yet I've a pressing desire to take a look at it," said Chester Kent musingly. "Going back to Annalaka, Mr. Smith? I'll walk with you as far as the road to Mr. Sedgwick's."

Faded of the veteran's company at the turn of the road, Kent sat down and took his hat in hand to think.

"Miss Dorrance," he mused. "Marjorie Dorrance. What slapper twist for a nickname than to transform that into Marjorie Day? Poor Sedgwick! At the Nook he found the object of his concealment, industrially striving to piece together, as in a mosaic, the shattered remnants of his work. Sedgwick, architectured at his friend's approach.

"For heaven's sake, come out and do me a couple of sets of tennis!" he besought. "I'm no sport for you, I know, particularly as my nerves are jumpy, but I need the work."

"Sorry, my lug," said Kent, "but I've got to make a more or less polite call. People around Blair. Ever know any?"

"Used to know a Wilfred Blair in Paris," said the artist indifferently.

"An agreeable enough little beast, but a squalid of the worst sort. Is he the man you're going to see?"

"No such luck," said Chester Kent. "I never expect to see Wilfred Blair. Probably I shan't even be invited to his funeral."

"Oh! Is he dead?"

"His death is officially expected any day."

With which words Kent stepped out and into his waiting car.

After departing from the Nook Kent's car rolled along beside Sundayman's creek, and eventually crept into the shade of a clump of bushes and hid. Its occupant emerged and went forward feet until he came in view of Hedgerow house. At the turn of the stream he leaped a fence and made his way to a group of willows beneath which the earth was ridged with little mounds. Professor Chester Kent was trespassing. He was invading the territory of the dead.

From the seclusion of the graveyard and the willows a fair view was af-

forded of Hedgerow house. Grim as was the repute given it, it presented to the intruder an aspect of homely hospitable attractiveness and quaintness. Tall hollyhocks lifted their flowers to smile in at the old fashioned window. Here and there on the well kept lawn peonies glowed, crimson and white. A great, clambering rose tree had thrown its arms around the square porch, softening the uncompromising angles into curves of leafage and bloom. Along the paths panicles laughed at the sun, and nigmettes scattered his scented summons to bee and butterfly. The place was a loved place; so much Kent felt with sureness of love.

But the house was dead. Its eyes were closed. Silence held it. The garden buzzed and flickered with vivid multicolored life, but there was no stir from the habitation of man. Had its occupants deserted it?

From the far side of the amuseur came the sound of a door opening and closing again. Moving quickly along the suncast fringed course of the creek, Kent made a detour which gave him view of a side entrance and had barely time to efface himself in the shrubbery when a light wagon, with a spirited horse between the shafts, turned briskly out into the road. Kent, well sheltered, caught one brief sufficient glimpse of the occupant. It was Dr. Breed. The medical officer looked, as always, nerve beset, but there was a steady smile on his lips.

Kent's mouth puckered. He took a deep breath of musical inspiration and exhaled it in painful noiselessness, flattening himself amid the greenery as he saw a man emerge from the rear of Hedgerow house. The man was Gansett Jim. He carried a pick and a spade and walked slowly. Presently he disappeared in the willow shaded place of mounds. The sound of his toll came, muffled, to the ears of the hidden man.

Cautiously Kent worked his way, now in the stream, now through the heavy growth on the banks, until he gained the roadway. Once there he went forward to the front gate of Hedgerow house. Kent paused for the merest moment. His gaze rested on the heavy black door. Heavier and blinder against the woodwork a pen-dant waved languidly.

To the normal human being the grisly insignificance of death over a portal is provocative of anything rather than mirth. But Chester Kent, viewing the crape on Hedgerow house, laughed as he turned to the open road.

Meditation furruved the brow of Lawyer Adna Bain. "Nobody versus Sedgwick," grumbled he. "Police only versus Sedgwick," he mused. "How's a self respecting lawyer going to earn a fee out of that? And Len Schlinger standing over the grave of the corpse defiled with a warrant against searching, so to speak, in his hand! For that matter, this Professor Kent worries me more than the sheriff."

A sharp humming rose in the air and brought the idle counselor to his window, whence he beheld the prime author of his bewilderment descending from a car. A minute later the two men were sitting with their feet on one desk, a fairly good sign of mutual respect and confidence.

"Blair?" said Lawyer Bain. "No, I don't know him, not even to see. Took Hogg's haven, didn't he?"

"Then he doesn't see this postoffice?"

"No. Might use any one of half a dozen. See here. He drew a county map from a shelf. "Here's the place. Seven railroad stations on three different roads within ten miles of it. Annalaka would be way out of his reach."

"Yet Gansett Jim seems to be known here."

"Oh, is it Blair that the Indian works for? I never knew. Cloned a deaf muto with lackjaw, he is. Well, I expect the reason he comes here occasionally is that it's the nearest license town."

"Is the poor injun when he wants a wild walk ten miles as easy as you'd think?"

"Do you know most of the postoffice around here?"

"There isn't but one postmaster within twenty miles that I don't call by his first name, and she's a postmistress."

"Then you could probably find out by telephone where the Blair family get their mail."

"Easy!"

"And perhaps what newspapers they take."

"I'm! Yes, I guess so."

"Try it as soon as you get back."

"Back from where?"

"Back from the medical officer's place. I think he must have returned by this time."

"You want to see Tim Breed?"

"No; just his records. Rural permits, I suppose, are a matter of public record."

"Yes. All you've got to do is to go and ask for 'em. You won't need me."

"Regrettable as a solemn face," said Kent with a solemn face. "I fear that Dr. Breed doesn't regard me with that confidence and esteem which one tends of in illuminated resolutions."

"And you want me as an accelerator, eh?" smiled the lawyer. "All right. It's the Jaw the permit you're after, I suppose."

"Which?"

"Jaw Doc. They buried the corpse from Lonesome Cove under that name. Unidentified dead, you know."

(Continued Next Saturday.)

CABINET DISCUSSES IT.

London, Dec. 17.—With every member in attendance, the British cabinet met here today to discuss the German naval raid on the English coast east Wednesday morning. Premier Asquith, War Minister Lord Kitchener and First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill were the first to arrive.