

# THE ALAMANCE GLEANER.

VOL. XL

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NO. 29

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## The Secret of Lonesome Cove

By Samuel Hopkins Adams

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The body of an unknown woman partly found at the top of the cliff above Lonesome Cove, Chester Kent, a scientist, investigates the strange case.

He meets Arden Sedgwick, an old friend, who is suspected of killing her and plans to help him.

Sedgwick tells of meeting a beautiful young woman, name unknown, with whom he has fallen in love.

Kent and Sedgwick go to the lighthouse on the woman's body and engage Adam Blair as Sedgwick's lawyer.

Sheriff Schlager and Coroner Breed suddenly withdraw the body from public view. Gansett Jim, an Indian, accuses Sedgwick of murder.

Kent secures an embroidered silver star found on top of the cliff above Lonesome Cove the night the woman died.

Kent believes the woman was hand-knifed to a man who wore the star. He meets Alexander Blair, who acts in a suspicious manner.

Gansett Jim, thinking Sedgwick murdered the woman, tries to kill him. Kent hears of Wilfrid Blair, Alexander's son-in-law.

Wilfrid Blair has died suddenly, and Coroner Breed is helping Alexander Blair to suppress the news.

Kent and Sedgwick discover an 1830 picture, which is like the woman of the beach. Kent spies upon Wilfrid Blair's funeral.

Kent and Sedgwick dig up Wilfrid Blair's body and are caught at work by Sheriff Schlager and Alexander Blair.

**CHAPTER XVII.**  
The Astrologer's Tale.

MIDNIGHT found Kent in his hotel room. A knock brought him to the door.

"Letter for you," announced the messenger boy.

What Preston Jax had to say was, first, in the form of a very brief note; second, in the shape of a formidable

looking document. The note began "Esteemed sir," concluded "Yours remorsefully" and set forth in somewhat exotic language that the writer, fearing a lapse of courage that might compromise his narrative when he should come to give it had "taken pen in hand" to commit it to writing and would the recipient "kindly pardon haste?" Therewith twenty-one typed

pages. "Quite enough," said Chester Kent, and slipped into the turbid flood of words. And behold! As he turned, up to speak, the corner of the narrative the current became suddenly clear.

The reader ran through it with increasing absorption. Preston Jax, whose real name was John Preston, had, after a rebellious boyhood, run away to sea, lived two years before the mast, picked up a smattering of education, been assistant and caper for a magnetic healer and had finally formulated a system of astrological prophecy that won him a slow but increasing renown.

"This Astrea affair looked good from the first." So began Preston Jax's confession, as he bearded and stripped down by its editor. "It looked like one of the best. You could smell money in it with half a nose. Her first letter came in on a Monday. I recollect, my assistant had put the red pencil on it when she sorted out the mail to show it was something special. But don't get her into this, Professor Kent. If you do it's all off, jewels and all. Irene has always been the straight star business and forecast game and no extra or side lines. Besides, we were married last week. She quoted poetry, swell poetry. First off she signed herself 'An Adept.' I gave her the Personal No. 3 and followed it up with the Special Friendly No. 5. Irene never liked that No. 5. She says it's spooky. Just the same, she fetched them—but not this one. She began to get personal and warm hearted, all right, and answered up with the kindred soul racket. But come to Boston? Not a move! Said she couldn't. There were reasons. It looked like the old game—fitter headed wife and jealous husband. Nothing in that game unless you go in for the straight holdup. And blackmail was always too strong for my taste. So I did the natural thing—gave her special readings and doubled on the price. She paid like a lamb. Then I put my best robe in a bag and bought a ticket for Carr's Junction. You can believe that while I was going through the woods I was keeping a bright eye out for any third party. Well, he was not there, not when I arrived anyway. Where he was all the time I do not know. I never saw him. But I heard him later. I can hear him yet at night. God help me!

"She was leaning against a little tree at the edge of the thicket when I first saw her. There was plenty of light from the moon, and it sifted down through the trees and fell across her head and neck. I noticed a queer ciret around her neck. The stones were like soft pink fires. I had not ever seen any like them before, and I stood there trying to figure whether they were rubies and how much they might be worth. While I was wondering about it she half turned, and I got my first look at her face.

"And so on and on and on," continued the narrative. "Well, of course, she was nutty—that is, about the star business. But that don't prove anything. The diplost star chaser I ever worked was the head of a department in one of the big stores, and the fiercest little business woman in business hours you ever knew. That was the letter she first called me Hermann in and signed Astrea to. Said there was no use pretending to conceal her identity any longer from me. Seemed to think I knew all about it. That jarred me some. And, with the change of writing in the signature, it all looked pretty queer. You remember the last letter with the copperplate writing name at the bottom? Well, they all came that way after this; the body of the letter very bold and careless; signature written in an entirely different hand.

"But hundred dollar bills loose in letters meant a big stake. I wrote her I would come, and I signed it 'Hermann,' just to play up to her lead. Irene got on and threw a fit. She said her woman's intuition told her there was danger in it. Truth is, she was stuck on me herself, and I was on her, but we did not find it out until after the crash. So I was all for prying Astrea loose from her money if I had to marry her to do it. She wrote some fish about the one desperate plunge together and then the glory that was to be ours. That looked like marriage to me."

"You saw the last letter. It had me rattled, but not rattled enough to quit. There was a map in it of the place for the meeting. That was plain enough. But the 'our' and 'we' business in it bothered me. It looked a lot like a third person. I had not heard anything about any third person. What is more, I did not have any use for a third person in this business. The stars forbade it. I wrote 'and told her so and said if there was any outsider rung in the stellar courses would have a sudden change of heart. Then I put my best robe in a bag and bought a ticket for Carr's Junction. You can believe that while I was going through the woods I was keeping a bright eye out for any third party. Well, he was not there, not when I arrived anyway. Where he was all the time I do not know. I never saw him. But I heard him later. I can hear him yet at night. God help me!

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"You were younger than I had reckoned on and not bad to look at, but queer, queer! Something about her struck me all wrong—gave me a sort of ugly shiver. Another thing struck me all right, though. That was that she had jewels on pretty much all her fingers. In one of my letters to her I gave her a hint about that—told her that gems gave the stars a stronger hold on the wearer, and she had taken it all in. She certainly was an easy subject.

"A bundle done up in paper was on the ground near her. I ducked back, very still, and got into my robe. The arrangement in her letter was for me to whistle when I got there. I whistled. She straightened up.

"Her voice was rather deep and soft. But it wasn't a pleasant softness. Some way I did not like it any better than I liked her looks. I stepped out into the open and gave her the grand bow.

"The master of the stars, at your command," I said.

"You are not as I expected to see you," she said.

"That was a sticker. It might mean most anything. I took a chance.

"Oh, well," I said, "we all change."

"It went," she said, "I am life changes," she said. "They never found you, did they?"

"From the way she said it I saw she expected me to say 'No.' So I said 'No.' That was left for me to return and do," she went on with a kind of queer joy that gave me the shivers again. "The instant I saw your statement in the newspaper I knew it was your soul calling to mine across the ages. 'Our boat is at the shore.'"

"In that last letter she mentioned a ship. And, now, here was this boat business. (Afterward I looked for a sign of either, but could not find any. I thought perhaps it would explain the other part of the 'we' and 'our'.) If I was going to elope by sea I wanted to know it, and I said as much.

"Are you steadfast?" she asked.

"Well, there was only one answer to that. I said I was. She opened her package and took out a coil of rope. It was this gray-white rope, sort of clothesline, and it looked strong.

"What now?" I asked her.

"To bind us together," she said. "Close, close together, and then the plunge! This time there shall be no failure. They shall not find one of us without the other. You are not afraid?"

"Afraid! My neck was bristling.

"Go slow," I said, thinking mighty hard. "I don't quite see the point of this."

"Didn't I curse myself for not remembering what I had written her? No clew, except that the poor soul was plumb dippy—too dippy for me to marry at any price. It wouldn't have held in the courts. Yet there might have been \$5,000 of diamonds on her. I suppose she felt me weakening.

"You dare to break our pact?" she

says in a voice like a woman on the stage. Then she changed and spoke very gently. "You are looking at these gewgaws," she said and took a diamond circlet from her finger. "What do these count for? And she put it in my hand. Another ring dropped at my feet. Mind, she was giving them to me. 'These are as nothing compared to what we shall have,' she went on, 'after the plunge. Wait!'

"She had dropped the rope, and now she went into her paper parcel again, kneeling at my side. I had stooped to look for the fallen ring when I felt her hand slide up my wrist and then a quick little snip of something cold and close. A bracelet, I thought. And it was a bracelet!

"Forever! Together!" she said and stood up beside me, chained to me by the hand-uffs she had slipped on my right wrist and her left.

"How much to let me off?" I asked as soon as I could get breath. You see, it dashed on me that it was a police trap. Her next words put me on.

"The stars! The stars!" she whispered. "See ours—how they light our path-way across the sea, the sea that awaits us!"

"More breath came back to me. It wasn't a trap, then. She was only a crazy woman that I had to get rid of. I looked down at the hand-uff. It was of iron and had dull rusted edges. A hammer would have made short work of it, but I did not have any hammer. I did not even have a stone. There would be stones in the broken land beyond the thicket. I thought I saw a way.

"Yes, let's go," I said.

"We set out. At the edge of the thicket was a fatish rock with small stones near it. Here I pretended to slip. I felt with my right wrist across a rock and caught up a cobblestone with my left hand. At the first crack of the stone on the hand-uff I could feel the old iron weaken. I got no chance for a second blow. Her hands were at my throat. They bit in. Then I knew it was a fight for my life.

"The next thing I remember clearly—she was quiet on the ground and I was hammering, hammering, hammering at my wrist with a blood-stained stone. I do not know if it was her blood or mine. Both, maybe, for my wrist was like pulp when the iron finally cracked open and I was free. I caught a glimpse of blood on her temple. I suppose I had hit her there with the stone. She looked dead.

"All I wanted was to think—to think—to think. I was pretty much dotty, I guess.

"While I was trying to think she came alive. She was on her feet before I knew it and off at a dead run. The broken hand-uff went jerking and jumping around her as she ran. That was an awful night full of awful things. But the one worst sight of all—worse even than the finding of her afterward—was that mad figure leaping

over the broken ground toward the cliff's edge. I held my breath to listen for her scream when she went over. I never heard it.

"But I heard something else. I heard a man's voice. It was clear and strong and high. There was death in it, I tell you, Mr. Kent. Living horror gripped at the throat that gave that cry. Then there was a rush of little stones and gravel down the face of the cliff. That was all.

"Beyond me the ground rose. I ran up on it. It gave me a clear view of the cliff top. I thought sure I would see the man who had cried out from there. Not a sight of him! Nothing moved in the moonlight. I thought he must have gone over the cliff too. I threw myself down and buried my face.

"How long I lay on the ground I do not know. A wisp of cloud had blotched out the woman's star, now, and by that I knew she was dead. But the moon was shining high. It gave me light enough to see my way into the gully, and I stumbled and slid down through to the beach.

"I found her body right away. It lay with the head against a rock. But there was no sign of the man's body, the man who had yelled. I felt that before I went away from there I must conceal the cause of her death and everything about it that I could. If it was known how she was killed they would be more likely to suspect me.

"I went back and got the rope, got an old grating from the shore. I dragged the body into the sea and let it soak. I fished it to the grating. I stripped the jewelry from her, but I could not take it. That would have made me a murderer.

"There is a rock in the gully that I marked. Nobody else would ever notice it. Under it I hid the jewelry. I can take you to it, and I will.

"I got on my coat and sunk my robe in a creek and got myself to the railroad station for a morning train. And when I got home I married Irene, and I am through with the crooked work forever. This is the whole truth. If any human being knows more about the death of Astrea it must be the man who shouted as she fell from the cliff and who went away and did not come back.

"(Signed) PRESTON JAX, S-M."

**CHAPTER XIX.**  
In the White Room.

ANNALAKA, July 15.—To Hotel Eyrle, Martindale Center, Dust 571 and send up seven chairs. Chester Kent."

"Now, I wonder what that might mean?" mused the day clerk of the Eyrle as he read the telegram through for the second time. "Convention in the room of mystery, maybe?"

Nor did the pers

Continued on page 4

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