

The BLACK BAG

By Louis Joseph Vance

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapter

CHAPTER I—In London Philip Kirkwood, a young American painter, learns that the San Francisco disaster has cost him his fortune and decides to return home to the stricken city. His elderly English friend, Brentwick, visits him, and he meets George B. Calendar, an American whom he believes to be an adventurer. II—Before leaving his hotel for the boat train Kirkwood dines at the hotel. In the dining room he sees Calendar receive a note of warning from a fashionably dressed woman. He is then asked by the American, who admits without giving a reason that he fears arrest, to escort his young and beautiful daughter home. Kirkwood consents. III—Kirkwood takes Dorothy Calendar to a seemingly unoccupied house at No. 9 Froggall street, in a shabby-genteel quarter of London, where he leaves the girl at her request. IV—Drawn back to the house by curiosity, Kirkwood sees the door of the dark house ajar. He throws off a cockney who tries to detain him, enters the house and bolts the door. On the staircase he has a tussle with a slender man in evening dress. The latter is knocked unconscious by a fall downstairs. Kirkwood is then rejoined by Dorothy, who is very glad to see him, but does not explain the mystery of the gloomy house. Heavy rains at the front door startle the two. V—Dorothy and Kirkwood, the latter questioning himself whether or not he has fallen in love with the girl, flee from the mysterious house by the rear dock. The girl takes with her a small black gladstone bag, which, she says, she is to take to her father. VI—In a cab Kirkwood escorts her to the house of Mrs. Hallam in fashionable Craven street, where, she declares, her father is to meet her. Kirkwood leaves her in the cab and enters the house to learn whether Calendar is there. He meets Mrs. Hallam and recognizes her as the woman who warned Calendar in the hotel. As Kirkwood talks to her he hears a man leave the house. Together Mrs. Hallam and Kirkwood go to the door to call Dorothy in and find that the girl and the cab have vanished. VII—Calendar appears at the Hallam house in search of Dorothy. Kirkwood accompanies him at his request to an unsavory locality on the Thames. VIII—Calendar meets his daughter in the company of a man named Mulready, evidently his companion in some strange, nefarious enterprise. Mulready, it seems, has tried to kidnap Dorothy in Kirkwood's cab. Calendar and Mulready quarrel, after which the girl and two men row off to board a vessel referred to as the *Alethea*, leaving Kirkwood to find his way in a cab to St. Pancras station, where he is to take the midnight train for his steamer. He is now thoroughly in love with Dorothy. IX and X—Kirkwood just misses his train and finds himself almost penniless. After wandering about for two hours he is again in Froggall street. He enters the house to seek his missing purse and finds the young man whom he had knocked down still unconscious after six hours. Kirkwood's ministrations to him are interrupted by the entrance into the house of a woman in evening dress. XI and XII—The woman is Mrs. Hallam, and the injured young man is her son. She tells Kirkwood that Dorothy, Calendar and Mulready are engaged in a plot to steal family jewels left to her son by his relative, Colonel Burgoyne. Calendar, she says, is her late husband's cousin. The jewels are in the black bag, Mrs. Hallam declares. Kirkwood doubts her story and suspects that Dorothy is an innocent partaker in some mysterious plot. He decides to defend the girl. XIII—The next morning Kirkwood in a rowboat, with two watermen, searches the Thames in vain for the *Alethea*. The boatmen take him to Woolwich on his way to Sheerness to intercept the *Alethea*. XIV—On the train to Sheerness Kirkwood meets Mrs. Hallam, bent, like himself, on finding Calendar. She tries to get his aid, but he refuses. He eludes her at Sheerness. XV—In the distance he sees a vessel which he believes is the *Alethea*. After a struggle with a covetous boatman who steals his watch and chain, Kirkwood knocks him overboard into his story and seizes his catboat to sail out to the *Alethea*. XVI—Kirkwood is nearly drowned when the catboat sinks and reaches the *Alethea* only to be told by Captain Stryker, a facetious ruffian, that the vessel carries no passengers. XVII—Stryker badgers and robs Kirkwood, who believes that Dorothy and Calendar had been aboard the *Alethea*, but left her. XVIII—Kirkwood finds in a railway guide on the *Alethea* indications that the *Calendar* and *Mulready*, having sailed for England on a channel steamer, are waiting at Antwerp for Stryker. He surmises from marks in the guide that they are to go to Amsterdam on the 6:32 train. Stryker sets him ashore with only his clothing and three-pence. XIX and XX—In Antwerp, at evening, Kirkwood sees Mrs. Hallam watching a cheap hotel, from which emerge Calendar and Mulready. Unseen by the two men, he follows them aboard the *Alethea* and overhears them discuss their plots with Captain Stryker. They are planning to smuggle diamonds into the United States. Calendar mentions the fact that he and Mulready are to receive \$1,000 each from Mrs. Hallam if Dorothy is kept out of England six weeks. Kirkwood determines to join the plotters in order to help Dorothy. As he walks to the cabin Mulready and Calendar quarrel, and the former tries to shoot his accomplice, but Kirkwood enters and knocks Mulready down. XXI and XXII—Kirkwood outfits Calendar and after recovering his property from Stryker steals the black bag and takes it ashore. He is pursued by the conspirators, but eludes them and conceals the black bag in a hand bag. He then goes to the hotel in which Dorothy is awaiting Calendar. Knocking at the door, he is confronted by Mrs. Hallam. XXIII—Dorothy is persuaded by Kirkwood that

Mrs. Hallam is her enemy and accompanies the young man to a train for Brussels in order to escape the plotters. XXIV—On the train they are spied upon by Hobbs, mate of the *Alethea*. XXV—Dorothy tells Kirkwood her life story, and Kirkwood tells her her father is a swindler. Hobbs again appears. XXVI—Dorothy and Kirkwood separate to elude Hobbs. XXVII—Hobbs tries to stab Kirkwood. Evading pursuits, Dorothy and Kirkwood sail from Calais for England. Hobbs, left behind, has taken Dorothy's bag, believing it to contain the black bag. Kirkwood fears Calendar and the others are awaiting them in England. XXVIII—Dorothy and Kirkwood in a cab are pursued through the streets of London by Calendar and Stryker. The chase ends at the house of Brentwick, where the girl and the young man find refuge. XXIX—Brentwick requisitions a friends automobile and chauffeur to take himself and Dorothy and Kirkwood to the house of the girl's friends at Chiltern. They are followed by Calendar and Stryker in another motor car. XXX—They are overtaken by Calendar, and Brentwick acts like a traitor. "Come fight in, cap'n," Calendar threw over one shoulder. "Come in, shut the door and lock it. Let's all be sociable and have a nice quiet time." Stryker obeyed, with a derisive grimace for Kirkwood. Calendar, advancing jauntily to a point within a yard of the table, stopped, smiling affably down upon his prospective victims and airily twirling his revolver. "Good evening, all!" he saluted them blandly. "Dorothy, my child," with assumed concern, "you're looking a trifle upset. I'm afraid you've been keeping late hours. Little girls must be careful, you know, or they lose the bloom of roses in their cheeks. Mr. Kirkwood, it's a pleasure to meet you again. Permit me to paraphrase your most sound advice and remind you that pistol shots are apt to attract undesirable attention. It wouldn't be wise for you to bring the police about our ears. I believe that in substance such was your sapient counsel to me in the cabin of the *Alethea*, was it not? And you, sir," fixing Brentwick with a cold, unfriendly eye, "you animated fossil, what might your name be?" "It might be Brentwick," said that gentleman placidly. "Brentwick, eh? Well, I like a man of spirit. But permit me to advise you!" "Gladly," nodded Brentwick. "Eh? Don't come a second time between father and daughter. Another man might not be as patient as I, Mr. Brentwick. There's a law in the land, if you don't happen to know it." "I congratulate you on your success in evading it," observed Brentwick, undisturbed. "And it was considerate of you not to employ it in this instance." Then, with a sharp change of tone, "Come, sir," he demanded. "You have unwarrantably intruded in this room, which I have engaged for my private use. Get through with your business and be off with you." "All in good time, my antediluvian friend. When I've wound up my business here I'll go—not before. But, just to oblige you, we'll get down to it. Kirkwood, you have a revolver of mine. Be good enough to return it." "I have it here, under the table," interrupted Brentwick snavely. "Shall I hand it to you?" "By the muzzle, if you please. Be very careful. This one's loaded, too—apt to explode any minute." To Kirkwood's intense disgust Brentwick quietly slipped one hand beneath the table and, placing the revolver on its top, delicately with his finger tips showed it toward the farther edge. With a grunt of approval Calendar swept the weapon up and into his pocket. "Any more ordnance?" he inquired briskly, eyes moving alertly from face to face. "No matter. You wouldn't dare use 'em anyway. And I'm about done. Dorothy, my dear, it's high time you returned to your father's protection. Where's that gladstone bag?" "In my traveling bag," the girl told him in a toneless voice. "Then you may bring it along. You may also say good night to the kind gentlemen." CHAPTER XXXI. DOROTHY did not move. Her pallor grew more intense, and Kirkwood saw her knuckles tighten beneath the gloves; otherwise her mouth seemed to grow more straight and hard. "Dorothy!" cried the adventurer, with a touch of displeasure. "You heard me?" "I heard you," she replied a little wearily, more than a little contemptuously. "Don't mind him, please, Mr. Kirkwood," with an appealing gesture, as Kirkwood, unable to contain himself, moved restlessly in his chair, threatening to rise. "Don't say anything. I have no intention whatever of going with this man." Calendar's features twitched nervously. He chewed a corner of his mustache, fixing the girl with a black stare. "I presume," he remarked, after a moment, with slow deliberation, "you're aware that as your father I am in a position to compel you to accompany me." "I shall not go with you," iterated Dorothy in a level tone. "You may threaten me, but I shall not go. Mr. Brentwick and Mr. Kirkwood are taking me to—friends, who will give me a home until I can find a way to take care of myself. That is all I have to say to you." "Bravo, my dear!" cried Brentwick encouragingly. "Mind your business, sir!" thundered Calendar, his face darkening, then to Dorothy, "You understand, I trust, what this means?" he demanded. "I offer you a home, and a good one. Refuse and you work for your living, my girl! You've forfeited your legacy!"

"I know, I know," she told him in cold disdain. "I am content. Won't you be kind enough to leave me alone?" For a breath Calendar glowered over her. Then, "I presume," he observed, "that all these heroics are inspired by that whippersnapper Kirkwood. Do you know that he hasn't a brass farthing to bless himself with?" "What has that?" cried the girl indignantly. "Why, it has everything to do with me, my child. As your doting parent I can't consent to your marrying nothing a year, for I surmise you intend to marry this Mr. Kirkwood, don't you?" There followed a little interval of silence, while the warm blood flamed in the girl's face and the red lips trembled as she faced her tormentor. Then, with a quaver that escaped her control, "If Mr. Kirkwood asks me I shall," she stated very simply. "That," interposed Kirkwood, "is completely understood." His gaze sought her eyes, but she looked away. "You forget that I am your father," sneered Calendar, "and that you are a minor. I can refuse my consent." "But you won't," Kirkwood told him, with assurance. The adventurer stared. "No," he agreed after slight hesitation; "no, I shan't interfere. Take her, my boy, if you want her, and a father's blessing into the bargain. The Lord knows I've troubles enough. A parent's lot is not what it's cracked up to be." He paused, leaning, ironic. "But," deliberately, "there's still this other matter of the gladstone bag. I don't mind abandoning my parental authority when my child's happiness is concerned, but as for my property—" "It is not your property," interrupted the girl. "It was your mother's, dear child. It's now mine." "I dispute that assertion," Kirkwood put in. "You may dispute it till the cows come home, my boy. The fact will remain that I intend to take my property with me when I leave this room, whether you like it or not. Now, are you disposed to continue the argument, or may I count on your being sensible?" "You may put away your revolver, it that's what you mean," said Kirkwood. "We certainly shan't oppose you with violence, but I warn you that Scotland Yard!" "Oh, that be blowed!" the adventurer snorted in disgust. "I can sail circles round any tee that ever blew out of Scotland Yard! Give me an hour's start and you're free to do all the funny business you've a mind to with—Scotland Yard!" "Then you admit," queried Brentwick civilly, "that you've no legal title to the jewels in dispute?" "Look here, my friend," chuckled Calendar; "when you catch me admitting anything you write it down in your little book and tell the bobby on the corner. Just at present I've got other business than to stand round admitting anything about anything. Cap'n, let's have that bag of my dutiful daughter's." "Ere you are," Stryker spoke for the first time since entering the room, taking the valise from beneath the chair and depositing it on the table. "Well, we shan't take anything that doesn't belong to us," laughed Calendar, fumbling with the catch. "Not even so small a matter as my own child's traveling bag. A small—heavy—gladstone bag," he granted, opening the valise and plunging in one greedy hand, "will—just—about—do for mine!" With which he produced the article mentioned. "This for the discard, cap'n," he laughed contentedly, pushing the girl's valise aside, and, rumbling with stentorian mirth, stood beaming benignantly over the assembled company. "Why," he exclaimed, "this moment is worth all it cost me! My children, I forgive you freely. Mr. Kirkwood, I felicitate you cordially on having secured a most expensive wife. Really, d'you know, I feel as if I ought to do a little something for you both." The thick, mottled fingers tore nervously at the catch. Eventually he got the bag open. Those about the table bent forward, all quickened by the prospect of for the first time beholding the treasure over which they had fought, for which they had suffered so long. A heady and luscious fragrance pervaded the atmosphere, exhaling from the open mouth of the bag. A silence, indefinitely sustained, impressed itself upon the little audience—a breathless pause ended eventually by a sharp snarl of Calendar's teeth. "M-m-m!" granted the adventurer in bewilderment. He began to pant. Abruptly his heavy hands delved into the contents of the bag, like the paws of a terrier digging in earth. To Kirkwood the air seemed temporarily thick with flying objects. Beneath his astonished eyes a towel fell upon the table—a crumpled, soiled towel bearing on its dingy hem the inscription in indelible ink, "Hotel du Commerce, Anvers." A tooth mug of substantial earthenware dropped to the floor with a crash. A slimy soap dish of the same manufacture slid across the table and into Brentwick's lap. A battered alarm clock with never a tick left in its abused carcass rang vacuously as it fell by the open bag. The remainder was—oranges, a dozen or more small, round, golden globes of ripe fruit, perhaps a shade overripe, therefore the more aromatic. The adventurer ripped out an oath. "Mulready!" he raged in fury. "Done up, I swear! Done by that infernal sneak—me, blind as a bat!" He fell suddenly silent, the blood congesting in his face; as suddenly broke forth again, haranguing the company. "That's why he went out and bought

those oranges, is it? Think of it—me sitting in the hotel in Antwerp and him lugging in oranges by the bagful because he was fond of fruit! When did he do it? How do I know? If I knew, would I be here, and him the devil knows where this minute? When my back was turned, of course! That's why he was so hot about picking a fight on the boat, eh? Wanted to get thrown off and take to the woods, leaving me with this! And that's why he felt so awful done up he wouldn't take a hand at hunting you two down, hey? I'll camp on his trail for the rest of his natural born days! I'll have his eyeteeth for this! I'll!" He swayed, gibbering with rage, his countenance frightfully contorted, his fat hands shaking as he struggled for expression. And then, while yet their own astonishment held Dorothy, Kirkwood, Brentwick and Stryker speechless, Charles, the mechanic, moved suddenly upon the adventurer. There followed two metallic clicks. Calendar's ravings were abrupted as if his tongue had been paralyzed. He fell back a pace, flabby jaws pale and shaking, ponderous jaw drooping on his breast, mouth wide and eyes crazed as he shook violently before him his thick, fleshy wrists, securely handcuffed. Simultaneously the bold mechanic whirled about, bounded eagerly across the floor and caught Stryker at the door, his dexterous fingers twisting in the captain's collar as he jerked him back and tripped him. "Mr. Kirkwood," he cried, "here, please, one moment! Take this man's gun from him, will you?" Kirkwood sprang to his assistance and without encountering much trouble succeeded in wresting a revolver from Stryker's limp, fabled fingers. Roughly the mechanic shook the man, dragging him to his feet. "Now," he ordered sternly, "you march to that corner, stick your nose in it and be good! You can't get away if you try. I've got other men outside, waiting for you to come out. Understand?" Trembling like a whipped cur, Stryker meekly obeyed his instructions to the letter. The mechanic, with a contemptuous laugh, leaving him, strode back to Calendar, meanwhile whipping off his



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