

The Secret of Lonesome Cove

By Samuel Hopkins Adams

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CHAPTER V.

An inquiry.

"Am I running a Strangers' Rest here?" Francis Sedgwick asked of himself when he emerged upon his porch the morning after Kent's visit.

The occasion of this query was a man stretched flat on the lawn, with his feet propped up comfortably against the stone wall. His white shirt was freshly pressed. A soft white hat covered his eyes against the sun glare. To put a point to this foppishness, a narrow silken ribbon, also pure white, depending from his lapel buttonhole, suggested an eyeglass in his pocket.

His was a remarkable face, both in contour and in coloring. From chin to cheek, the skin was white, with a tint of blue showing beneath, but the central parts of the face were bronzed. The jaw was long, lean and bony. The cheek bones were high, the mouth was large, fine cut and firm, the nose solid, set like a rock.

At the sound of a footstep the man pushed his hat downward, revealing a knobby forehead and half closed eyes in which there was a touch of somberness, of brooding.

"Good morning," said the artist, and then all but recoiled from the voice that replied, so harsh and raucous it was.

"You rise late," it said.

"I hear your opinion on it," retorted Sedgwick, a bit nettled. "Am I to infer that you have been waiting for me?"

"You wouldn't go far wrong."

"And what can I do for you—before you leave?" said Sedgwick significantly.

"Take a little walk with me presently," said the man in another voice, brushing the hat clear of his face.

"Kent!" exclaimed the artist.

"Well, you appear surprised. What kind of artist are you not to recognize a man simply because he shaves his beard and affects a false voice. I've read your story."

"Already? Do you know it's 10 o'clock? However, it's a good story."

"Thank you."

"As a story. As information, it leaves out most of the important points."

"Thank you again."

"You're welcome. Color, size and trappings of the horse?"

"I didn't notice particularly. Black, I think; yes, certainly black. Rather a large horse. That's all I can tell you."

"Humph! Color, size and trappings of the rider?"

"Reddish brown hair with a gloss like a butterfly's wing," said the artist, with enthusiasm; "deep hazel eyes, clear sea browned skin, tall—I should say quite tall—but so—so feminine that you wouldn't realize her tallness. She was dressed in a light brown riding costume, with a toque hat, very simple, tan gauntlets and tan boots—that is, the first time I saw her. The next time—"

"Hold on; a dressmaker's catalogue is no good to me! I couldn't remember it all. Was she in riding clothes on any of her later visits?"

"No."

"Any scars or marks?"

"Certainly not!"

"That's a pity, although you seem to think otherwise. Age?"

"We-ell, twenty perhaps."

"Add five. Say twenty-five."

"What for?" demanded Sedgwick indignantly.

"I'm allowing for the discount of romance. Did you notice her boots?"

"Not particularly, except that she was always spick and span from head to foot."

"Humph! Was it pretty warm the last week she called on you?"

"Plying?"

"Did she show it?"

"Never a bit. Always looked fresh as a sewer."

"Then, although she came far, she didn't walk far to get here. There's a road back of the hill yonder and a little cove in an open field where a motorcar has stood. I should say that she had driven herself there and come across the hill to you."

"Could we track the car?" asked Sedgwick eagerly.

"No farther than the main road. What is the latest she ever left here when she arrived foot?"

"Once she stayed till half past 6. I begged her to stay and dine, but she

grew into herself at the mere suggestion.

"Half past 6. Allowing for a half past 7 dinner and time to dress for it, she would have perhaps twelve to fifteen miles to go in the car. The name she gave is obviously not her own, not even, I judge, her maiden name."

Sedgwick turned very white. "Do you mean that she is a married woman?" he demanded.

"How could you have failed to see it?" returned the other gently. "A young girl of breeding and social experience would hardly have come to your studio. A married woman might who respected herself with full confidence and knew with the same confidence that you would respect her. And, my dear boy," added Kent, with his quiet winning smile, "you are a man to inspire confidence. Otherwise I myself might have suspected you of having a hand in the death of the woman on the beach."

"Never mind the woman on the beach. This other matter is more than life or death. Is that flimsy supposition all you have to go on?"

"No. Her travel. Her wide acquaintance with men and events. Her obvious poise. And; reverting to tangible fact, as clinching evidence, there are her gloves, which she always wore."

"What about her gloves?"

"You never saw her left hand, did you?"

"Oh, I see. You mean the wedding ring. Well, I suppose," continued Sedgwick, with a tinge of contempt in his voice, "she could have taken off her ring as easily as her gloves."

There was no answering contempt in Chester Kent's voice as he replied; "But a ring, constantly worn and then removed, leaves an unmistakable mark. What the connection between her and the corpse on the beach may be is the problem. My immediate business is to discover who the dead woman is."

"And mine," said Sedgwick hoarsely, "to discover the living."

"Well at least start together," replied Kent. "Come!"

Twenty minutes of curving and dodging along the rocky roads in Kent's runabout brought them to the turnpike in sight of the town of Annalaka. The inquest is set for 11 o'clock," said Kent.

"All right," said Sedgwick with equal tactfulness.

They turned a corner and ran into the fringe of a crowd hovering about the town hall. Halting his machine in a bit of shade, Kent surveyed the gathering. At one point it thickened about a man who was talking eagerly, the vocal center of a small circle of silence.

"Elder Dennett," said Kent, "back from Cadystown. You'll have to face the music now. One word of warning: Don't lose your head or your temper if the suspicion raised against you by Dennett is strengthened by me. My concern is to get to the bottom of this matter. There is something the sheriff knows that I don't know. Probably all is the identity of the body. To force him into the open it may be necessary for me to augment the case against you."

"Ought I to be ready for arrest?"

"Hardly probable at present. No; go on the stand when you're called and tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

"But not the whole truth?"

"Nothing of the necktie. You won't be questioned about that. By the way, you have never kept among your artistic properties anything in the way of handkerchiefs, have you?"

"No."

"I didn't suppose you had. Those maniacs are a sticker. I don't—absolutely do not like those maniacs. And on one wrist only! Perhaps that is the very fact, though. Well, we shall know more when we're older; two hours older, say. Whether we shall know all that Mr. Sheriff Len Schlager knows is another question. I don't like Mr. Schlager, either, for that matter."

"Dennett has seen me," said Sedgwick in a low voice.

Indeed, the narrator's voice had abruptly ceased and he stood with the dropped jaw of stupefaction. One after another of his auditors turned and stared at the two men in the motorcar.

"Stay where you are," said Kent and stepped out to mingle with the crowd.

No one recognized at first the immaculate dressed man as the bearded scientist whose strange actions had amused the crowd on the beach. A heavy, solemn man addressed him:

"Friend of his?" he asked, nodding toward the artist.

"Yes."

"He'll need 'em. Going to give evidence?"

"To hear it, rather," replied Kent pleasantly. "Where's the body?"

"Inside. Just brought it over from Dr. Breed's. He's the medical officer, and he and the sheriff are running the show. Your friend wants a lawyer, maybe?"

The thought struck Kent that, while a lawyer might be premature, a friend in the town might be very useful.

"Yes," he said; "from tomorrow on."

"Meaning that you're in charge to-day," surprised the big man shrilly.

Kent smiled: "I dare say we shall get on very well together. Mr.— His voice went up interrogatively.

"Bain, Adam Bain, attorney and counselor at law for thirty years in the town of Annalaka."

"Thank you. My name is Kent. You already know my friend's name. What kind of man is this medical officer?"

"Breed? Not much. More of a politician than a doctor and more of a horse trader than either. Fidgety as a sandpiper, undependable."

"Did he perform the autopsy at his own house?"

"Yes, and the sheriff last evening

Didn't even have an undertaker to help lay out."

The lobe of Kent's ear began to suffer from repeated handling. "The body hasn't been identified, I suppose?"

"Nobody's had so much as a wink at it but those two and Ira Dennett. He viewed the corpse last night. That's why I guess your friend needs his friends and maybe a lawyer."

"Exactly. Mr. Dennett doesn't seem to be precisely a deaf mute."

Lawyer Bain omitted the bubbling chuckle of the fat throated. "It's quite some time since Iry won any prizes for silent thought," he stated. "You are known hereabouts?" he added after a pause.

"Very little."

"Gansett Jim, yonder, looks as if he kinder cherished the honor of your acquaintance."

Over his shoulder Kent caught the half breed's glance fixed upon him with solid intensity. A touch on his arm made him turn to the other side, where Sallor Smith faced him.

"Didn't hardly know you with your beard off," piped the old man. "Howdy, professor? You're finicked up like your own wedding."

"Good morning," said the scientist. "Are you going inside? Sit with us, won't you? Mr. Sedgwick is with me."

The ex-sailor started, "Him!" he exclaimed. "Here? There's been quite a lot of talk—"

"Suspicion, you mean?"

"Well, yes."

"People are inclined to connect Mr. Sedgwick with the death of the woman."

"What else can you expect?" returned the old man deprecatingly. "Iry Dennett's been talkin' his story. He's certain the woman he seen talkin' to Mr. Sedgwick is the dead woman—willin' to swear to it anywhere."

"What about Gansett Jim? Has he contributed anything to the discussion?"

"No. Jim's as close tongued as Iry is clatter mouthed."

"And probably with reason," muttered Kent. "Well, I'll look for you inside."

He returned to join Sedgwick. Together they entered the building, while behind them a rising rum testified to the interest felt in them by the villagers.

Within a tall, wizened man with dead, fishy eyes stalked nervously to and fro on a platform, beside which a hastily constructed coffin with a humped cover stood on three sawhorses. On a chair near by slouched the sheriff, his face red and streaming. A few perspiring men and women were scattered on the benches. Outside a clock struck 11. There was a quick inflow of the populace, and the man on the platform lifted up a chattering voice.

"Feller citizens," he said, "as medical officer I declare these proceedings opened. Meaning no disrespect to the deceased, we want to get through as spry as possible. First we will hear witness. Anybody who thinks he can throw any light on this business can have a hearing. Then those as wants may view the remains. The burial will take place right afterward in the town buryin' ground, our telfer citizen and sheriff, Mr. Len Schlager, having volunteered the expenses."

CHAPTER VI.

"Dah de murderer!"

THE first witness, a sheep herder, rose in his place and, without the formality of an oath, told of sighting the body at the edge of the surf at 7 o'clock in the morning. Others, following, testified to the position on the beach, the lashing of the body to the grating, the wounds and the maniacs. Dr. Breed announced briefly that the deceased had come to her death by drowning and that the skull had been crushed in, presumably, when the waves hammered the body upon the reefs.

"Then the corpse must have come from a good way out," said Sallor Smith, "for the reefs wouldn't catch it at that tide."

"Nobody knows how the dead came to Lonesome Cove," said the sheriff in his deep voice.

Elder Ira Dennett was the next and last witness called. Somewhere beneath the elder's dry exterior lurked the instinct of the drama. Stalking to the platform, he told his story, with skill and fervor. He made a telling point of the newly finished picture he had seen in Sedgwick's studio, depicting the moonlit charge of the wave mounted corpse. He sketched out the encounter between the artist and the dead woman vividly.

Then Sedgwick rose. He was white, but his voice was under perfect control as he said:

"It is all true. But I do not know the woman who accosted me. I never saw her before that evening. She spoke strangely to me and indicated that she was to meet some one and go aboard ship, though I saw no sign of a ship."

"You couldn't see much of the ocean from your house," said the medical officer.

"I walked on the cliffs later," said Sedgwick, and a murmur went through the courtroom, "but I never found the woman. And as for throwing her out of a ship, or any such fantastic nonsense, I can prove that I was back in my house by a little after 9 o'clock that night."

He sat down coolly enough but his eyes dilated when Kent whispered:

"Keep your nerve. The probability will be shown that she was killed before 10 o'clock."

Now, however, Dr. Breed was on his feet again. "Form in line, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "and pass the coffin as spry as possible."

At this Sheriff Schlager stepped forward and loosened the hasps preparatory to removing the cover. "The body has been left," said he, slipping the lid aside, "just as— Of a sud-

den, his eyes stiffened. A convulsive shudder ran through his big body. He jammed the cover back, and, with fingers that actually drummed on the wood, forced the hasps into place.

"She's come to life!" cried a voice from the rear.

"No, no!" rumbled the sheriff. Whirling upon the medical officer, he whispered in his ear—no more than a single word. It seemed to the wait-ful Kent.

The doctor turned ghastly. "Gents," he said in a quavering voice to the amazed crowd, "the program will not be carried out as arranged. The—well, the condition of the deceased is not fitter"—He stopped, mopping his brow.

But Yankee curiosity was not so easily to be balked of its food. It found expression in Lawyer Bain.

"That ain't the law, doc," he said.

"I'm the law here," declared Sheriff Schlager, planting himself solidly before the crowd and the coffin. One hand crept slowly back toward his hip.

"Don't pull any gun on me," retorted the lawyer quietly. "It ain't necessary."

"You heard Doc Breed say the body wasn't fit to be viewed," pursued the sheriff.

"That's all right too. But the doc hasn't got the final word. The law has. And the law says that the body shall be duly viewed. Qtherwise, and the deceased being buried without view, an order of the court to exhumate may be obtained."

"Look at Breed," whispered Kent to Sedgwick.

The medical officer's lips were gray as he leaned forward to pluck at the sheriff's arm. There was a whispered colloquy between them. Then Breed spoke, with a pitiful effort at self control:

"Lawyer Bain's point is correct, undoubtedly correct. But the body must be prepared. It ought to 'a' been looked to last night. But somehow I—we— Will six citizens kindly volunteer to fetch the coffin back to my house?"

Ten times six offered their services. The box was carried out swiftly, followed by the variable hum of excited conjecture. Quickly the room emptied itself except for a few stragglers.

Sedgwick, who had followed the impromptu cortege with his vision, was brought up sharply by the glare of a pair of eyes outside the nearest window. The eyes were fixed on his own. Their expression was distinctly malevolent. Without looking round, Sedgwick said in a low voice:

"Kent!"

No answer came.

"Kent!" said the artist a little louder.

"Huh?" responded a muffled and abstracted voice behind him.

"See here for a moment."

There was neither sound nor movement from the scientist.

"An Indian looking chap outside the window is trying to hypnotize me or something of the sort."

This information, deemed by its giver to be of no small interest, elicited not the faintest response. Somewhat piqued, the artist turned, to behold his friend stretched on a bench, with face to the ceiling, eyes closed and heels on the raised end. His lips moved faintly in a whistle. Sedgwick shook the whistler insistently.

"Eh? What?" cried Kent, wrenching his shoulder free. "Go away! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"I'll give you something to think about. Look at this face of a cigar store Indian at the window. No! It's gone!"

"Gansett Jim, probably," opined Kent. "Just where his interest in this case comes in I haven't yet found out. He favored me with his regard outside. And he had some dealings with the sheriff on the beach. But I don't want to talk about him now nor about anything else."

Acting on this hint, Sedgwick let his companion severely alone until a bustle from without warned him that the crowd was returning. Being aroused, Kent accosted one of the villagers who had just entered.

"Body coming back?" he asked.

"Yep. On its way now."

"What occurred in the house where they took it?"

"Search me! Everybody was shut out by the sheriff and the doc. They had that body to themselves nigh twenty minutes."

At this moment the sheriff entered the hall, followed by Dr. Breed, who escorted the coffin to its supporting sawhorses. The meager physician was visibly at the fag end of his self control. Even the burly sheriff looked like a sick man as he lifted aside the coffin lid and spoke.

"There was reasons, neighbors," said he, "why the corpse wasn't suitable to be looked at. Nobody had seen it since last night. We've fixed it up as good as we could, and you'll now please pass by as quick as possible."

In the line that formed Kent got a place behind Elder Dennett, who had decided to take another look for good measure, as he said. The look was a productive one. No sooner had it fallen on the face of the dead than Dennett jabbed an indiciary finger in that direction and addressed the sheriff:

"Hey, Len! What's this?"

"What's what?" growled Schlager.

"Why, there's a cut on the lady's right cheek. It wasn't there when I seen the corpse last night."

"Ah, what's the matter with your eyes?" demanded the sheriff savagely. "You want to hog the limelight that's your trouble!"

This was evidently a shrewd lash at a recognized weakness, and the elder moved on amid jeering comments. But Sedgwick, whose eyes had been fixed upon Kent, saw a curious expression flicker and fade across the long fawed face. It was exactly the expression of a dog that pricks up its

ears. The next moment a fitter ran through the crowd as a bumpkin in a rear seat called out:

"The dude's eyes ain't mates!"

Chester Kent, already conspicuous in his spotless white flannels, had made himself doubly so by drawing out a monocle and deftly fixing it in his right eye. He leaned over the body to look into the face, and his head jerked back the merest trifle. Bending lower, he scrutinized the unmanacled wrist. When he passed on his lips were pursed in the manner of one who whistles noiselessly.

He resumed his seat beside Sedgwick. Chancing to look down at the monocle, Sedgwick started and stared. Kent's knuckle, as seen through the glass, stood forth, monstrous and distorted, every line of the bronzed skin showing like a furrow.

The monocle was a powerful magnifying lens.

The sheriff's heavy voice rose. "Any one here present recognize or identify the deceased?" he droned, and, with-



"Dah de murderer!"

CHAPTER VII.

Simon P. Groot Does Business.

NO one moved in the courtroom for appreciable seconds after that pronouncement.

First to recover from the surprise was the sheriff. "You, Jim, set down!" he shouted. "If there's to be any accusin' done here, I'll do it."

"I do it," persisted the half breed.

"Blood is on his han'. I see it."

Involuntarily Sedgwick looked at his right hand. There was a low growl from the crowd.

"Steady!" came Kent's voice at his elbow. "Mistakes like that are Judge Lynch's evidence."

"What was he the night of the killing?" cried Gansett Jim. "Ast him. What was he?"

"Where was you if it comes to that?" retorted the sheriff and bit his lip with a scowl.

At that betrayal Chester Kent's eyelids flashed up and instantly drooped again into somberness.

"This hearing is adjourned," twittered the medical officer. "Burial of the unknown will take place at once. All are invited."

During their slow progress to the door Kent kept up a running comment, which Sedgwick supported with equal coolness. The crowd, darkling and undecided, pressed around them. As they went through the doorway they were jostled by a sudden pressure, following which Kent felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned to face the sheriff.

"Better get out of town quick," advised Schlager in a half whisper.

"Thank you," said Kent in a clear and cheerful voice. "Where can I get some tobacco?"

"Sterrett's grocery keeps the best," said some informant back of him. "End of the square to the right."

"Much obliged," said Kent and strolled leisurely to his car, followed by Sedgwick. As they took their seats and started slowly through the crowd Sedgwick inquired earnestly:

"Do you crave tobacco at this particular moment worse than you do the peace and loneliness of the green fields?"

"Polley, my young friend," retorted Kent, "I wish I could think up a dozen more errands to do. The more casually we get out of town the less likely we are to be followed by a flight of rocks. I don't want a perfectly good runabout spoiled by a mob."

Both of them went in Sterrett's store, where Kent earned the reputation from Sterrett of being "awful dang choosy about what he gets," and came out into a considerable part of the populace, which had followed. As they re-embarked the sheriff put his foot on the running board.

"Better take my tip," he said significantly.

"Very well," returned Kent. "There will be no arrest, then?"

"Not just now."

A peculiar smile slid sidewise off a corner of the scientist's long jaw. "Nor at any other time," he concluded. "He threw in the clutch. When the car had won the open road beyond the village Sedgwick remarked:

"Queer line the sheriff is taking."

"Poor Schlager!" said Kent, chuckling. "No other line is open to him. He's in a fix. But it isn't the sheriff that's worrying me."

"Who, then?"

"Gansett Jim?"

"What did the sheriff mean by asking Gansett Jim where he was the night of the murder?"

"Murder!" said Kent quizzically. "What murder?"

"The murder of the unknown woman of course. I think that Gansett Jim killed her and is trying to turn suspicion on me."

"Humph!"

"But if the sheriff knows where Gansett Jim was at the time of the killing, he can't suppose me guilty. I wonder if he really does believe me guilty?"

"If he does, he doesn't care. His concern is quite apart from your guilt."

"It's too much for me," confessed the artist.

"And for me. That is why I am going back to the village."

"But I thought you were frightened."

"If I stayed away from everything that alarms me," said Kent, "I'd never have a tooth filed or speak to a woman under seventy. I'm a timid soul, Sedgwick, but I don't think I shall be in any danger in Annalaka so long as I'm alone. Here we are. Out with you! I'll be back by evening."

To his surprise, Kent, turning into the village square, found the crowd still lingering. A new focus of interest had drawn it to a spot opposite Sterrett's store, where a wagon, decorated in the most advanced style of circus art, shone brilliant in yellow and green. Bright red letters across the front presented to public admiration the legend:

SIMON P. GROOT
SIMON PURE GOODS

A stout projection rested on one of the rear wheels. Here stood the proprietor of the vehicle, while behind him in a window were displayed his wares. It was evident that Simon P. Groot followed the romantic career of an itinerant hawker, dealing in that wide range of commodities roughly comprised in the quaint term, "Yankee notions." Kent was struck with the expansive splendor of the man's gestures, the dignity of his robust figure and the beauty of a broad whitening beard that spread sidewise like the ripples from a boat's stem. Two blemishes unapparently marred the majesty of Simon P. Groot's presence—a pair of pinhead eyes, mutually attracted to each other, and a mean and strident little voice.

Missard's Liniment Cures Colds, Etc.

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