

The Black Bag

By Louis Joseph Vance
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well and good luck go with you." "Thank you. Good night," replied the man, more conservatively. Kirkwood rose, expectant. There was a swish of draperies, and a moment later he was acknowledging the totally unlooked for entrance of the mistress of the house. He had thought to see Calendar, presuming him to be the man closeted with Mrs. Hallam; but, whoever that had been, he did not accompany the woman. Indeed, as she advanced from the door—



"Dorothy Calendar" Mrs. Hallam rose alertly.

Calendar is waiting in a cab outside. "Dorothy Calendar!" Mrs. Hallam rose alertly. "But why should she wait there? To be sure, we've never met, but I have known her father for many years." She swung about quickly, preceding him to the door and down the stairs. "I am sure Dorothy will come in to wait if I ask her," she told Kirkwood in a high, sweet voice. "I'm so anxious to know her. It's quite absurd, really, of her—to stand on ceremony with me when her father made an appointment here. I'll run out and ask." Mrs. Hallam's slim white fingers turned latch and knob, opening the street door, and her voice died away as she stepped out into the night. Then, with a sudden, imperative gesture, she half turned toward him. "But," she exclaimed, perplexed, gazing to right and left—"but the cab, Mr. Kirkwood?" He was on the stoop a second later. Standing beside her, he stared blankly. To the left the Strand roared, the stream of its night life in high spate; on the right lay the embankment, comparatively silent and deserted, its brilliant with its high swung lights. Between the two, quiet Craven street ran, short and narrow and wholly innocent of any form of equipage.

CHAPTER VII.

WELL, Mr.—Kirkwood?" "Mrs. Hallam," he stammered, "I—" She lifted her shoulders impatiently and with a quick movement stepped back across the threshold, where she paused, a rounded arm barring the entrance, one hand grasping the doorknob, as if to shut him out at any moment. "I'm awaiting your explanation," she said coldly. He grinned with nervousness, striving to penetrate the mental processes of this handsome Mrs. Hallam. She seemed to regard him with a suspicion which he thought inexcusable. Did she suppose he had spirited Dorothy Calendar away and then called to apprise her of the fact, or that he was some sort of adventurer who had manufactured a plausible yarn to gain him access to her home, or—harking back to her original theory—that he was an emissary from Scotland Yard? Probably she distrusted him on the latter hypothesis. The reflection left him more at ease. "I am quite as mystified as you, Mrs. Hallam," he began. "Miss Calendar was here at this door in a four wheeler not ten minutes ago, and—" "Then where is she now?" "Tell me where Calendar is," he retorted, inspired, "and I'll try to answer you!" But her eyes were blank. "You mean—" "That Calendar was in this house when I came; that he left, found his daughter in the cab and drove off with her. It's clear enough." "You are quite mistaken," she said thoughtfully. "George Calendar has not been here this night." He wondered that she did not seem to resent his imputation. "I think not—" "Listen!" she cried, raising a warning hand, and relaxing her vigilant attitude, moved forward once more to peer down toward the embankment. A cab had cut in from that direction and was bearing down upon them with a brisk rattle of hoofs. As it approached, Kirkwood's heart, that had lightened, was weighed upon again by disappointment. It was no four wheeler, but a hansom, and the open wings of the apron, disclosing a white triangle of linen surmounted by a glowing spot of fire, betrayed the sex of the fare too plainly to allow of further hope that it might be the girl returning.

"Dorothy!" Calendar's moonlike visage was momentarily divested of any trace of color. "What of her?" "You had better come in," advised Mrs. Hallam brusquely. The fat adventurer hopped hurriedly across the threshold, Kirkwood following. The woman shut the door and turned with back to it, nodding significantly at Kirkwood as her eyes met Calendar's. "Well, well?" snapped the latter impatiently, turning to the young man. But Kirkwood was thinking quickly. For the present he contented himself with a deliberate statement of fact. "Miss Calendar has disappeared." It gave him an instant's time. "There's something fishy," he told himself. "These two are playing at cross purposes. Calendar's no fool. He's evidently a crook to boot. As for the woman, she's had her eyes open for a number of years. The main thing's Dorothy. She didn't vanish of her own initiative. And Mrs. Hallam knows or suspects more than she's going to tell. I don't think she wants Dorothy found. Calendar does. So So I. Ergo, I'm for Calendar." "Disappeared?" Calendar was barking at him. "How? When? Where?" "Within ten minutes," said Kirkwood. "Here; let's get it straight." And he told what had happened, mentioning that he had not paid the cab driver. "Thanks," said Calendar dryly. He bent his head in thought for an instant, then looked up and fixed Mrs. Hallam with an unprejudiced eye. "I say!" he demanded explosively. "There wasn't any one here that knew—eh?" Her fine eyes wavered and fell before his, and Kirkwood remarked that her underlip was curiously drawn in. "I heard a man leave as Mrs. Hallam joined me," he volunteered helpfully and with a suspicion of malice. "And after that—I paid no attention at the time—it seems to me I did hear a cab in the street!" "Ow?" interjected Calendar, eying the woman steadfastly and employing an exclamation of combined illumination and inquiry more typically British than anything Kirkwood had yet heard from the man. For her part, the look she gave Kirkwood was sharp with fury. It was more; it was a mistake, a flaw in her diplomacy, for Calendar intercepted it. Unconsciously he grasped her bare arm with his fat hand. "Tell me who it was!" he demanded in an ugly tone. She freed herself with a twist and stepped back, a higher color in her cheeks, a flash of anger in her eyes. "Mr. Mulready," she retorted defiantly. "What of that?" "I wish I was sure," declared the fat adventurer, exasperated. "As it is, I bet a dollar you've put your foot in it, my lady. I warned you of that blackguard. There! The mischief's done. We won't row over it. One moment." He begged it with a wave of his hand, stood pondering briefly, fumbled for his watch, found and consulted it. "It's the barest chance," he muttered. "Perhaps we can make it." "What are you going to do?" asked the woman. "Give Mr. Mulready a run for his money. Come along, Kirkwood! We haven't a minute. Mrs. Hallam, permit us." She stepped aside, and he brushed past her to the door. "Come, Kirkwood!" He seemed to take Kirkwood's company for granted, and the young man was not inclined to argue the point. Meekly enough he fell in with Calendar on the sidewalk. Mrs. Hallam followed them out. "You won't forget?" she called tentatively. "I'll phone you if we find out anything." Calendar jerked the words unceremoniously over his shoulder as, linking arms with Kirkwood, he drew him swiftly along. They heard her shut the door. Instantly Calendar stopped. "Look here, did Dorothy have a small parcel with her?" "She had a gladstone bag." "Oh, the devil, the devil!" Calendar started on again, muttering distractedly. As they reached the corner he disengaged his arm. "We've a minute and a half to reach Charing Cross pier, and I think it's the last boat. You set the pace, will you? But remember I'm an oldish man and—fat."

The Thames appeared before them, a river of ink on whose burnished surface lights swam in long winding streaks and oily blobs. By the floating a county council steamboat strained its hawsers, snoring huskily. Bells were jingling in her engine room as the two gained the head of the sloping gangway. Kirkwood slapped a shilling down on the ticket window ledge. "Where to?" he cried back to Calendar. "Cherry Gardens pier," rasped the winded man. He stumbled after Kirkwood, groaning with exhaustion. Only the tolerance of the pier employees gained them their end. The steamer was held some seconds for them. As Calendar staggered to its deck the gangway was jerked in, the last hawser cast off. The boat sheered wide out on the river, then shot in, arrow-like, to the pier beneath Waterloo bridge. The deck was crowded, and additional passengers embarked at every stop. In the circumstances conversation, save on the most impersonal topics, was impossible. As the boat snorted beneath London bridge Calendar's impatience drove him from his seat back to the gangway. "Next stop," he told Kirkwood curtly and rested his heavy bulk against the paddle box, brooding morosely, until, after an uninterrupted run of more than a mile, the steamer swept in, side wheels backing water furiously against the ebbing tide, to Cherry Gardens landing. Sweet name for a locality unsavory beyond credence! Kirkwood shuddered, sticking close to Calendar's side as they landed. Life's naked brutalities had theretofore been largely out of his ken. He had heard of slums, had even ventured to mouth politely moral platitudes on the subject of overcrowding in great centers of population, but in the darkest flights of imagination had never pictured to himself anything so unspeakably foul and hopeless as this. And they were come hither seeking Dorothy Calendar! After some ten minutes' steady walking Calendar turned aside with a muttered word and diving down a covered dark and evil smelling passageway that seemed to lead toward the river. Mastering his involuntary qualms, Kirkwood followed. Some ten or twelve paces from its entrance the passageway swerved at a right angle, continuing three yards or so to end in a blank wall, wherefrom a flickering, inadequate gas lamp jutted. At this point a stone platform perhaps four feet square was discovered, from the edge of which a flight of worn and slimy stone steps led down to a permanent boat landing, where another gaslight flared gustily despite the protection of its frame of begrimed glass. "Good Lord!" exclaimed the young man. "What in heaven's name, Calendar?" "Bermondsey Old Stairs. Come on." They descended to the landing stage. Beneath them the pool slept, a sheet of polished ebony, whispering to itself, lapping with small, stealthy gurgles angles of masonry and ancient piles. On the farther bank tall warehouses reared square old time heads, their uncompromising, rugged profile relieved here and there by tapering mastsheads. A few scattering, feeble lights were visible. Nothing moved save the river and the wind. The landing itself they found quite deserted, something which the adventurer comprehended with a nod which, like its accompanying inarticulate ejaculation, might have been taken to indicate either satisfaction or disgust. He ignored Kirkwood altogether for the time being and presently produced a small, bright object which, applied to his lips, proved to be a boatswain's whistle. He sounded two blasts, one long, one brief. There fell a lull. Kirkwood watching the other and wondering what next would happen. Calendar paced restlessly to and fro upon the narrow landing, now stopping to incline an ear to catch some anticipated sound, now searching with sweeping glances the black reaches of the pool. Finally, consulting his watch, "Almost 10," he announced. "We're in time?" "Can't say. If that infernal boat would only show up!" He was lifting the whistle to sound a second summons when a rowboat rounded a projecting angle formed by the next warehouse downstream and with clanking oarlocks swung in toward the landing. On her thwarts two figures, dipping and rising, labored with the sweeps. As they drew in the man forward shipped his blades and, rising, scrambled to the bows in order to grasp an iron mooring ring set in the wall. Calendar waddled to the brink of the stage, grunting with relief. "The other man," he asked brusquely—"has he gone aboard, or is this the first trip tonight?" One of the watermen nodded assent to the latter question, adding gruffly, "Seen nawthin' of 'im, sir." "Very good," said Calendar, as if he doubted whether it were very good or bad. "We'll wait a bit." "Right-o!" agreed the waterman civilly. Calendar turned back, his small eyes glimmering with satisfaction. "I suppose," he said to Kirkwood abruptly, "you haven't changed your mind?" "Changed my mind?" "About coming in with me." "My dear sir, I can have no mind to change until a plain proposition is laid before me." "H-m!" Calendar puffed vigorously until it occurred to him to change the subject. "You won't mind telling me what happened to you and Dorothy?" "Certainly not." Calendar drew nearer, and Kirkwood, lowering his voice, narrated briefly the events since he had left the Pless in Dorothy's company. Her father followed him intently, interrupting now and again with an exclamation or pertinent question—as, had Kirkwood been able to see the face of the man in No. 9 Froggall street? The negative answer seemed to disconcert him. "Youngster, you say? Blam' if I can lay my mind to him! Now, if that Mulready—" "It would have been impossible for Mulready—whoever he is—to recover and get to Craven street before we did," Kirkwood pointed out. "Well, go on." But when the tale was told "It's that scoundrel Mulready!" the man affirmed with heat. "It's his hand. I know him. I might have had sense enough to see he'd take

the first chance to hand me the double cross. Well, this does for him, all right!" Calendar lowered viciously at the river. "You've been blamed useful," he told Kirkwood assertively. "If it hadn't been for you I don't know where I'd be now—nor Dorothy, either"—an obvious afterthought. "There's no particular way I can show my appreciation, I suppose? Money?" "I've got enough to last me till I reach New York, thank you." "Well, if the time ever comes just shout for George B. I won't be wanting. I only wish you were with us, but that's out of the question." "Doubtless." "No two ways about it. I bet anything you've got a conscience concealed about your person. What! You're an honest man, eh?" "I don't want to sound immodest," returned Kirkwood, amused. "You don't need to worry about that. But an honest man's got no business in my line." He glanced again at his watch. "D—that Mulready! I wonder if he was cute enough to take another way? Or did he think—the fool!" He cut off abruptly, seeming depressed by the thought that he might have been outwitted, and, clasping hands behind his back, chewed savagely on his cigar, watching the river. Kirkwood found himself somewhat wearied. The uselessness of his presence there struck him with added force. He bethought him of his midnight boat train, scheduled to leave a station miles distant in an hour and a half. If he missed it he would be stranded in a foreign land, penniless and practically without friends, bentwicks being away and all the rest of his circle of acquaintances on the other side of the channel. Yet he lingered in poor company, daring fate that he might see the end of the affair. Why? There was only one honest answer to that question. He stayed on because of his interest in a girl whom he had known for a matter of three hours at most. It was insensate folly on his part, ridiculous from any point of view, but he made no move to go.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE slow minutes lengthened monotonously. There came a sound from the street level. Calendar held up a hand of warning. "Here they come! Steady!" he said tensely. Calendar turned to the boat. "Sheer off," he ordered. "Drop out of sight. I'll whistle when I want you." "Aye, aye, sir." The boat slipped noiselessly away with the current and in an instant was lost to sight. Calendar plucked at Kirkwood's sleeve, drawing him into the shadow of the steps. "Easy, he whispered. "And, I say, lend me a hand, will you, if Mulready turns ugly?" "Oh, yes," assented Kirkwood, with a nonchalance not entirely unassumed. The racket drew nearer and ceased. The bush that fell thereafter seemed only accentuated by the purring of the river. It was ended by footsteps echoing in the covered passageway. Calendar craned his thick neck round the shoulder of stone, reconnoitering the landing and stairway. "Thank God!" he said under his breath. "I was right, after all!" A man's deep tones broke out above. "This way. Mind the steps. They're a bit slippery, Miss Dorothy." "But my father?" came the girl's voice, attuned to doubt. "Oh, he'll be along—if he isn't waiting now in the boat." They descended, the man leading. At the foot, without a glance to right or left, he advanced to the edge of the stage, leaning out over the rail as if endeavoring to locate the rowboat. "But, Mr. Mulready—" The girl's words were drawn by a prolonged blast on the boatswain's whistle at her companion's lips. The shorter one followed in due course. "But what shall we do if my father isn't here—wait?" "No; best not to—best to get on the Aethra as soon as possible, Miss Calendar." To be continued.

FARM FOR SALE

FARM FOR SALE—Lot 11, con. 11 Emily; 200 acres more or less; 140 acres cleared, balsam, tamarack swamp. New frame house and frame barn 36x80. Small orchard well watered. 5 miles from the town of Lindsay. Property of DENNIS SCULLY, Price right for a quick sale. Apply to Elias Bowes, Real Estate Agent, Lindsay.—wtf.

Consisting of 100 acres, more or less, barn only, known as the Wilson Farm, being Lot 1, Con. 8, Eldon, on the Town line between Mariposa and Eldon, 1 mile east of Grass Hill station. This Farm will be sold at a bargain on easy terms. Immediate possession. For further particulars write D. D. McEACHERN or T. A. WILSON Executors of the H. Wilson Estate Cannington, Ont.—wtf.

FARM FOR SALE—Improved farm of one hundred and fifty acres, more or less, being composed of the South Half of Lot Twenty (20) in the Tenth and the West part of Lot Twenty (20) in the eleventh Concession of the Township of Ops. This land is good clay loam, suitable for any kind of grain, drained, and all cleared but about Fifteen (15) acres of pasturage, through which there is running water. Situated three miles East of Lindsay, on good gravel road. There is a frame dwelling, kitchen and woodshed. Large frame barn 45x75 feet with stone foundation and stabling for all kinds of stock. Apply to MOORE & JACKSON, Solicitors, Lindsay, Ont. or A. BLACKWELL, 1 Notre Dame Street, West, Montreal.—wtf.

FARM FOR SALE OR TO RENT—Part of Lot 21, con. 7, Ops, just east of town, containing about 3½ acres of good land, well drained. There is on the premises a one storey frame house, good stable, driving shed and hen coop. Good well, ½ acre of good bearing orchard, ½ acre of new strawberry bed. Will also sell cheap 1 good cultivator, wagon, disk harrow, berry boxes, crates, stands, etc. everything necessary for the cultivation and growing of strawberries, also a mare and colt. Apply on the premises or address JAS. MAHER, P. O. box 292, Lindsay, Ont.—wtf.

FARM FOR SALE—Lot 15, con. 2, Fenelon, containing 93½ acres, more or less, adjoining the village of Islay. 90 acres cleared and about 4½ acres hardwood bush. New frame barn 50x65 on stone wall with first-class stabling complete, cement floor. Log house, well finished inside, partly plastered and partly boarded. School post office and blacksmith shop within a few rods of farm, 6 miles from Cambridge station. Grass Hill and Cameron grain markets. The property of JOHN R. COWISON. For further particulars apply to Elias Bowes Real Estate Agent, Lindsay.—wtf.

FARM FOR SALE—50 acres being S. W. ¼ of lot 9, con. 8, Ops. There are on the premises good farm buildings and a never failing spring; land is first-class. This property will be sold on reasonable terms. Apply GEO. MARTIN, Fenelon Falls, Ont.

FARM FOR SALE—100 acres, east half lot 16, con. 9, Ops, all cleared, good frame house and frame barn with stone stabling. 5 miles from town of Lindsay; the Hoey property. Terms easy; wants to sell at once. For further particulars apply to ELIAS BOWES, Real Estate Agent, Lindsay.—wtf.

FARM FOR SALE—Seven roomed brick house with ½ acre of land; hard and soft water. Apply to Mrs. A. White, 27 Victoria-ave., Lindsay.—wdtf.

Live Stock Insurance
I am agent for the General Live Stock Insurance Co. of Montreal, and can take risks on all kinds of live animals. Pr. Broad, office 46 Peel-st.

WANTED
MILLINERY IMPROVERS WANTED.—Two or more millinery improvers, also two apprentices. J. SUTCLIFFE & SONS.—d3w2.

TEACHER WANTED
For the Senior Department of Little Britain Public School. Duties to commence on the First day of March, 1910.
G. W. HALL, Sec'y and Treas.

WANTED—Cattle to keep for the winter, good feed and attention ALFRED A. BIRCHARD, Linden Valley.—wtf.