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The Penny Popular

NUMBER 209

**3 Grand
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Stories.**



TOM MERRY'S MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANT!

(A thrilling scene from the Grand Long Complete Tale of TOM MERRY & Co.,
contained in this issue.)

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THE AVARICIOUS ARISTOCRAT!

A Magnificent Long, Complete
Story Dealing with the Further
Amazing Adventures of

SEXTON BLAKE,
the World-Famous
DETECTIVE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Dawning Hope — The Horror of the
Empty House — The Nubian Servant,
Hassan.

DAVID LANGLEY, broken in health by a rough Colonial life, had returned to England, the home of his youth. Here, in the house of his brother, Viscount Marchford, he hoped to spend in peace the few remaining weeks which the doctors had told him he could only hope to live.

This particular evening he was sitting, propped up with cushions, in his bed-room, a large back room, attended by a pretty nurse named Mary Fielding.

"Tell me," said Langley, turning to the nurse, "all about this sweetheart of yours, Harvey Manson. Is it true that he was drunk while driving a taxicab?"

"Of course it isn't!" answered the nurse. "You see, the viscount's son, the Hon. Charles Langley, used to pester me with his odious attentions, so Harvey gave him a good thrashing. To get his revenge, Langley, with his father, brought a false charge of drunkenness against Harvey, and through them he went to prison, and lost his motor licence. Harvey's as straight as a die; but why, Mr. Langley, do you take such an interest in him?"

"I cannot say how glad I am that you have told me all that," answered the invalid. "Now I will tell you why I take such an interest in him. My father had three children—the present viscount, my sister who is now dead, and myself. Harvey Manson was the son of my sister, and therefore my nephew. My sister married a poor man, and so she was cut by the rest of the family; that is why Harvey had to earn his living as a taxicab driver.

"When I returned to England I intended to leave my fortune to the Hon. Charles; but when I realised what a worthless character he is, I decided to try to trace Harvey. So I wrote to Sexton Blake, the great detective, to ask him to help me.

"I heard nothing till yesterday, when the viscount brought me a paper, in which it was stated that Harvey was wanted by the police for holding a motor licence in a false name, having had his own suspended owing to drunkenness. Naturally, I thought Harvey was a wrong 'un, too, so I made a will in favour of the viscount and his son. But now I see the truth after what you have told me concerning Harvey, and I believe you. The viscount is a scheming rascal, and is only after my money. But I'll be even with him yet."

Nurse Fielding burst into tears again.

"Oh, my dear Harvey—my dear Harvey in prison again!" she sobbed.

"Ah, my dear, don't cry!" murmured David Langley. "Harvey is not in prison; the police did not arrest him. I expect Sexton Blake saw to that. Thank Heaven we know the

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Blake paused only long enough to get home with a straight drive on the point of the Nubian's jaw, which dropped him like a stone.

worst, and have yet time to thwart the machinations of these scoundrels!"

She soon dried her eyes, and waited for the shrewd old man's next remarks with tense excitement and interest.

What he said was:

"It passes my comprehension, Mary, why Marchford should have brought you here. I wish I could understand the reason. It seems, on the face of it, the running of such a needless risk on his part, for he must have seen the possibility of our exchanging confidences. He consistently endeavours to keep me in the dark in regard to Harvey, and yet he provides me with a nurse who is the one person in the world best able to give me authoritative information about him. Either he was very stupid—and Marchford, as a rule, is the reverse of stupid—or else he was actuated by some deep and sinister motive which escapes me. I wish I could fathom it, Mary."

The emergency rendered Mary's wits preternaturally sharp.

"I think I know, Mr. Langley. I think he came to my house in Playdell Avenue in search of information of Harvey, and I think he found it there. I can't imagine how else he found it, for Harvey's secret had been well kept. Probably he brought me here to keep me out of the way while he or his agents searched my house at their leisure."

"I believe you've hit it, my dear!" exclaimed the delighted old man. "If you're right, it relieves my mind of a great load of anxiety on your account."

"On my account! Why?"

"You are virtually alone in a house where you have no friends," he answered gravely.

"I have you," she replied quickly and brightly.

"Me, Mary—a decrepit and worn-out old man? If you need protection, I fear I'm not worth considering. However," he went on, after an instant's pause, "we won't dwell on that. I merely wish to warn you and put you on your guard. And now," he said, "we'll take the first practical step to put things right."

He was astonishingly alert and vigorous. His spent forces seemed to rally on this occasion. His old fighting instincts

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 10.

were aroused. Mary, watching him, was confirmed in her opinion that he was not as ill as he thought he was.

He wrote a short note to Blake, in which he requested him to come and see him the first thing in the morning.

"Force your way in," he wrote. "Insist upon seeing me. Don't accept any excuses. I rely absolutely on you."

He closed and sealed the envelope, rang the bell for the attendant who waited on him, and bade him, in a strong, firm voice, deliver the letter at once, and bring him back an answer.

"It is a private matter," he said, "so you will inform no one of your errand. Be prompt and silent, and there will be a five-pound note for you when you return!"

The man, whose name was Sanders, promised faithful obedience, and retired.

"Can you trust him?" asked Mary, in some anxiety.

"I think so. He has performed other similar errands faithfully for me."

She was delighted with his businesslike energy and resourcefulness.

"It is nine o'clock," he said. "If Sanders is fortunate in finding Mr. Blake at home, we shall get the answer easily before ten. And to-morrow, Mary, we'll move to new quarters; I'll make a new will; I will place myself in the hands of any doctor you like to recommend; we'll set the lawyers to work on Marchford and Charles; and if you and Harvey aren't out of trouble and happily married within a month, it won't be my fault!"

Sanders was back in half an hour—a half-hour that was spent in gay chat and happy forecasting of the future. To Mary, who couldn't resist the infection of the old man's bright auguries and generous optimism, it seemed as if a full measure of happiness was already safe and secure in her grasp.

"You've been very quick, Sanders."

"Yes, sir, I have been very quick. You told me to be very quick."

"What does Mr. Blake say?"

David Langley smilingly handed her the note, and Mary read:

"You may count on me absolutely. I will be with you without fail early to-morrow morning.—S. B."

Downstairs there was much secret colloquy, mingled with incessant and angry recriminations.

The Hon. Charles Langley, as usual, when there was any suggestion of danger, had lost his nerve.

"Now, you see what you've done," he spluttered spitefully. "The old man knows everything. The whole business is spoilt, and there's ruin staring us in the face. It was an act of utterly insane folly bringing the girl here, and I said so from the very beginning. A nice mess you've got us into! It's your fault; you wouldn't be advised by me. We shall have Blake here the first thing in the morning, and then we're done for. I hope you're pleased with yourself!" he snarled, in conclusion.

The viscount, who was busy with pen and paper, continued to write without paying the least attention to his son's tirade. On the table between them lay David Langley's letter to Blake, which Sanders had brought straight to his master.

The viscount was entirely engrossed in composing an answer to it.

After making several drafts, he finally hit upon a form of words that satisfied him, read it over to Charles, and then committed it to Sanders to take upstairs.

"Don't take it up before half-past nine, Sanders. You must allow sufficient time to elapse to have enabled you to get to Baker Street and back. Later on I shall have another letter for you, which you will actually deliver at Mr. Blake's house."

Sanders said he perfectly understood, and vanished.

This business despatched, the viscount turned coolly to his son.

"Charles, you're a poor stick. I can't recall a single virtue you possess. You haven't even got gratitude. I don't expect you to be brave, but you haven't even common courage. I don't look for honesty in you, but you haven't a sense of ordinary, decent honour. I don't demand truthfulness or good faith, but you haven't even the rudiments of either. I sometimes wonder why I don't let you go to perdition your own way, without lifting a hand to save you!"

"I know why," snapped Charles. "It's because my ruin would involve yours. You need not trouble to make any parade of affection, gov'nor. If my interests did not happen to be identical with yours, you wouldn't lift your little finger."

"No doubt you are partly right," the viscount admitted calmly; "but there also remains the fact that you are my

only son, which counts for something." Charles—"the viscount's tone underwent a sudden change—"why need you be such a lamentable cur? Take this matter of bringing the girl here, which you describe as an act of insane folly, and entirely my fault. If the girl had not been decoyed away from her suburban home, how else would you have been able to ransack her house? In which matter, by the way, you bungled pretty badly. If we had not got Harvey's address, how else should we have contrived to put the police on his track? If we had not shown him up as an impostor and a fraud, should we now be in possession of your uncle's will, leaving us jointly half a million sterling? If accomplishing all that amounts to insane folly, I should like to see you develop some symptoms of the same disease yourself."

"Oh, yes; I admit you have accomplished something!" retorted Charles sullenly. "But it remains to be seen whether it is worth very much. You don't appear to me to be able to realise the peril of it all. You seem to assume the old man's already dead, and his money in our pockets. But he isn't dead yet. He may make a fresh will any time. The girl is to be reckoned with. Blake is to be reckoned with. There are the servants to remember. There is not a servant to be trusted, except Sanders and my own man, Hassan. The situation bristles with danger, and yet you calmly sit there, pluming yourself on your cleverness in having saved me from what you call perdition. Bah!" he concluded, with a gesture of disgust. "It simply makes me feel sick to listen to you!"

The viscount was entirely unperturbed by these strictures, though perhaps the set smile on his lips became slightly more ironical. He selected a cigarette from his case with exaggerated care, lighted it with studied deliberation, leant back in his chair, crossed his legs, and then replied:

"I will deal with your objections categorically, Charles. You say David may make a fresh will. I deny that. He will never make another will. The will he has made this evening, and which I now hold, will actually be his last will and testament."

"How can you prevent him making another?"

"I know one very effectual way of preventing him, but I leave that. I merely wish to remark that a legal will cannot be made except in the presence of two witnesses, and in this case two witnesses will never be available."

"I see," murmured Charles, glowering at his father with a scowl of reluctant admiration.

"Your next objection refers to the girl. Let me point out to you that the girl is powerless. She will not leave this house. She will not communicate with anybody outside. Unless she is a very nice, kind, well-behaved, and amenable young woman, she will never leave it!"

"Governor! You wouldn't," gasped Charles—"you wouldn't—"

"Tut! I shouldn't. I should leave that to your man Hassan, but the necessity will not arise. The girl, I repeat, is powerless to mar our fortunes, and will have the sense to see it. If she hasn't the sense to see it, we must drive the necessary sense into her. I pass to your third objection, which refers to Blake."

The viscount paused to flip the ash of his cigarette delicately into a silver tray, while his son's eyes were fastened on him with fascinated gaze.

"You may at once dismiss all fears relative to Blake. Blake will receive some time to-night a letter written by me in David's handwriting—which, I may tell you, I've been diligently practising, while you've been merely amusing yourself—informing him that all occasion for his services is at an end. This will cause him no surprise, because he will have expected it. If he calls, he will not be admitted. If he writes, his letter will not reach its destination. Personally, I do not imagine he will do either. He is an exceedingly busy man. He will have other things to think about. Have you anything to urge in contradiction of what I say, Charles?"

"Go on," muttered Charles hoarsely. "You're as clever as the fiend."

The viscount bowed ironically to the compliment, and continued:

"Your last objection, the feeblest and weakest of the four, had to do with the servants. To-morrow, Charles, there will be no servants, except Sanders and Hassan. Most fortunately they all gave me notice to-day. They are all anxious to leave in a hurry, and to-morrow they shall leave in a hurry. We'll make a clean sweep of them. There will be nothing suspicious about it, for, observe, they will have given me notice—not I them. You and I, and Sanders and Hassan, will then hold the fort till the old man dies. I hope you'll admit I've pulverised your objections; and I hope, Charles, though I must confess I hardly expect it, that you will have the grace to apologise for your curish rudeness and spiteful, ill-tempered politeness."

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DELICIOUS FREE TUCK HAMPER FOR READERS. SEE THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 1⁰ TO-DAY.

It was a crushing rebuke; and Charles, though still restive, still not convinced in his heart, still doubting and timorous, succumbed to the spell of the influence his father had acquired over him, a villain infinitely more formidable and pernicious than himself, if of a nobler breed, mumbled a vague apology, and declared his hearty acceptance of the other's plans.

The viscount smiled pleasantly. He didn't press his victory, or gloat over it; he knew Charles required light and gentle handling.

"My boy, I am glad we now see eye to eye in this matter. Be very sure I shall never neglect your advice. It is always sound and good, and deserving of careful consideration, though at times it lacks the essential spice of boldness. Go home, sleep well, cultivate a good conscience, and turn up here to-morrow with a portmanteau and Hassan not later than ten o'clock."

When Charles had gone, the viscount wrote the letter to Blake, which briefly stated that David Langley wished for no more information concerning Harvey Manson, as he was satisfied that he was a good-for-nothing, and Sanders duly delivered it.

Mary Fielding was up betimes next morning.

"Why, my dear," said David Langley, when she brought him his breakfast, "you look—you look"—he hesitated till he found the right word—"you look radiant—that's the only word to describe you—radiant!"

"I am feeling radiant; I am feeling as gay as a lark when it sings," she said.

And, indeed, she looked a different being from yesterday, so magical an influence has happiness on beauty. Beautiful always, her beauty had been wondrously enhanced and intensified by anticipation of what the day would bring her.

The old man had fully maintained the improvement in health he had made yesterday.

Sanders usually helped him to dress, but he rejected all offers of assistance that morning. He was marvellously sprightly and active.

Before nine o'clock he was settled in his armchair in front of the fire, with Mary beside him, speculating on the time Blake would arrive.

"I expect he will be here before ten, my dear."

"I hope he will," said Mary.

"We are going to surprise Marchford and my precious nephew Charles to-day."

"Oh!" she said. "I can't help feeling a little sorry for them."

"Don't waste your pity, my dear, on a pair of scoundrels!" was his answer.

At ten o'clock they heard a ring at the front-door bell—for Mary had set the door ajar—and their hearts beat high with expectation. Surely that must be Blake? Would the servants try to keep him out? They listened with straining ears. They heard the door close and someone come in, but no one came to them.

The old man summoned Sanders, and inquired sharply:

"Who was it that arrived just now?"

"Mr. Charles, sir. Would you like to see him?" said the smirking manservant.

"No; certainly not!"

And Sanders was promptly dismissed.

"My dear, we need not be anxious. A hundred things may have happened to detain Mr. Blake. He will be here at any moment. After all, it is only just ten o'clock. We have not made sufficient allowance for the many calls upon his time. We really had no right to expect him quite as early as this. But at any moment now, my dear—at any moment!"

At half-past twelve the old man again summoned Sanders, who appeared with his customary promptitude and his usual obsequious smirk.

"I suppose there is no doubt you did deliver that note of mine at Baker Street last night?" he demanded sternly.

"Oh, yes, sir, I did deliver it! You recollect I brought you back an answer, sir."

"Are Lord Marchford and Mr. Charles in the house still?"

"No, sir; they have both gone out."

"Very well; that's all. My dear," said David Langley, when Sanders had bowed and retired, "I am beginning to fear that fellow is not to be trusted, so it's no use my sending him with a second note to Mr. Blake. We must rely on our own efforts, which means I have only you to rely upon. Would you mind going yourself and seeing Mr. Blake?"

"I will go," she answered, "if—if they will let me." Her courage was still high, but hope had completely died within her. "If they won't let me go, I will try to telephone," she added.

She knew there was a telephone in the library. She went

at once. Nothing else was said. Neither of them had any actual expectation that she would be allowed to leave the house.

With light and noiseless step she raced downstairs, and not until she reached the hall did she perceive she was being followed by an individual whose step was as noiseless and silent as her own. Then she turned, and saw a tall, coal-black, turbaned figure intently watching her. It was Charles Langley's Nubian servant Hassan.

"I am going out," she said peremptorily. "Open the door!"

For the extremity of her fear inspired her with abnormal courage.

The Nubian made neither sign nor motion in response, but stood as impassive as a black stone statue, though his eyes seemed to devour her.

She ran to the door, which was locked and bolted, and was beginning to wrestle with the fastenings, when two sinewy arms clasped her waist, and, lifting her as easily as if she'd been an infant, Hassan tore her away from it, and set her down at the foot of the staircase.

He didn't speak.

Panting with horror, for she felt polluted by his touch, she darted into the library, and made a dash for the telephone, only to find that the wires had been disconnected.

But she wasn't done with yet; there was still a possible exit from the back.

She ran to the basement, through the vast kitchen spaces and domestic offices of the great mansion, meeting no one. Where were the servants? She called, but not a soul answered her. The back entrance was securely barred and fastened. When she tried to undo the bolts the sinewy arms again closed about her, and she was snatched violently away, and carried upstairs to the hall.

The Nubian didn't speak, but his eyes shone like blazing embers.

She knew now that all the servants had been hurriedly dismissed. She understood now the significance of those sounds of bustle and movement which had re-echoed through the house all the morning.

The Nubian's silence, no less than his strength, appalled her.

Somehow or another she found the energy to return to the old man's room.

"Oh!" she moaned, tottering in. "There's a horrible black—there's a horrible man—a black man—"

But she got no further. She swayed, and fell in a heap at David Langley's feet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Blake Gravely Troubled—Harvey Manson's Obstinacy—Blake Makes an Effort.

"HE sends his compliments, sir," said Tinker, "and he says he's not well enough to see you. He also says he hoped he had made it quite clear to you in his letter of last night that he took no further interest in Harvey Manson. He begs to remind you that you have received a very handsome fee for doing very little, and he wishes you distinctly to understand that all correspondence between you and him must now cease!"

"So that was the message?" said Blake.

"Yes, sir; that was the message," answered the youngster, who had been sent to Barclay Square to request David Langley to grant him a personal interview. "It was given me by a chap who was jolly careful not to let me get my nose inside the house!"

Blake was gravely troubled.

The actual message, refusing him a personal interview, did not surprise him; coming as it did on the top of last night's letter. David Langley had definitely washed his hands of Harvey; that is what troubled Blake.

He was troubled, too, because he would have to make some explanation to Harvey. The detective had worked as a taxicab driver to find Harvey. Had rescued him from the police, and brought him to his house for safety, and now David Langley took no further interest in Harvey Manson.

Blake was indeed troubled.

All the morning, Harvey, chafing under the restraint of being kept within doors, had been pressing Blake for the promised explanation; and Blake had replied that he should have it in the course of the day, thinking that it would be easy enough to see the old man and persuade him that Harvey was worthy enough of being made his heir.

But what could he say to Harvey now?

It would be the refinement of cruelty to tell him how he was related to the Marchford family, and how David Langley had proposed to leave him half a million of money, and then in the next breath add that David Langley had

changed his mind, and there was nothing for it but for him to go back to his taxi-driving. Why, Harvey couldn't even go back to that!

At that moment Harvey Manson came into the room, and the conversation abruptly ceased.

Harvey glanced inquiringly at the detective, and then he said:

"Haven't you anything to say to me yet, Mr. Blake?"

"No; not yet, Manson."

"I thought you said you would have when Tinker returned?"

"I said I hoped I should have," Blake corrected him; "but, as it happens, I haven't."

"Mr. Blake, I can't stand this any longer!" the young man burst out. "It's—it's not fair; you're trying me too high! I believe I was wrong in not submitting to arrest. The longer I put off giving myself up, the worse it will be for me in the end. The more I think about it, the more astonished I am at your bringing me here, and then refusing me any explanation. Will you tell me now all there is to tell, and let me judge for myself whether I ought to stay or not? If you don't, or if you won't, I shall have to go!"

"Last night you said you would try to trust me, Manson."

"I have tried; but last night was different. I hadn't had time to think then. I was simply dashed by your bringing me here. Now I can see that you have no right to expect the trust you demand. I am a grown man, and I have always fought my own battles myself. I know you mean well and kindly by me; but no man with an atom of self-respect can submit blindly to another man's dictation. That's how I feel about it, Mr. Blake, so you must either give me a full explanation, or I must go! My mind is firmly made up."

Blake admired the outspoken frankness and courage of this speech, but it was just because of that, because he admired it so much and the manly tone of the speaker, that he felt he could not subject him to the bitter irony of the knowledge of his position. What was the good of telling him that half a million of money was slipping through his fingers? It's a poor sort of kindness to unsettle a man by raising hopes that are never likely to be fulfilled. Blake felt he had done more than enough in that direction already.

"If your mind is firmly made up, there is nothing for me to say," he answered.

"Oh, sir, don't let him go!" pleaded Tinker impulsively.

Blake silenced the youngster with a look.

"I am not sure you're right," he said to Harvey, "and whether you go or whether you stay, you will always have my sincere sympathy and any help I can at any time give you. But I am going to make one last request to you. Give me a couple of hours—"

"No; not an hour, Mr. Blake!"

The interruption was so curt and sharp that Blake would have been less than human if he had not been nettled by it.

"I make the request in your own interests," he replied coldly.

"Explain what there is to explain, and let me be the judge of my own interests," came the swift retort.

"In the existing circumstances I can't do that."

"Then in the existing circumstances I cannot remain in your house."

The next minute Harvey Manson was gone.

Tinker was dreadfully upset at this denouement, but dared not venture a protest to Blake.

"Don't be down in the mouth, young 'un. It's the best thing that could happen, as matters stand. We shan't lose sight of him. He'll go and give himself up now, and to-morrow he'll be brought up at Bow Street. I shall appear in court, and give evidence on his behalf. In the witness-box I will detail the whole story of Lord Marchford's, and his son's machinations against him. That ought to get him off. If it doesn't, it will at all events give wide publicity to the plot, and the truth will reach Mr. David Langley through the newspapers. It's the only way the truth can reach him. If Mr. David Langley doesn't then send for me, or, better still, send for Harvey and recognise him formally as his heir, you may call me a Dutchman."

"But what are we going to do in the meantime?" queried Tinker disconsolately.

"I am going to reconnoitre, and try to get into the house myself, and you can come with me if you like."

Needless to say, the youngster jumped at the offer, and his spirits instantly revived.

"How are you going to attempt it, sir?"

"I haven't thought about that yet. We'll just go round to Barclay Square, and wait, and watch, and see if we can't get some sort of a chance."

All the morning long Blake's car had been standing at the edge of the kerb in front of the house, and he at once decided to use his cab to drive to Barclay Square.

Tinker, who was all eagerness to start, ran on ahead out into the street, and gave a turn to the handle, when, as ill-luck would have it, the engine back-fired, the handle spun round the wrong way, striking him a severe blow on the hand, and the youngster, with an exclamation of pain, stopped clear and clutched his right wrist with his left hand.

"I'm afraid it's badly sprained, young 'un," said Blake tenderly.

Tinker, who was suffering acute anguish, had to admit that he was afraid it was.

"This puts an end to our little excursion so far as I am concerned," he murmured ruefully.

Blake led him back into the house, and while Mrs. Bardell, who was first-rate in all such emergencies, bathed and bandaged the damaged wrist and generally rendered first aid, Blake telephoned to the doctor to come at once.

"What awful, vile luck!" said the youngster, sitting pale and suffering in an armchair while Mrs. Bardell fussed over him, "and I did so want to take a hand in the rest of the game. Don't you mind about me, sir, you go on to the square."

"No, I'll wait and see the doctor," said Blake.

Blake was greatly distressed, at the contretemps both for Tinker's sake and his own, for it was no small misfortune to be robbed of the youngster's services at this crisis.

"I am glad it was me and not you, sir."

"I am afraid it is one of the risks of the calling," said Blake.

"And now I suppose I shall be useless for a week or two? Why, sir," said Tinker, with sudden energy, "telephoning to the doctor has reminded me—why haven't we tried the telephone to get into touch with Mr. David Langley; there is sure to be a telephone at Lord Marchford's place?"

"By George, young 'un, there is something in the notion!"

"Then why not do it at once?"

"I will," said Blake, and, looking up Lord Marchford's number in the telephone-book, rung up the Exchange. While he was waiting for the operator to put him through, he said to Tinker: "If anything comes of this, young 'un, your accident will have turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for I own it never occurred to me. Yes, yes; what do you say?"

Blake was speaking into the instrument in reply to a remark from the Exchange.

"Can't make them hear. Why not?"

"It seems to me that this instrument is out of order."

"Botheration! What's the matter with it?"

"It's no use saying 'botheration!' I can't tell what's the matter with it; all I can do is to report the defect to the superintendent. You should have more patience."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, and hung up the receiver.

"I'm afraid that ends that," he said to Tinker.

"No, sir, it doesn't," was the quick and excited rejoinder. "It is better than if you'd been able to get through. It gives you the very chance you want of getting into the house. All you've got to do is to go there and say you're the post-office mechanic, sent to repair the telephone. They're almost bound to let you in."

"George, young 'un, the very thing!" exclaimed Blake delightedly. "Talk about your accident rendering you useless—why, it has made you ten times more useful than before!"

The idea was undoubtedly a smart one, and Blake proceeded to put it into execution without waiting for the doctor; Tinker being so much elated by Blake's enthusiasm and warm praise of him that he momentarily forgot the pain of his hurt.

Having dressed for the part, Blake set out.

He arrived at the house, marched up the steps, and rang the bell.

After some considerable delay, it was cautiously opened by Sanders.

"I've come to repair the telephone, sent by the Central Exchange. They've been trying to make you hear half the morning. Something wrong with the wires, or some defect in your instrument."

Sanders hesitated, then let him in, doubtless arguing that it would look queer to refuse admittance to the telephone man.

No shadow of suspicion of the man's bona fides rose in his mind.

Blake passed into the hall, and thence to the library.

Sanders pointed to the instrument, which was affixed to the wall, and Blake, after a cursory examination of it, exclaimed:

"What you bin up to here? It looks to me as if the wires had been wilfully cut."

"They 'ave," said Sanders. "Lord Marchford, he dis-

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DELICIOUS FREE TUCK HAMPERS FOR READERS. SEE THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 10 TO-DAY.

missed all his servants this morning, and before they go, one of them cut the wires, out of spite."

Sanders was an ingenious and plausible liar.

"Well, it's a good hour's job to mend them," grumbled Blake, and opening his bag of tools, set to work on the repairs, hoping that Sanders would go away and leave him. But Sanders stood stolidly by, watching the job being done.

"Nice, soft job yours seems to be, mister; do you always work as hard as you're working now?"

"I don't stay to listen to such talk, I'm going," said Sanders, with magnificent disdain, and went.

Blake, waiting till the sound of Sanders' footsteps had died away in the distance, made a move to the door to explore the house.

A curious throaty noise caused him to look round, and there, immediately behind him, stood the gigantic Nubian.

To say that Blake was startled would give an utterly inadequate idea of his feelings. He was completely non-plussed. He had heard nothing, and seen nothing to prepare him for the man's presence, and the combination of great strength with the faculty of noiseless movement is peculiarly terrifying. It's like coming unexpectedly face to face with a tiger.

But Blake quickly recovered himself.

"By gum, Sambo, you did give me a start!" he exclaimed with easy nonchalance.

The Nubian's eyes were blazing. His lips parted, displaying a double row of strong and dazzling white teeth, while there issued from them that dazing throaty noise again, only more vehement and furious, like the rumbling growl of a wild beast lashing himself into a rage, and he made an imperious gesture towards the telephone to indicate that Blake was to go on with his work. Blake queried that the man was a deaf-mute.

He resumed his labours, conscious all the while that the Nubian's blazing eyes were upon him. What was to be done? This was worse than having Sanders watching him. Yet the Nubian did not remain all the time. He disappeared at intervals, inspiring Blake with the hope that he might yet be able to explore the house; but as soon as he made a move to do so, so surely would Hassan return with his creepy stride and surprise him. There was no escaping the vigilance of those blazing eyes, which seemed to serve their owner for hearing as well as sight.

Blake realised that the secret exploration of the house was a sheer impossibility.

He was gathering up his tools prior to departure, when he heard Sanders in violent altercation with somebody at the front door, and the first words spoken warned him it was time to be gone.

"You are an impostor!" cried Sanders. "The man from the post-office is here already, and is now mending it. Go, or I will call the police! Begone with you—begone! Liar, thief, begone! You do not catch me with your lies. Clear off!"

Blake made a bee-line for the hall, closely followed by Hassan.

"Now, look here, somebody's having a game with you," expostulated the mechanic. "If there's any other joker doing this job, he's a fraud; he's the chap you ought to be calling names."

Sanders turned yellow, and made a sign to Hassan, and Hassan's long, lithe arms shot out to grab Blake.

But Blake had expected it, and was ready.

Ducking smartly, he paused only long enough to get home with a straight drive on the point of the Nubian's jaw, which dropped him like a stone; then, rushing for the half-open door, he swung his bag over like a nippin, tore the door open, fisted off the telephone man, slammed the door to from the outside, and raced down the steps, and got safely away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Viscount's Day—How Sanders Received a Caution—Charles Langley is Sobered by a Shock.

LORD MARCHFORD and the Hon. Charles Langley had been busy all day in the City.

The viscount had presided at a meeting of the directors and shareholders of the Sixpenny Bank, the bank which, through Marchford's scoundrelly manipulation of its funds, had failed. In a speech which was applauded to the echo, he repeated his promise to take over the whole of the bank's liabilities, and indemnify everybody concerned to the uttermost farthing of their losses.

The scene in the packed hall in which the meeting was held was such as probably has never been equalled in the history of company meetings.

The feelings of the audience were stirred to a pitch of frenzy.

"Heaven bless you, my lord, you've saved my home!"

Similar remarks to this resounded on every side.

After this there had been a prolonged conference with the

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bank's solicitors, which had lasted the whole of the afternoon.

The conference had not been quite as successful as the meeting, for the solicitors had exhibited an unpleasantly inquisitive desire to be told how the viscount proposed to raise the huge sum of money involved, and when it would be forthcoming, and they made no secret of their opinion that his answers to these important questions were exceedingly vague and unsatisfactory.

It was no use the viscount telling them, as he had told David Langley, that he meant to provide the money by mortgaging the family estates, for they were well aware that the estates were already mortgaged up to the hilt. So he had to fall back upon a dignified attitude of proud and haughty reserve, and an intimation in general terms that the money would be ready when it was wanted, without specifying where it was coming from. The solicitors managed at last to pin him down by a written guarantee to place the necessary funds in their hands within a week.

There were many awkward moments for the viscount at this conference, but his suave dexterity and splendid aplomb stood him in excellent stead, and, on the whole, he came through a very trying ordeal, if not exactly with flying colours, at all events with considerable credit.

This done, he and Charles dined at their club, and arrived home in Barclay Square at the reasonable hour of ten.

"Is all well, Sanders?"

It was Charles who asked this anxious, hurried question, not his father.

"All is well, sir, only——"

Sanders paused to point to various bruises and contused wounds on his face.

"Only what, you fool?"

"My dear Charles, pray give Sanders time," interposed the viscount blandly.

"Only, sir, I have been hurt, and Hassan, too, by a man who said he came to mend the telephone," said Sanders, in piteous accents.

But if he expected sympathy, he was grievously mistaken.

"Sanders, did I or did I not tell you to admit no one to the house under any circumstances in our absence?" demanded Lord Marchford.

"Milord, you told me to admit no one, but——"

"Then I'm exceedingly glad you received the reward your disobedience to orders deserved; and I am only sorry you were not hurt a great deal more."

This was all very well at the time, but when Sanders had given them detailed particulars of the incident, and they had retired to the library to discuss it, they could not hide from themselves that it was an affair of serious consequence.

Charles Langley in particular developed a sense of acute foreboding.

"I told you how it would be, guv'nor. I warned you you were too cocksure."

"Quite so, Charles. I remember distinctly your telling me to beware of a telephone-mechanic—I remember it distinctly," replied the viscount, with cutting sarcasm.

"It must have been Blake—can't you realise that? It must have been Blake!" replied Charles, in a voice that was barely articulate, owing to the sudden fear which seized him. "You said Blake wouldn't take any further trouble in the matter. You were wrong—wrong! He's been here; he'll come again. Your letters haven't bluffed him. We can't go on with this; we shall never succeed. If David Langley dies, we—we—we shall be hanged! We—we—you—you—you have ruined us! There is nothing can save us now—nothing—nothing—" And his voice trailed off into a murmur of meaningless sounds.

"Charles, would you spoil all now?" replied the viscount, and it is almost impossible to convey an accurate idea of his concentrated bitterness of tone, or the glance of withering contempt he levelled at his son.

He rose, and gripped Charles' shoulder with a steady hand.

"Listen to me," he said. "We are committed to this thing now, willy nilly, for good or ill. We can't go back. We must go on. You talk like a craven fool. The risk is infinitesimal. The old man upstairs is dying. He has made a will leaving us every fraction of his fortune, and he made it freely, without the slightest pressure or compulsion on our part. We have nothing to fear, I tell you—nothing. A day or two will settle it—probably two days at farthest. If for the next two days we can keep him from seeing anybody, and so prevent him from making a new will, our position is absolutely impregnable. Haven't you a spark of manhood in you? Be sensible; steady yourself; view the situation calmly. Understand, once for all, I won't let you spoil my plans now. The thing has got to go through. Nothing shall thwart me—nothing—no, not even you!"

Charles, who was white-lipped, rallied to his father's stern demeanour and overmastering influence.

"Yes—yes!" he stammered. "If—if you don't hasten the old man's death, there—there may be something in—in what you say—provided we—provided we can keep Blake out. But that is what terrifies me. Blake has been here once, and it's practically certain he'll come again, so how—how can we possibly manage to keep him out?"

The viscount poured out a stiff dose of whisky, and pushed the glass across to his son.

"Drink that, and then I'll talk to you," he said.

Charles swallowed the potent liquor greedily.

"You're feeling better?"

"Ye-es, guv'nor. I—I suppose I was a peg or two too low."

"You're always a peg or two too low when there's man's work to be done!" was the scathing retort. "Now, I am going to send for Sanders. I wish Sanders possessed one-half the good qualities of your man Hassan. There is one thing I can unreservedly compliment you upon, and that is your excellent choice of a servant. Hassan's worth ten of Sanders!"

"Hassan has his weak points, guv'nor."

"Everyone has his weak points!" replied the viscount sharply. "If it wasn't so, you and I would have been hard put to it to make a living."

The viscount, who had already rung the bell, had to ring it twice more before Sanders appeared. When he did come, he was out of breath with hurrying. There was an anxious—one might almost say a sheepish—look on his face as he apologised for his delay.

"Hark ye, Sanders, it is time you understood exactly what will happen to you if you fail in your duty again," said Lord Marchford, roughly cutting short Sanders' flood of excuses. "Another mistake such as you have made to-day, and you will be handed over to Scotland Yard for escaping from prison. An ex-convict receives short shrift from the prison authorities when once they get hold of him. Need I go into particulars? I think you are well aware of what awaits you if you are arrested. Back to prison you go if I have occasion to complain again!"

Charles, who was in ignorance of the nature of his father's hold over Sanders, watched the effect of this threat with tense curiosity.

Sanders blanched and cowered, and seemed to shrink to half his normal size.

"Milord—milord," he faltered, "you—you would never do that?"

"Assuredly I would, and will, if you fail me again!"

"Milord, I shall be vigilant. I shall be careful. I shall never disobey again."

"You had better not!" said the viscount grimly.

Sanders clearly had no desire to experience the treatment that is meted out to escaped convicts.

After Sanders had left the room the viscount and Charles helped themselves freely from a whisky bottle. Charles continued to drink heavily, to his father's secret delight, for the viscount thought the more fuddled his son was the better it would be for him to perform the work which he had on hand.

He was a confirmed toper by habit, so that the process of fuddling was slow and gradual. Still, he was getting on.

They continued to chat for another half-hour, and Charles grew by degrees more and more drowsy. The moment was



Even as David Langley spoke, the inspector and the sergeant emerged from the cupboard and Blake from the window.

near at hand when the viscount would be freed from his fear of Charles thwarting his plans—at all events for the next twelve hours or so.

"Soon have to go to bed, guv'nor. Can't stay awake much longer."

"Why not go at once, Charles? It's silly to stay up if you're sleepy."

"Silly? I'm not silly! Go to bed when I'm ready. Mind your own bishness!"

Charles was not yet quite out of the quarrelsome stage of inebriation.

"Of course—of course, Charles, I wouldn't hurry you for worlds!" said the viscount coaxingly. "I'm very glad to have you to talk to."

"I'm going to bed this minute," said Charles, with the drunkard's perverse inconsequence—"going because I want to—not because you want me to."

Supported by the viscount, Charles staggered out into the hall, and was lifting his foot gingerly to the first step of the stairs, when a thundering rat-tat-tat on the front-door knocker caused him to collapse into his father's arms.

"Blake!" he gasped. "It must be Blake!"

He was able to stand up without help. The shock of dread suddenly sobered him.

"No, it's not Blake—it can't be Blake!" said the viscount, who was outwardly cool, if inwardly alarmed. "Why doesn't Sanders come?"

The thundering rat-tat was repeated with fresh and augmented fury.

"You aren't going to open the door, guv'nor?"

"Yes, I am. Go and wake Hassan, and bring him here. Quick, now!"

Charles went shambling off to the basement, where the Nubian slept, and the viscount opened the door on the chain.

"Who is it that knocks?" he demanded peremptorily.

"I require to see Miss Fielding at once," came the answer, in a tone that was at least as peremptory as his.

"You cannot see Miss Fielding; she is in attendance upon her patient, and cannot leave him. If you like to leave a message, it shall be given her."

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"That will not do. I must see her, to assure myself of her safety."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Harvey Manson!"

The viscount looked round, and saw Hassan standing just beside him. He motioned to the Nubian to move to the corner behind the door.

Charles' scared face showed white against the gloom of the passage.

"Come in by all means, Mr. Manson!" said the viscount, removing the chain.

Harvey walked in, and as the door closed Hassan leapt on him and bore him to the ground.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Viscount at Bay—What the Driver Knew—The House in Marlborough's Rents.

IN good time the next morning Blake and Tinker arrived at Bow Street.

"This case of Harvey Manson's," said Blake to the inspector on duty. "What time is it likely to come on? I am going to give evidence on his behalf. I shall have something to say in the witness-box that will astonish you fellows from Scotland Yard," he added, smiling.

The inspector, looking puzzled, cast his eye down the charge-sheet.

"Harvey Manson," he murmured. "I don't see the name here, Mr. Blake."

"The taxi-cabman who is wanted for obtaining a licence under a false name."

"Oh, that man! Yes, I recollect now; but I didn't know he'd been arrested."

"He gave himself up yesterday afternoon."

"Did he? The first I've heard of it. Anyway, the case is not being tried here."

"But it ought to come on here, oughtn't it?"

"I should have thought so. Are you quite sure he gave himself up?"

"Quite sure; at least, I believe I'm quite sure. I saw him at midday, and when I parted from him his intention was to go direct to Scotland Yard."

"I don't think he did. However, we'll phone through and find out."

Five minutes later the inspector said:

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"No, Mr. Blake, they've no news of Manson at the Yard. He hasn't given himself up, and he hasn't been arrested. A downy customer; he's slipped through your fingers. A pity you didn't nab him promptly when you had your hand on him."

Blake was too much perturbed in mind to care to discuss the matter.

"A foolish trick to play!" he said, in a vexed tone to Tinker, when they were outside. "If Manson had decided to evade arrest, he might as well have remained in hiding with me. A foolish fellow. He's ruining his chances. The job of persuading Mr. David Langley that he's worthy to be his heir was hard enough already, and now he's gone and made it still more difficult. Folly—criminal folly! He might have trusted me!"

"You don't think anything has happened to him, sir?" Tinker ventured.

"Happened to him! What could have happened to him?" snapped Blake. "And if anything has happened to him, it is entirely his own fault."

His irritation died away in ten minutes.

"We'll go to Barclay Square, and we'll get in, young 'un. You'd like to come?"

"Rather, sir; though I shan't be any good if there's a row."

Tinker's injured hand was in a sling.

"No," said Blake; "and if the doctor's orders were being strictly obeyed, you'd be in bed."

Whereupon Tinker very promptly turned the conversation by remarking that it would be wise to go first to Baker Street to get their revolvers before proceeding to Barclay Square.

At eleven o'clock they were standing in the porch of Lord Marchford's house, and, greatly to their surprise, the front door was opened to them without any delay, and by the viscount himself.

"Oh, it's you! You are Mr. Blake, I think. I am very glad to see you. Pray come in!" said the viscount pleasantly. "You find me in the throes of a grave domestic upset," he continued easily and fluently, as he led the way to the library. "Yesterday my servants left me en masse; last night, my invalid brother, with his lady nurse and his male attendant, quitted my house without a word of explanation; this morning my son and his servant have been out since daylight trying to find them, and have not returned. So you have surprised me absolutely alone in the house. You will readily understand how glad I am to see you, Mr. Blake."

Was this flummery? Blake was distinctly taken aback.

"I came here to see Mr. David Langley," he said.

"I gathered that," was the instant rejoinder. "You were here yesterday for the same purpose, I think. Ah, Mr. Blake, you might have completed that little matter of repairing my telephone while you were about it, instead of assaulting my servants and running away. However, we'll let that pass. The present point is that my brother is no longer here, so that unfortunately you can't see him."

"Are you telling me the truth?" Blake challenged him.

"I cannot conceive any shadow of a reason why I should lie to you, sir. Your question is offensive, but I decline to resent it, because I understand and sympathise with the motive which prompted you to ask it. You suspect me of having designs against my brother's life. It is a monstrous suspicion, but, at the same time, I cannot quarrel with you for entertaining it. My poor brother has himself infected you with that suspicion. Are you aware, Mr. Blake, that he is in the last stages of a deadly disease, and yet his morbid eccentricity is such that, in spite of my earnest entreaties, he has persistently refused to see a doctor? If I hadn't taken the law into my own hands and obtained a skilled hospital nurse for him, he would have died from sheer lack of proper care and attention. I put it to you as a man of shrewd common-sense, does that look as if I were anxious to hasten his end?"

All this was literally true to Blake's own knowledge, and, therefore, he found himself in more and more of a dilemma; and yet, paradoxical as it sounds, he was convinced the other was lying.

The viscount, as his son had so often said of him, was as clever as the fiend.

Blake was driven to try another tack.

"Why did you thwart your brother's desire to find his nephew, Harvey Manson, Lord Marchford?"

"Thwart him, Mr. Blake! I didn't thwart him!"

"Did you do anything to aid him in his search?"

"I did everything possible to gratify his desire to find the seamp."

"Everything you say, Lord Marchford, is strikingly plausible, but I am afraid I am not convinced. I don't believe that you—"

"Then how can I convince you, Mr. Blake?"

"Wait, please. I don't believe that you tried to find Harvey Manson to gratify your brother's desire to make him his heir. I don't believe that you engaged Miss Fielding's services as nurse that your brother might have skilled care and attention. I don't believe that your brother and Miss Fielding quitted your house last night."

"Will you believe the evidence of your own eyesight?"

"Yes; that and nothing else where you are concerned."

"My house is at your disposal, Mr. Blake; ransack it from top to bottom."

"I warn you I am armed, Lord Marchford."

"My dear sir, I am delighted to hear it."

"I carry a loaded revolver, and I shall use it at the first sign of treachery."

"Why not, Mr. Blake—why not?"

"I don't believe you're alone in the house."

"Well, well, well, we shall see. Pray shoot anyone you find."

It was a strange position.

Convinced of the correctness of his suspicions, Blake was yet so much impressed by the viscount's extraordinary coolness and effrontery that seeds of doubt began to germinate in his mind. Had he made an egregious blunder, after all? Was David Langley just an eccentric invalid who imagined that his relatives had designs upon his life? The records of insanity show such cases in plenty.

But these doubts did not prevent him from making an exhaustive search of the house. He and Tinker went into every room, the viscount acting the part of willing guide and cicerone.

"This is my room; this is my son's room; this is the hole in which Hassan sleeps; this is Sanders' crib. This is the apartment of my invalid brother; the adjoining room was occupied by Nurse Fielding. It was assigned to her in order that she might be within call of him at any hour of the day or night. You will notice the signs of hurried departure, Mr. Blake. Nothing has been removed or altered. Everything remains exactly as it was at the moment they left."

Glib, plausible, anxious to supply any and every item of information, anticipating every possible question that could be asked him, the viscount conducted them methodically through the mansion from basement to garret.

"I ask nothing better than that you should trace and find the fugitives for me," said the viscount. "If you will accept a commission from me to do so, I will gladly pay your usual fees."

"I shall certainly not rest till I find them," was Blake's answer.

The viscount thanked him effusively, and, superbly unruffled by the detective's sternness and courtiness, opened the front door and bade him a courteous good-day.

"I should like to go through that house with Pedro, sir," said Tinker to Blake, as they walked slowly away. "It is a huge place, and there must be lots of cupboards and hiding-places we overlooked and he didn't show us."

"You're right, young 'un; that shall be our next move."

"When, sir?"

"Oh, when you like—at the first opportunity," answered Blake wearily.

He was stung to the quick by his inability to probe the mystery of the viscount's cool unconcern.

"Why not now, sir?"

"No, not now; I'm going to the Yard to report David Langley and Nurse Fielding as missing. That is the first thing to be done."

"May I go and fetch Pedro and meet you here?"

"Yes, if you like."

The youngster went off without waiting for a second permission.

Blake strolled on till he came to a cabstand.

There was only one taxi on the rank, and the driver was absorbed in the perusal of an early edition of the "Evening News."

"Hallo, Shorty!" he said, for he knew the driver. "I want you to drive me to Scotland Yard!"

"Seen this, Mr. Blake?" said Shorty, handing him the paper. "It's something in your line, and, if I'm not mistaken, it's something in mine, too. A man, believed to be a man-servant, found murdered outside one of the principal West End banks. Strangulation marks on his throat. Body thrown into the area. News too late for the morning papers, but it's all here. I believe I know something about it."

Blake eagerly scanned the paragraphs, and was instantly struck by the exact correspondence between the description of the murdered man and what he remembered of Sanders.

"A large cheque found on him with the signature 'David Langley.' The police theory is that he was waiting outside

the bank to cash the cheque directly the doors were opened when he was murdered. Funny if I should turn out to be mixed up with it, sir."

"Tell me all you know," said Blake hoarsely.

His surmise that the murdered man was Sanders was confirmed by the cheque signature. But had anybody else been murdered? What about Mary Fielding and David Langley?

"Last night at about eleven," began Shorty, "I was driving slowly through Barclay Square when a chap came running after me, and asked me to wait for him at the corner. He was awfully excited. He gave me a sovereign and told me where he wanted to be driven; and then he scoots off again."

"Do you remember the address?"

"Oh, yes, it was No. 72, Marlborough Rents, Wickham Row, down Whitechapel way; a regular Yiddish quarter it is. Well, he comes back in about six or seven minutes, and with him an old gent who could hardly crawl and a girl who was dressed like a nurse. You know what I mean—white cap with long streamers, and—"

"Yes, yes!" said Blake impatiently. "Never mind all that; get on."

"Well, they hoists the old gentleman into the cab, and gets in themselves, and without a word more said off we go, because, mind you, he'd given me the address beforehand."

"Yes, yes; get on!"

"We came there. The old gent was hauled out and carried by the man into No. 72, the girl helping him; and that's all. I tell you straight I didn't linger in the neighbourhood because I didn't like the look of it. I was too precious glad to be quit of the job."

"Drive sharp to Scotland Yard!" said Blake.

A few words to one of the assistant-commissioners, and Blake and an inspector and a sergeant were rattling eastward in Shorty's cab.

The cab made a sensation in that neighbourhood, but the police uniforms created something like a stampede. The street was almost deserted when Shorty drew up at Marlborough's Rents.

Number 72 was a room on the top floor of the tenement building. The door was locked. The inspector rapped sharply on the panel, and shouted:

"Open, in the name of the law!"

"I cannot open; we are prisoners!" answered a faint voice from within.

A woman, suddenly appearing from an adjacent doorway, produced the key. The door was unlocked, and they went in.

It was a decently-furnished room, but horribly neglected and dirty. There was a bed, a chair, a table, a washstand, a cupboard, and curtains to the windows. On the table was a jug with a little milk, and the remains of a loaf of bread. David Langley lay on the bed fully clothed. Mary Fielding sat on the chair.

She was too much exhausted by her long vigil and anxiety to be able to rise at their entrance.

"Thank heavens someone's come at last!" she murmured. She brightened rapidly to the protection their presence ensured her, and gave Blake a clear narrative of their escape. How Sanders, for £5,000, had got them safely from the viscount's house, and brought them to their present lodging. Having brought them to that room, Sanders had left them, locking them in, but promising to come and release them early next morning, and threatening the girl with dread penalties if she made a disturbance. She had not seen him since. No one had taken any notice of her cries.

While they were talking the old man awoke.

The first words he spoke brought a smile to the lips of everyone.

"I want," he said, speaking very distinctly, "to make a new will at once! Will somebody kindly bring me pen, ink, and paper?"

Blake stepped forward, and introduced himself, and David Langley said:

"Very pleased indeed to meet you, Mr. Blake; but I can't attend to any business whatever until I have made a new will. If I should happen to die before I did it, that rascally brother of mine and his son Charles would inherit everything. I shouldn't rest easy in my grave. I want you to bear witness that I'm in my sane mind and sound senses."

Pen, ink, and paper were obtained from one of the tenants of the building, and Blake, writing at his dictation, drew up a short will, which bequeathed the whole of his property jointly to Harvey Manson and Mary Fielding. When this had been duly executed and witnessed, he asked Blake to take care of it, and then declared his readiness to talk about any matter under the sun.

At this moment Shorty rushed up, to say that Lord Marchford and Charles Langley were coming.

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"Then we'll give them a surprise," said Blake.

"Give 'em a shock," said the old man truculently.

"I expect we shall give them several shocks before we've done with them."

Under Blake's direction, the inspector and the sergeant stowed themselves away in the cupboard, while Blake concealed himself behind the curtains.

"You are not afraid, Miss Fielding? The brunt of the interview will fall upon you."

"Afraid! No!" she smiled. "I am not afraid of anything now."

"Mr. Langley, will you kindly look as ill as possible?"

The old man stretched himself stiffly on the bed, with a chuckle of amusement.

The preparations were only just complete when there came a tap at the door, and the viscount and his son entered.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Justice is Done!

"O H, heavens! Hassan's found them! Hassan's murdered Sanders!"

With these words on his lips, Charles Langley tottered into the house in Barclay Square less than half an hour after Blake and Tinker had left it. His story was meagre and brief.

Hassan was apparently familiar with Sanders' haunts, and had tracked him unerringly to Marlborough's Rents, then had followed him to the bank, and strangled him in the dark hours before dawn. The Nubian was quite unable to understand Charles' horror at the deed, thinking he had done his master a good turn for which he would be warmly praised. When he found the reverse was the case he had renounced Charles' service, and taken himself off, mortally offended.

"You don't know where he is now?"

"No; I don't know anything about him."

"So much the better, Charles. You've got the address?"

"Yes. But this horrible murder, guv'nor! You don't seem to—"

"My dear Charles, be sensible! We didn't murder Sanders, and it's an extraordinarily fortunate occurrence he's out of the way. Dead men tell no tales. Deaf mutes tell no tales. There is no one left to tell tales. If we're only true to ourselves now, nothing can rob us of our reward. I am going at once to the address Hassan gave you, and I'm going to take you with me. We must settle with the Fielding woman without the loss of a moment."

"Settle with her! You don't mean—"

"Don't be a fool, Charles! You know what I mean."

And the discussion was closed.

He came into that dreary, shabby room, Charles skulking at his heels, with the same aplomb and assured demeanour he would have exhibited on entering a great drawing-room. He doffed his hat, bowed to Mary, placed his hat on the table, looked about him for a chair, and, not seeing one, stepped jauntily to the bed, and gazed at the rigid form lying on it. Then he spoke:

"Not dead, nurse—my poor brother is not dead?"

"No, 'Lord Marchford; your poor brother is not dead."

"You ran a great risk—a very great risk," he said, gravely shaking his head.

"In what way?"

"In removing my poor brother from the shelter of my house. You did it clandestinely. You imposed your will on a weak invalid. You suborned a worthless servant to aid you. I doubt not you have materially shortened your patient's life, and in so doing you have rendered yourself liable to very severe penalties."

He took another peep at the form on the bed, and said:

"He is either asleep or unconscious. "He—"

"Guv'nor—guv'nor, look!" cried Charles.

David Langley had raised himself on the bed, and was sitting bolt upright, calmly surveying the viscount, whose back was turned to him.

The viscount whipped round and started back, and David Langley said:

"You know, Marchford, you're not even a clever scoundrel. You've disappointed me. I can see perfectly plainly now why you've made a mess of your life. You lack ordinary, common, average brains. No person with a modicum of intelligence would have been such a hopeless nincompoop as to suppose he could persuade my dear niece Mary—oh, yes, Marchford, she's going to be my niece!—to do the dirty work you've proposed to her. It's a sad business—a sad business!"

The viscount was quick to recover himself.

"Am I such a fool, David? You and the girl are alone here with Charles and me. It's a neighbourhood from which people disappear without questions asked. Your life and hers are at my mercy. A desperate man takes desperate chances. My need of money is desperate. I must have money, David!"

"And so foolish of you, Marchford, to imagine that Mary and I are alone with you and Charles—so very foolish! We are not alone. If you will kindly take the trouble to look into the cupboard, and peep behind the window-curtains, you will find something in both places that will probably surprise you."

As he spoke, the inspector and the sergeant emerged from the cupboard, and Blake from the window.

The play was played out. The inspector and the sergeant took Charles and the viscount into formal custody at once.

A cab was procured, and the prisoners were removed.

Blake, Mary Fielding, and David Langley drove to Baker Street in Shorty's taxi, and on the way Mary and the old man developed acute anxiety in regard to Harvey.

But in Blake's absence Tinker had not been idle. After fetching Pedro, the youngster had remained watching the house till he had seen the viscount and his son leave it, and then had entered by the back door, and had explored it at his leisure.

With Pedro's help, the process of exploration was not a long one.

Harvey was found, lying gagged and bound, in an attic under the roof, whither he had been conveyed by Hassan.

The viscount did not live to be brought to trial.

The spirit of ruthless determination which had animated him throughout this dark conspiracy remained with him till the end. He was found dead in his cell of poison self-administered, a deadly dose of which, minute in quantity, it was subsequently discovered, he invariably carried about with him concealed in a signet-ring.

No proceedings were taken against Charles.

His constitution, undermined by years of dissipation, collapsed under the strain of exposure. He was diseased in body and brain, and died within three months, a raving lunatic, in a home for the hopelessly insane.

Hassan paid the extreme penalty, but not at the hands of the law.

The police failed to arrest him, but his dead body was found floating in the Thames below Barking. There is good reason to believe that he met his death in a drunken broil with foreign seamen.

Mr. David Langley, who, on the death of his brother and Charles, became the new Viscount Marchford, lived hale and strong for five years after these events. His illness was largely imaginary, and, as Mary had foretold, he was quickly restored to health under proper medical advice and treatment.

His great achievement in these years was his masterly management of the affairs of the Sixpenny Bank. After generously taking over its liabilities, he set to work to pull its fortunes round, a task in which, owing to his commanding aptitude for business, he was brilliantly successful.

Thanks to Blake's influence, the warrant issued for Harvey's arrest was withdrawn, and his former conviction quashed. A new licence was granted to him, which, though he never used it, he gladly accepted.

THE END.

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TOM MERRY & CO.
of St. Jim's.

- BY -

**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Why the Music Was Interrupted.

TOM MERRY laughed. Now, Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, had a very pleasant laugh, which was very agreeable to hear, but certainly just then the moment was not judiciously chosen for laughing. The other fellows were grinning, but they looked surprised when Tom Merry laughed.

There were nearly a dozen of the St. Jim's fellows present. Bernard Glyn of the Shell had taken the little party home to tea. Glyn's father had a house near the old school, and Glyn of the Shell frequently took a little party of juniors home. On the present occasion there were nearly a dozen of them—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake and Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth, and Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, the famous "Co." of the New House at St. Jim's. Tea was over, and the lights gleamed from the windows of Glyn House into the wide grounds. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the piano, a sheet of music in his hands, his head thrown back, and a tenor solo—or, at all events, a solo that was supposed to be tenor—proceeding from his aristocratic vocal organs. Glyn's sister, Edith, was at the piano, accompanying him, and keeping pace with the tenor solo in a really wonderful way. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo was in full blast, so to speak, when Tom Merry laughed.

It was really too bad.

Of course, the fellows always grinned when D'Arcy started on a tenor solo. That was only to be expected. He was accustomed to that. But when Tom Merry laughed, the swell of St. Jim's paused in the tide of melody, and looked round with an extremely indignant expression. A sheet of music fluttered to the floor as he groped for his eyeglass, which he proceeded to jam into his eye, in order to take a scornful survey of the hero of the Shell.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he began warmly.

Tom Merry turned pink.

"Sorry, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "I—I wasn't laughing at—the tenor solo! I'm so sorry I interrupted!"

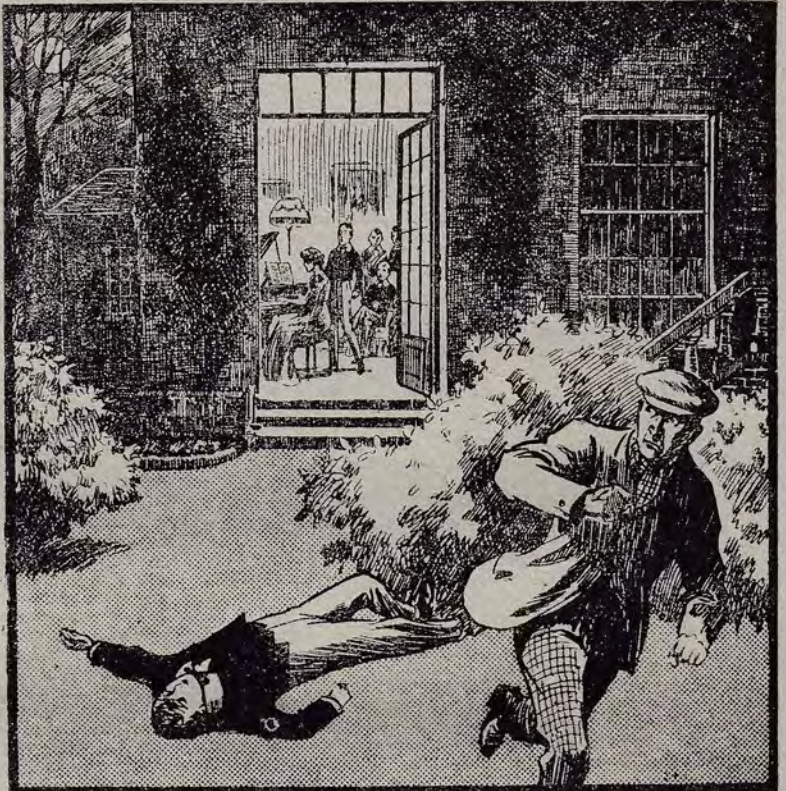
"Weally—"

"It's too bad," said Jack Blake, with a shake of the head. "I'm surprised at you, Tom Merry."

"Look here, Blake—"

"There's no excuse," said Blake. "You've interrupted D'Arcy's song. Now, it will be all the longer before he gets finished. It's too bad!"

"Weally, Blake—"



In a flash the savage blow was struck, and Tom Merry staggered and fell. He lay stretched upon the ground, his face upturned, white, and streaked with blood.

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"If you are alludin' to my song, Lowthah—"

"Ahem!"

"I'm so sorry!" said Tom Merry penitently. "I know it's hard on you fellows—I—I mean, I know it's hard on you, Gussy—"

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"But—but, you see, I couldn't help it! Begin again, Gussy; there's a good chap!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Figgins. "You ass!"

Miss Glyn looked round on the piano stool.

"It is really too bad to interrupt D'Arcy," she said severely. "Now, begin again, Arthur! Begin at the beginning."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, where's my music?"

Bernard Glyn picked up the music and handed it to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's turned back to the first verse with an air of great dignity. Miss Glyn's slim fingers ran over the keys again. Edith Glyn was a good pianist, and, as Monty Lowther had remarked in a stage whisper, she needed to be, to accompany D'Arcy. D'Arcy had a way of bucking up and slacking down at the most unexpected moments, and accompanying him was something in the nature of an acrobatic performance.

"So sorry!" murmured Tom Merry. "I—I wasn't thinking of the song, Gussy—honour bright—it was something else, really, and I'm sorry!"

Arthur Augustus bowed stiffly.

"Vewy well, Tom Mewwy, I accept your apology."

Once more the tenor voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose upon the air.

It was certainly a beautiful song, but whether Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rendered it beautifully was another matter. But the juniors bore it manfully, and Tom Merry did not laugh again. Tom Merry was sitting by the French windows, which were open, and, as a matter of fact, he was looking towards the shrubberies in the garden, and not at D'Arcy at

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all. It seemed as if something or other in the garden chained Tom Merry's attention, to the exclusion of that magnificent solo.

Outside, in the wide grounds of Glyn House, the moon was rising over the trees, and a soft light fell upon lawns and shrubberies. As Tom Merry looked from the open window a shadow moved in the shrubberies, and he nearly laughed again. But this time he managed to subdue the expression of his inward merriment to a soft chuckle. Bernard Glyn glanced at him curiously, and came across to him.

"What's the joke?" whispered Glyn.

Tom Merry made a gesture towards the garden.

"He's there," he murmured.

"Who is?"

"Romeo, of course—Owney-owney, you know."

The words were mysterious to anyone not in the secret. But Bernard Glyn evidently understood, for he burst into a sudden roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus broke off at once, and looked round indignantly.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, sorry!" exclaimed Glyn. "I—I—I—"

"Bernard!" said Edith Glyn gently. "It is too bad to interrupt D'Arcy in this way. It is really not the way to treat a guest, you know."

Glyn turned red.

"I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I didn't mean it; but—but Tom Merry said something funny. I—I— Do begin again, Gussy! After all, the more we get of the song, you know, the better we like it, and the first verse is—is ripping!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled again. That was really a very nice way of putting it, and the clouds cleared from the amateur singer's brow at once.

"Vewy well, deah boy," he said graciously; "but I weally think you might wewerve your jokes for a more appowpwiote occasion, Tom Mewwy!"

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's all right! I'll begin again. Would you mind turnin' back to the first page, Miss Glyn?"

"Not at all," said Edith.

And once more the swell of St. Jim's started.

By this time the whole of the youthful company knew that something was "on." The juniors all gathered round Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn at the window. Even old Mr. Glyn, who had been dozing in his armchair, looked a little curious, and wondered what there could be in the moonlit garden to excite so much interest among the juniors. Arthur Augustus, unconscious of everything but the tenor solo, warbled on at full pitch.

"What is it out there?" whispered Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Never mind now! Quiet, or Gussy's solo will go on for ever!"

"But what—"

"There he is!" murmured Bernard Glyn.

The juniors all looked from the open window.

In the moonlight, half-hidden by the shadows of the deep shrubbery, a man's figure could be seen—a figure that stood motionless, regarding the house with a steady gaze.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Struck Down.

TOM MERRY chuckled softly—he did not laugh this time. The juniors grinned—they understood. Bernard Glyn seemed to be going into some inward paroxysm. He glanced at his elder sister, sitting unconscious at the piano, and then, a little uneasily, at his father on the other side of the room.

"Quiet!" he murmured. "Don't let the pater guess!"

Tom Merry became grave at once.

"Right-ho! Don't look out of the window, you chaps," he murmured. "We don't want to get Romeo in a row."

"Rather not!" said Figgins.

"Why don't you bring up your Housemaster to be more sensible, Figgy?" murmured Blake. "The Romeo and Juliet business is out of date."

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Figgins chuckled.

Tom Merry glanced from the window again, the dim figure in the shrubbery had disappeared. He was glad of it, for old Mr. Glyn, his curiosity awakened, was coming over towards the window. Mr. Glyn glanced out into the garden, but saw nothing but the lawns and the shrubberies—merely that and nothing more.

He looked inquiringly at the juniors, but their faces were quite solemn now; they seemed to be listening to D'Arcy's tenor solo, and to be thinking of nothing else in the world.

They realised that they had come near to betraying a secret, and they were being very circumspect now, rather late in the day.

But they could hardly help grinning at the thought of that figure in the garden, watching the lighted window from the shadow of the shrubbery.

It was an open secret at St. Jim's that Mr. Wodyer, the new Housemaster of the New House, was attached to Glyn's sister.

Mr. Wodyer had lately come to St. Jim's, in the place of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, who had gone away on a long holiday.

The new Housemaster, who had also taken the position of master of the Fourth Form—Blake's Form—was very popular at St. Jim's. He was a young man to hold such a post, but he fulfilled his duties well, and he had shown that he was quite as much at home in the playing-fields as in the Form-room. A master who could kick a good goal was certain to be popular at a school like St. Jim's—and Figgins & Co. were very proud of their new Housemaster—and they contrasted him with old "Ratty," very much to Mr. Ratcliff's disadvantage.

That Mr. Arthur Wodyer was in love with the sister of Glyn of the Shell seemed a very pretty romance to the juniors. It amused them a little. Being in love was not much in their line, and they were inclined to look upon it as a sort of youthful weakness on the part of the Housemaster. The course of true love, the poet assures us, never did run smooth, and such was the case with Mr. Wodyer and Edith Glyn. For old Mr. Glyn was a millionaire, and was generally supposed to roll in money; and Arthur Wodyer, M.A., had nothing but an Oxford degree and his salary as a master at St. Jim's, and even his post there was only a temporary one. The match was, therefore, very unequal, and Mr. Glyn was not likely to give his consent to an engagement. Bernard Glyn was willing to give his, because Mr. Wodyer was a jolly good fellow and a real sport; but these qualities did not appeal to the millionaire so much as to his son.

Mr. Wodyer, of course, had never spoken a word to the juniors on the subject. But Bernard Glyn knew all about it, and he kept his schoolfellows informed, Glyn was of opinion that Mr. Wodyer was good enough for anybody, and the other fellows agreed with him. Indeed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had seriously suggested arguing the matter out with Glyn senior. D'Arcy had great faith in his persuasive eloquence; but the other fellows hadn't, and they had threatened him with instant slaughter if he attempted anything of the sort.

It was "rotten for Wodyer," as the juniors agreed, and they took a very kindly interest in the matter.

And Glyn had discovered that, as Mr. Wodyer could not meet Edith excepting upon very rare occasions, he had developed a habit of strolling past Glyn House and watching her window—a little way common to lovers at all periods of the world's history. Glyn often went home to see his people, as his home was so near St. Jim's, and so he had come upon Mr. Wodyer more than once doing the "Romeo act," as he humorously termed it.

Therefore, when Tom Merry saw the silent figure in the shrubbery watching the window, he had no doubt that it was Mr. Wodyer playing Romeo once more.

That was the cause of the sudden laugh which had had such disastrous effects upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo.

Tom Merry was wishing now that he had not allowed his risible faculties free play; but he had been taken by surprise.

It was evident that Mr. Glyn

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was suspicious. The old gentleman was a little crusty in temper, though extremely kind-hearted, and very good to his son's chums at St. Jim's. But it was known that he was very much "down" upon an almost penniless suitor for his daughter, and if he found that Mr. Wodyer was in the habit of haunting his grounds in this Romeo-like way, it was pretty certain that there would be trouble.

Tom Merry tried to avoid the old gentleman's eye. But Mr. Glyn dropped into a chair beside him with the evident intention of speaking.

D'Arcy's song was over. Arthur Augustus looked round for applause. The juniors applauded him—whether for the solo or for getting it finished they did not state.

"Oh, ripping!" said Glyn.

"Very ripping—awfully like ripping canvas—very tough canvas," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Up with you, Blake!" said Bernard Glyn. "You're going to give us a patriotic song!"

Blake rose. "I don't mind if I do," he said modestly.

And the music of a famous patriotic song was put on the piano, and Miss Glyn's slim fingers ran over the opening chords.

"You chaps have all got to join in the chorus, you know," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Glyn leaned towards Tom Merry as Blake began to sing.

"You were looking at something in the garden, I think, Merry," he remarked, in a low tone, under cover of the music.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered.

"Did you see someone there?"

"I—I—"

"I wish you to tell me."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, I—I thought I saw someone," he said reluctantly.

"Who was it?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Please tell me who it was, Merry," said Mr. Glyn, with unmistakable firmness in his tones. "I want to know."

"Well, sir, you—you see, I couldn't possibly see his face in the dark," said Tom Merry. "I only just caught a glimpse of him."

"Who was it?"

"I couldn't possibly recognise him at that distance, sir."

"But you know who it was?"

No reply.

"You know who it was, Merry?"

"I could guess, sir."

"And whom did you guess that it was?"

"As I couldn't recognise him, sir, it might have been anybody, and so it wouldn't be fair for me to mention any names."

Mr. Glyn compressed his lips.

"Very well!" he said.

He crossed the room again to his armchair, and sat down and seemed to doze again; but Tom Merry knew that he was not dozing. The old gentleman's suspicions had been aroused, and Tom Merry's reticence had, of course, made them stronger. The hero of the Shell felt very much distressed; and Bernard Glyn, who had heard all that his father had said, was dismayed.

"My word," he murmured, "this is rotten! It was idiotic of Wodyer to come into the grounds; when I've seen him



A young man, with pale face and flashing eyes, dashed in at the door of the dining-room. He did not stop to speak. He sprang at the two ruffians like a tiger, and a crushing blow from his fist, landing under the ear, sent one of them reeling to the floor. The other, releasing Mr. Glyn, sprang to meet his new foe.

about here before, he was in the road. It's a bit thick coming into the grounds when the pater is against him."

"Oh, chaps in love are always like that, I believe!" said Tom Merry. "You jolly well never know what they're going to do next."

Glyn nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid the pater may catch him at it, and then there will be a scene," he whispered, "that would be jolly unpleasant for everybody—especially for poor old Edie. I can't get out without the pater noticing, but—but could you slip out into the garden, Tommy, and warn him off! Tell him the pater's got his eye open."

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"I—I say," he murmured, "that's rather thick. Wodyer doesn't really know that we know anything about it, you know."

Glyn grinned.

"I know; but—it's better than risking having a scene—if you wouldn't mind. It was reckless of him to come into the grounds like this."

"Well, you're right. I'll go."

"Slip out while we're yelling Blake's chorus."

"All serene!"

"Chorus!" exclaimed Figgins.

As the chorus rang out, Tom Merry slipped quietly through the French windows into the garden. The moonlight lay dim upon the lawn and shrubbery. The Shell fellow remembered just where he had seen the dim figure, but he did not make direct for the spot. He knew that Mr. Wodyer would withdraw into cover if he imagined that he was discovered, and then the warning could not be conveyed to him. Tom Merry slipped quickly along the terrace, and dived into the shrubbery at some distance from the drawing-room window. He knew the grounds of Glyn House well, and he turned into a path among the rhododendrons that would bring him behind the spot where the dim figure had been standing. He trod very cautiously now; he did not want to alarm the solitary Romeo. He paused abruptly—he had caught sight of the dim figure again. There it was, crouching in the cover of the shrubs, watching the house

with a stealthiness that seemed strangely out of keeping with the character of a Housemaster. Tom Merry felt an uneasy sensation. The man's attitude was more like that of a cracksmen watching a crib he intended to crack, than of a lover looking for a glimpse of his lady. The junior came on softly and tapped the stooping figure on the shoulder.

"Mr. Wodyer—"

There was a hoarse, startled cry. The figure leaped up, and in a flash a savage blow was struck, and Tom Merry staggered and fell.

There was a faint rustle in the shrubbery as the dim form fled, and Tom Merry lay stretched upon the ground, the moonlight glimmered upon his face, upturned, white, and streaked with red that oozed out from under the thick hair.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Mystery.

FROM the open lighted window came the ringing chorus of the juniors. In the shrubbery all was silent. The dimly-seen watcher had fled. Tom Merry lay motionless upon the earth.

He was insensible. The minutes passed.

The lighted window in the distance was darkened for a moment by a form as Bernard Glyn looked out anxiously, wondering what was keeping Tom Merry in the grounds so long.

It was ten minutes before the unfortunate junior moved.

Then he stirred and groaned.

Tom Merry's eyes opened, and he sat up, his hand going unconsciously to his head.

"What—what—"

His head was reeling. He stared about him blankly. The chorus in the house had died away, and there was silence. The moonlight fell coldly upon the shrubs. Slowly recollection came, and Tom Merry staggered to his feet, dizzy and sick.

What had happened?

Who had struck him that cowardly blow?

It could not have been Mr. Wodyer, after all, who had been crouching there in the shrubbery! Surely the Housemaster, however angry and surprised, would never have struck out in that savage manner!

But if it was not Mr. Wodyer, whom had it been?

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl.

It must have been Arthur Wodyer. He had been surprised, alarmed, at being found there, and he had supposed, perhaps, that someone had been spying on him, and he had not meant to hit so hard.

That must be the explanation.

Tom Merry looked at his hand, where it had pressed his forehead, and started. There was a glimmer of red upon his fingers in the moonlight.

It was blood.

He could not go back to the house in that state. He knew what amazement, what inquiries would follow.

He remembered that there was a fountain in the grounds, and he made his way slowly towards the sound of the tinkling water.

He stooped over the marble basin and dipped his handkerchief into the cool water and bathed his forehead.

"Tom Merry!"

He started and swung round as his name was uttered. It was Bernard Glyn. The Shell fellow came up quickly, anxious and amazed.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What's the matter, Tom?"

Tom Merry wiped his wet forehead.

"Did you find him, Tom?"

"Yes."

"But what—what happened?" panted Glyn.

Tom Merry's lips moved in a painful smile.

"He knocked me down."

"Knocked you down!" ejaculated Glyn, in blank astonishment.

"Yes."

"Was it Wodyer?"

"I suppose so."

"Good heavens!"

"Don't say anything about this in the House," muttered Tom Merry quickly. "Not a word! He must have been surprised—excited—and he couldn't have meant to hurt me like this. Don't say a word!"

Glyn stared at him blankly.

"Why, it's horrible!" he muttered. "He must have been a brute to hit you like that. It was not like old Wodyer. Are you sure it was Wodyer?"

"Whom could it have been?"

"Well, that's so."

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't say a word about it—here. I'll be all right in a minute."

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"Let me bathe your forehead."

There was a cut on Tom Merry's forehead under the hair, where hard knuckles had struck cruelly. It had ceased to bleed now, and Glyn wiped away the traces of it. Tom Merry was very pale, but he was himself again now.

"Better get back to the house," he said. "They will be wondering."

"It's jolly queer, Merry!"

"Yes—but come on!"

Glyn nodded, and they went back to the house. Figgins was singing now—a sentimental song of a child and a rose. He was just finishing when the juniors came in, and Blake was looking at his watch.

"Time we were off, my sons," said Jack Blake. "We shall find the gates locked at St. Jim's if we don't buck up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Glyn looked curiously at Tom Merry as he shook hands for good-bye. Quiet old gentleman as he was, he was very keen, and he could see that something had happened in the garden which the junior did not care to allude to. But he asked no questions.

Edith Glyn seemed to be the only one who had noticed nothing. She said good-night to the juniors in her sweet, kind way, and they went down the drive in a cheerful party to the gates. It was not till they were outside the gates of Glyn House that the juniors asked questions.

"Did you see Wodyer in the garden?" asked Figgins.

"I think so."

Figgins stared.

"Don't you know?" he demanded.

Tom Merry explained.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kerr. "It couldn't have been Wodyer."

"Impossible!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it wasn't Wodyer, I don't know whom it could have been," said Tom Merry. "Who else could have been hanging about in the shrubberies watching the window?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"We'll see when we get back to St. Jim's," said Figgins slowly. "If it was Wodyer, we'll jolly soon find out. If he acted in that way we've been mistaken in him, that's all. I thought he was a decent chap."

The juniors were very thoughtful as they walked home to St. Jim's. The matter was a puzzle. The action was utterly unlike anything that could have been expected of handsome, kind-hearted Arthur Wodyer. But if it had not been Wodyer, whom could it have been?

"There used to be another chap who was moony in the same way—a naval chap," Bernard Glyn remarked. "Edie was almost engaged to him once, but it came to an end. But that chap is at sea, and—he wouldn't act like that, anyway. I'm blessed if I can understand the thing at all."

They reached St. Jim's, and Taggles, the porter, snorted as he opened the gates for them. Taggles would have been pleased to report them for coming in so late, only he knew that they had passes out to visit Glyn House. Figgins paused as the other fellows went in to speak to the porter.

"Has Mr. Wodyer just come in, Taggles?" he asked.

"Ow should I know?" said Taggles. "Mr. Wodyer 'as a key to the private gate, Master Figgins. 'Ow should I know?"

There was evidently no information to be had from Taggles. The juniors separated in the quadrangle, the School House fellows going over to their own house, and Figgins & Co. going to the New House. As they entered the New House, the trio stopped and exchanged glances.

"We ought to find out if that was Wodyer," said Figgins.

Kerr and Wynn nodded assent.

"I'll go to his study," said Figgins. "I've got some lines to take to him, and that will make a good reason for going."

"Good egg!"

Figgins fetched his lines down from his study, and knocked at Mr. Wodyer's door. There was a light under the door, showing that the New House master was at home.

"Come in!" called out Arthur Wodyer's cheery voice.

Figgins entered.

The young Housemaster was seated at his table, with a pen in his hand, but he looked up kindly at Figgins. Figgins gave him a very keen look. Arthur Wodyer was a handsome fellow, well-built and athletic, and as much addicted to "games" as the most sporting fellow at St. Jim's could desire. He looked the picture of health and good nature.

"I've brought my lines, sir," said Figgins awkwardly.

"Put them on the table, Figgins." Mr. Wodyer looked sharply at Figgins as the junior lingered. "Is there anything else, Figgins?"

"No—yes!" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"That is a very curious reply, Figgins," he said. "I can see that there is something on your mind. What is it?"

Figgins flushed. He was a very bad hand at keeping a secret. Whenever there was anything on Figgins' mind it was pretty certain to be reflected in his honest, rugged face. "We've just come home from Glyn House, sir," said Figgins.

"Yes?"

"That's all, sir."

"I hope you had a pleasant evening there, Figgins," said the Housemaster genially.

"Oh, yes, sir! Gussy sang, but it was all right otherwise."

Mr. Wodyer laughed.

"I hope all are well there?" he said casually.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very good!"

"We—we thought we saw you there, sir, that's all," blurted out Figgins, his face growing as red as a beetroot.

Mr. Wodyer knitted his brows.

"You thought you saw me there?" he repeated.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Well, you were mistaken," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I was not there. I have not been out of the school since noon. But if you had seen me there, Figgins, it would have been no business of yours. It would not have been a matter for you to take any interest in at all. You must be careful, Figgins, not to take an interest in matters that do not concern you or any junior at St. Jim's. You may go."

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered poor Figgins.

And he went.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Superfluous Young Man.

THE next day Mr. Wodyer sat alone in his study, a downcast look on his face. To have gazed at Mr. Wodyer's features one would have thought that he had all the troubles of the world on his young shoulders.

Suddenly there was a tap on the door.

"Come in!" he said, jumping to his feet.

The door opened and the House-page looked in.

"Gentleman to see you, sir—Mr. Glyn, sir!" said the page.

"Kindly step in, Mr. Glyn!" said the Housemaster.

Mr. Glyn kindly stepped in.

The page drew the door shut, and departed, leaving the millionaire and the Housemaster alone.

There was a moment's silence.

Mr. Wodyer remained standing. Mr. Glyn showed no desire to sit down. The Housemaster did not offer to shake hands; it was pretty clear to him that his hand would not have been taken by the irate old gentleman.

Mr. Wodyer broke the silence, with a faint smile curving the corners of his lips, in spite of his inward misgivings.

"Good-morning, Mr. Glyn!"

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"I did not come here for polite formalities, Mr. Wodyer," he replied gruffly.

"No," said Mr. Wodyer calmly. "May I offer you a chair, sir?"

"I prefer to stand."

"Very well; please yourself, Mr. Glyn, by all means," said the master of the New House pacifically.

"I intend to do so, sir, and in more matters than one!" said the millionaire grimly.

Mr. Wodyer bowed, without replying. He did not seem to think that Mr. Glyn's remark called for any reply.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Glyn, "I am going to speak to you very seriously."

Mr. Wodyer bowed again.

"Thank you!" he said. "But won't you sit down?"

Mr. Glyn had deposited his silk hat and umbrella upon the table. Upon second thoughts, he decided to sit down. The calmness of the athletic young man before him seemed somehow to disconcert the portly gentleman.

"I suppose you know why I have called, sir?" he said, as he settled himself down at last upon a chair.

Mr. Wodyer looked at him steadily.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant of your reason, sir," he replied quietly. "I presume that it is in connection with my suit for your daughter's hand?"

Mr. Glyn flushed with anger.

"I refuse to admit that there is anything of the sort in existence!" he exclaimed. "Suit for my daughter's hand, by Jove! What have you to offer my daughter?"

Mr. Wodyer did not reply.

"Yourself, I suppose?" said the old gentleman sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Anything else of higher value?"

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"I am an honest and decent man, and I love your

daughter," he said calmly. "That is all I have to say for myself."

Mr. Glyn seemed a little impressed.

"Well, that is straightforward, at all events," he growled. "But I suppose you admit that a penniless schoolmaster is not a suitable match for a millionaire's daughter!"

"I hope to be able to support Edith, if she chooses to marry me," said Mr. Wodyer. "And I do not think that riches bring happiness. I do not even think that I should care to be a very rich man, and I am sure Edith does not care for wealth!"

Mr. Glyn smiled grimly.

"She may think she does not," he said. "She spends in hats more than you get in a year as your salary here!"

"Perhaps she might be content to wear old hats as my wife," Mr. Wodyer suggested.

"Her last Pomeranian dog cost as much as your quarter's salary."

"The same dog will last a long time, I hope, sir," said Mr. Wodyer imperturbably. "I shall be able to afford to pay the licence!"

The millionaire burst into a laugh.

"Well, you are a cool young rascal!" he exclaimed, half admiringly. "If you were fitted to be a match for my daughter, I don't know that I should object to you. My son speaks of you very highly, too. But—but you must see, Mr. Wodyer, that since I have become a millionaire, a very large number of young men have thought it would be easier to live on my money than to make some for themselves. I have encountered quite a number of these superfluous young men, but I have always known how to send them about their business!"

"I am glad to hear it, sir."

"And I am quite equal to dealing with one more," said the millionaire significantly.

"Then you regard me as a fortune-hunter?"

"How am I to regard a young man who has nothing, who pays court to a young lady who is heiress to a millionaire?"

"I should think that Miss Glyn herself might be supposed a sufficient reason."

"Well put," said the millionaire, again half admiringly. "But it won't do. That's the long and the short of it—it won't do! When I found how matters were going, I told Edith it wouldn't do, and I told you so. That settled it!"

"Miss Glyn has told me that she could not think of marrying without your consent, sir," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I bow to her decision. I hope some day to have a position to offer that will not be unworthy of her, and I hope to convince you that I am not a mere fortune-hunter!"

The millionaire made an impatient gesture.

"It is not only that you are poor," he said. "Edith will have money enough, so far as that goes. But—well, I want a son-in-law who has the right stuff in him; a man with real grit in him, sir, who will be able to take care of my daughter and her money. Prove yourself to be that kind of man, and I might consider it. But what are you? What have you done? What place have you made in the world? At your present age, you are filling a post temporarily; and after that what are your prospects?"

Mr. Wodyer flushed.

"I hope—"

"Hopes are nothing. What definite prospects have you? None! You cannot look after yourself, and you expect to be allowed to look after my daughter! It won't do, Mr. Wodyer. You must prove that you have real grit in you if you want me to think of you, even, as a son-in-law; not that I'm ever likely to look upon you in that light. In the meantime, I must remind you of what I said at our former interview; you are not to see my daughter—not to meet her, I mean!"

"I think that is very hard upon me, sir, but I have obeyed you."

"You have—what?"

"I have obeyed you," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I repeat that I think your decision hard upon your daughter and myself; but it was Edith's wish that I should obey you, and I have done so!"

Mr. Glyn flushed angrily.

"You call coming into my grounds and hanging about under the windows obeying me!" he exclaimed. "Is that your idea of keeping your word?"

Mr. Wodyer looked at him in surprise.

"Certainly not," he said. "I should not regard that as keeping my word. If I have in passing Glyn House sometimes looked up to see Miss Glyn's window, I do not regard that as a contravention of the agreement. I have done no more than that."

"You have entered my grounds."

"That is a mistake. I have done nothing of the sort."

Mr. Glyn shook a fat forefinger at the young man.

"Do you deny that you were in the grounds of Glyn House

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last evening, listening to my daughter playing, and watching the drawing-room window from the shrubbery?"

Mr. Wodyer looked astonished.

"Most decidedly!" he exclaimed.

"You were not there?"

"I could easily prove that I did not leave the school last evening, sir, if it were necessary; but I expect you to take my word," said Mr. Wodyer coldly.

The millionaire looked at him long and hard.

"I will take your word," he said. "I cannot think that you would lie. But it is very extraordinary; there was certainly someone there, and I am assured that the juniors who were in the room thought that it was you."

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"The impertinent young rascals——"

"Oh, they did not say so! I questioned Merry, but he was very reticent—so reticent that it was clear that he had something to conceal," said Mr. Glyn. "I was certain that it was you. But if you declare that it was not, the matter is at an end, and I have come over here this morning for nothing!"

"Well, it certainly was not me."

"It is very extraordinary!" Mr. Glyn rose to his feet. "I will say good-morning to you now, Mr. Wodyer, and I must ask you to excuse me for having doubted you; but I certainly thought it was you in the shrubberies last evening."

"One word more, sir," said the young Housemaster. "I take it that your only objection to me as a son-in-law is on the score of money?"

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"And what that implies," he said—"I made my way in the world. I expect my son-in-law to do the same. Money is the proof of it. That's all. Not that I would not be willing to accept any other proof that you have grit in you. If you were worthy of Edith you should have her. But I don't think you are."

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"And Miss Glyn's wishes count for nothing?" he asked.

"Oh, Edith will do as I tell her!"

"H'm! And if I could convince you that I am worthy of being considered——"

The millionaire smiled grimly.

"Then I will consider you," he said.

"And the only way——"

"You had better become a millionaire," said Mr. Glyn. "Good-morning!"

And he quitted the study. Mr. Wodyer remained staring after the millionaire, and then staring at the door that had closed behind him, and shut off the portly figure from view. Then he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and paced up and down the study.

"Rotten!" he muttered. "Poor Edith—poor me! But I suppose it was only what I might have expected!"

He threw himself into a chair, with a wrinkled and worried brow. It was a deep problem that was before him—a problem that seemed too deep for the superfluous young man.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Wodyer is Mysterious.

"POOR old Woddy!"

It was Tom Merry who made the remark, as the Shell fellows strolled out of the School House after morning lessons the next day or two later.

Mr. Wodyer had come out of the Fourth-Form room, and crossed the quad to the New House. The chums of the Shell, who felt very friendly towards the New House master, could not help noticing how pale and out of sorts he looked. He looked as if he had passed a very sleepless night, and there were dark lines under his eyes.

"Yes, he does look seedy," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Poor old chap!" said Manners. "This is what comes of being in love, you know. Keep off the grass—oh, my young friends——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Gussy's the only one of us who's ever been in love. But he never looked so bad as Woddy about it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——" began the swell of St. Jim's, who was standing on the steps of the School House, and overheard the remark. "I must say——"

"Hallo, Figgys!" said Tom Merry, as the chums of the New House came out. "You're not looking after your giddy Housemaster. Woddy wants bucking up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins grinned ruefully.

"He does look off colour, doesn't he?" he remarked. "He seems quite to have gone off his feed, you know. He was awfully absent-minded in class this morning, and he fell asleep over the maths."

"No wonder—mathematics make me sleepy," said Blake feelingly.

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"But it shows he's queer," said Figgins. "Fancy a Form-master falling asleep over a lesson, you know! Shows he's in a bad way."

"Yaas, wathah! He wants buckin' up somehow!"

And the juniors all nodded their heads sympathetically. They were all very much concerned about the popular young master, though it is extremely doubtful whether Arthur Wodyer, M.A., would have appreciated their sympathy if he had known about it.

"It's simply rotten," said Kerr thoughtfully. "Woddy is a ripping chap. He's such a change after old Ratty as a Housemaster, you know, that we can't help liking him. I don't like to see him going off colour like this."

"He hasn't much appetite, either," said Fatty Wynn, in a tone of deep feeling. "When a chap begins to go off his feed, you know, there's something radically wrong."

"We ought to back him up, somehow," said Redfern.

The juniors all agreed to that. Fourth Form and Shell, School House and New House, agreed cordially that Mr. Wodyer was a ripping chap, and that he ought to be backed up. But it was not quite clear what his friends in the Lower School of St. Jim's could do to help him.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn strolled away together. As New House fellows, they regarded Mr. Wodyer as being, to some extent, under their special protection. Figgins & Co. had been on the worst of terms with their late Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff, but Arthur Wodyer had been very kind to them from the beginning, and they liked him very much. It was much more comfortable for them to have him in the New House, in the place of the gentleman whom they generally alluded to disrespectfully as "old Ratty." And, taking such an interest in him, it was natural that they should be concerned about him.

"I wouldn't say anything about it before the School House chaps," said Figgins, in a low voice. "Least said soonest mended. But I'm afraid Woddy is taking this very much to heart; and he's not going the right way about it."

"Missing his meals, do you mean?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No, ass; something more serious than that!"

"But there isn't anything more serious than that!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in astonishment.

Figgins sniffed.

"Look here, I got it from Taggles," he said. "You know how Taggles jaws. Woddy goes out of a night."

"What!" ejaculated Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"It's a fact," he said. "I got it from Taggles. You know the masters have keys to the side gate, and let themselves in. The mastiff always barks when the gate's opened, and Taggles hears him, and I heard him grumbling about it. And—and last night I heard the dog barking, and got up and looked out of the dorm window—and there was Woddy, plain as anything in the moonlight, coming in. It was five in the morning."

"Phew!"

"It's jolly serious," said Figgins. "A master has no right to go out every night, and stay away practically all night. The Head would be ratty about it if he knew. Of course, we sha'n't say a word; but Taggles is bound to jaw. It will get out, and it will get Woddy into trouble. As a matter of fact, it isn't quite respectable."

And Figgins looked very serious and thoughtful as he went in to dinner. Dinner was served in the dining-room of the New House, and all the fellows came in, but one person was absent—the Housemaster. Monteith, the prefect, called to Figgins.

"Go to Mr. Wodyer's room, and tell him dinner's ready, Figgins."

"Yes, Monteith."

Figgins hurried to the Housemaster's room. He knocked at the door, but there was no reply from within. Figgins knocked again, and opened the door. Mr. Wodyer was sitting at his table, and his arms rested upon it—his head had fallen forward upon his arms, and he was fast asleep.

Figgins stood for some moments undecided, listening to the heavy, steady breathing of the Housemaster. But it would never do to return to Monteith, and tell him that the Housemaster was asleep in the middle of the day; it would excite too much curiosity. Figgins touched Mr. Wodyer gently upon the shoulder.

Mr. Wodyer started at his touch, and lifted his head drowsily. He saw Figgins, and straightened up at once, frowning.

"Figgins! What——"

"Dinner's ready, sir."

Mr. Wodyer rose to his feet, flushing deeply.

"Dear me!" he said. "I—I must have fallen asleep. Thank you, Figgins!"

Figgins hurried away. Mr. Wodyer rubbed his eyes, and

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looked into the glass, and rubbed them again, blinking in a tired way.

"This won't do!" he murmured. "Hang it! But—but there's no help for it. The old man is silly and obstinate, and won't take any precautions; and I cannot risk harm coming to her. But—but I shall have to be careful."

And Mr. Wodger went very thoughtfully into the dining-room.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Grit!

"NONSENSE!"

Mr. Glyn uttered that expressive word in a tone of finality.

Dinner was over at Glyn House. Dusk had fallen on the wide gardens and shrubberies, and was deepening into night. Bernard Glyn of the Shell had dined at home that evening, having permission from his Housemaster; and he was sitting in a corner of the long drawing-room, wishing that some of his chums were with him, when his father's voice disturbed his reading. He looked up from his book, and glanced across sympathetically at his sister.

Edith was silent, and a little pale. She had been speaking in a low tone, when her father silenced her with that remark.

Glyn rose, and put his book down, and strolled out upon the terrace with his hands in his pockets. He was going to stay the night at his home, and return to St. Jim's in the morning, as he sometimes did. He had a workshop in the house, and he often occupied himself there with contrivances that were too extensive for the study of St. Jim's. At his home, his inventions had to be kept strictly within the limits of his workshop.

"Poor old Edie!" he murmured, as he strolled out upon the terrace. "Fancy trying to reason with the governor! Only a girl would think it possible. I may as well leave them to fight it out."

Edith Glyn glanced round as her young brother disappeared through the French windows. Mr. Glyn settled himself back in his chair, and selected a cigar from his case. When he was in a bad temper, Mr. Glyn smoked cigars in the drawing-room, as a sort of warning to the household generally that his anger was to be feared. He lighted his cigar and snorted. Edith looked at him.

"Papa—"

"Nonsense!"

"But, my dear papa—"

"Nonsense!"

The girl smiled a little.

"But won't you let me speak?" she said. "It is very, very hard of you not to let me see Arthur."

"Nonsense! What's the use of seeing him, when it is impossible for anything to come of it? Why couldn't you be satisfied with a naval officer, for instance?"

Edith coloured.

"But I really care for Arthur," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"There is nothing against him—"

"And nothing in his favour!" growled the millionaire. "Impertinent young puppy, to think that he could marry a millionaire's daughter! Ugh!"

"He would care for me just as much if I were poor," said Edith.

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"Possibly," he said. "I don't doubt that he is fond of you. Even your old father is fond of you, though you bother him to death with your nonsense. But—"

"And Arthur is not so very poor. He is in a good position now," said Edith. "He will probably remain a Housemaster at St. Jim's."

"And you could become a Housemaster's wife, and look after the House accounts, and see clean linen served out to the boys, and so forth, after what you've been used to," said Mr. Glyn sarcastically.

"Yes; I think I should be very happy. Arthur does not want your money, papa, and he is able to look after a wife. I think it is very cruel that mere money should come between me and happiness."

"Mere money! Wait till you can't afford to buy a new summer hat!" growled the millionaire. "Women are always ready to face poverty—till the poverty comes! But it isn't the money. If there were anything in that young man, if he had any real grit, I shouldn't object. You have money enough, goodness knows! It isn't a question of money, but you want a man for a husband—a man who can do things—not a young popinjay in a Master-of-Arts gown, with no ideas in his head above Greek irregular verbs, and no courage for anything better than a game of football."

"I am sure Arthur is quite able to distinguish himself, if he had any opportunity," said Edith. "But—"

"He should make an opportunity, then. I did."

"But we cannot all be millionaires, papa. There would not be enough money to go round," said Edith, smiling.

"I don't ask him to become a millionaire, but to do something to show that there's some quality in him. All he's done is to write me an idiotic note about danger from burglars. I'm an old man, but I'm not afraid of burglars. He's a young man, and he's as nervous as an old hen!" growled the millionaire.

"But it would be only prudent to take precautions—"

"Prudent! When I was a young man I wasn't thinking of prudence. Young men in our days are too prudent. I prefer a little courage."

And Mr. Glyn tossed his half-smoked cigar into the fire, and walked out of the room, to cut short the argument.

Edith sighed.

"It's no good, Edie," said Bernard, looking in at the window. "The governor's a giddy mule—simply a mule. I've tried to reason with him, and it won't work. You'll have to give up Woddy."

"Don't be silly, Bernard! Go to bed!"

Glyn went to bed. Glyn House was an early household, and by half-past eleven there was not a light burning. Edith Glyn looked from her window into the shadowy grounds ere she extinguished her light. The stars were in the sky, and they glimmered over the wide shrubberies, and the row of elm-trees that marked the road beyond the garden walls. A shadow moved under the trees, and the girl's eyes caught it for a moment. Her heart beat quickly at the thought that it might be one she cared for.

The last light went out.

Darkness lay upon the house—silence and slumber.

Silence in the wide, lonely grounds. But when the hour of one had passed, if anyone had been awake in the house, he might have heard a faint sound at the French windows of the dark drawing-room. In the deep shadows on the terrace outside there were crouching forms; and a faint, incessant sound came softly through the stillness.

It was the sound of a diamond eating its way slowly but surely through a pane of glass.

"This 'ere will be an easy job, Badger!" whispered the man who was standing and leaning over the ruffian who handled the diamond. "The old man's a millionaire, and the plate—"

"Thousand quid at least, Jerry!"

"Mebbe twice that!"

"Keep your ears open!"

The man Jerry moved along the terrace a little, and looked and listened. But the house was silent and dark, and the grounds still as death. He returned to the window. There was a faint crack, and a section of glass came out in the hands of the burglar.

"Done it, Badger?"

"All serene!"

A minute more, and the French window was open. Two burly ruffians stepped into the dark and silent room.

"Show a glim for a tick, Jerry—just a glim."

An electric pocket-lamp glimmered out for a few moments, sufficiently to allow the two ruffians to take their bearings. Then all was dark again.

"Hark!" muttered Badger suddenly.

The two ruffians listened. A sound as of a rustle in the shrubbery came wafted upon the night wind through the open window.

"Wot's that?"

"Only the wind, Badger."

They listened for a few moments. The sound died away, and was not repeated.

"I s'pose it was only the wind," muttered Badger.

"That's all, ole pal! Kim on!"

"The dinin'-room's on the left," muttered Badger. "I see 'em at dinner this evenin', from the garden. And the plate's there, I reckon."

Jerry chuckled softly.

"We'll make the haul without waking a soul," he murmured. "But if they wake—"

The Badger set his teeth.

"It will be the worse for anybody who tried to stop me makin' a 'aul like this!" he muttered.

The Badger opened a door silently, and they stepped out into a hall. Across the hall was the door of the dining-room, and they opened it and passed in. The Badger crossed to the windows and drew the blinds carefully, and then the electric lantern was turned on again. Jerry placed it upon the table. As he did so, the Badger gave a violent start, and his hand went into his pocket for a weapon.

"Wot's that?"

Jerry, the less desperate ruffian of the two, turned pale.

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What the Badger had heard was a step in the passage, and the next moment there was a glare of light as the electric lamps were turned on. The figure of an old man in a dressing-gown and slippers appeared at the open door.

"The old cove!" muttered Jerry.

Mr. Glyn stared into the room.

"You scoundrels!" he exclaimed.

The Badger's desperate face became murderous in its expression. Mr. Glyn had awakened and come down—recklessly enough; but he did not seem to feel fear. The Badger's hand came up with a jemmy in it, and he leaped savagely towards the old man. Mr. Glyn started back, but the cracksmen's grasp was upon him, and he was dragged into the room. He fell, the ruffian's knee upon his chest.

"Quiet!" hissed the Badger. "Quiet! Give the alarm, and I'll smash your skull!"

"You scoundrel! Help—"

The jemmy descended. Mr. Glyn tore his head aside, and the blow almost missed; but it struck him slanting, and the blood gushed under the white hair. The Badger's hand rose again, and Jerry called out hoarsely.

"Badger! Don't make it a hanging job, you fool!"

Mr. Glyn, half-stunned as he was, caught the ruffian's wrist, and held back the blow.

"Help!" he cried faintly.

"Jerry, lend a 'and, you fool!"

The second ruffian seized upon the millionaire. There was a crash of rapid feet in the house, in the hall, and a figure dashed in at the door of the dining-room. It was a young man, with a pale face and flashing eyes. He did not stop to speak. He sprang at the two ruffians like a tiger, and a crashing blow from his fist, landing under the ear, sent Jerry reeling to the floor.

The Badger sprang to his feet, releasing Mr. Glyn to face this new foe.

The young man caught his wrist, and with a twist sent the jemmy whirling away. Then his grasp was upon the ruffian. They struggled furiously, and the cracksmen, burly as he was, found that he had met quite his match. His hand slid into his pocket, and came out with a revolver in it.

"Hang you! Take that!"

Crack—crack!

"Ah!"

There was blood upon the young man's face now. But he held on to the cracksmen, and he wrenched the pistol away. There was a crash of breaking glass as Jerry leaped through the window and disappeared. The whole household was up now. Lights were flashing, and women's voices were shrieking. The Badger fell heavily, with his antagonist on top of him, and the back of his head crashed hard upon the floor. A shiver ran through him, and he lay limp and still. He was stunned.

Startled servants were rushing in now. Bernard Glyn was first of the new-comers, and he had a cricket-stump in his hand. The young man, with his hand to his head, reeled away to a chair, and sank down.

"Take care of that scoundrel!" he gasped. "Bind him!"

The servants threw themselves upon the stunned ruffian. Bernard Glyn stared blankly at the young man, upon whose ghastly face the red streak showed up grimly.

"My hat! Mr. Wodyer!"

Mr. Glyn staggered to his feet. He was bleeding from his blow, but he was not seriously hurt. But the case of his rescuer seemed more serious.

"Wodyer," he muttered—"Arthur Wodyer!"

The young man smiled faintly.

"How did you come here?" gasped Mr. Glyn.

"He's wounded!" muttered Bernard Glyn. "Good heavens, somebody buzz off for a doctor! Let me tie it up, sir—"

"Arthur!"

It was Edith's voice. The girl, white as a ghost, came in. Arthur Wodyer tried to sit upright as he heard her voice, but he sank back into the chair with a groan. His senses were reeling.

"Edith! Don't worry! I—I'm all right!" He smiled

faintly again. "You will admit that I have a little grit now, sir?"

"Forgive me!" muttered Mr. Glyn brokenly.

But Arthur Wodyer could not hear. His eyes were closed.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Form-master's Triumph.

ARTHUR WODYER was placed in Bernard Glyn's bed, and the Shell fellow dashed off at full-speed upon his bicycle to fetch a doctor and the police. The Badger, tied hand and foot, was guarded by the servants until the police arrived; and then he was taken to the station. Meanwhile, Arthur Wodyer's injuries were seen to.

The cracksmen had had no time to take aim when he fired, but the shots had gone terribly close. One of them had grazed Arthur Wodyer's head, tearing away a strip of skin under the hair. He would bear that scar to his grave; but it was not a dangerous hurt. But the second bullet was buried in his shoulder, and it had to be extracted. The surgeon shook his head over it.

Mr. Glyn, with his head bound up, was in the room. And so was Edith—calm, but white as a statue.

It had all come out now, from what Arthur Wodyer had muttered when he was laid upon the bed. He had been fearful of harm coming to Edith, and every night he had left the school to keep watch and ward outside her house till the small hours of the morning. Every night had found him at his post, and so he intended to watch, either until the danger came, or he was sure that the danger existed no longer. And it had come, and it had found him ready. It was not Edith upon whom the peril came, as the lover's uneasy fears had dreaded, but her father. If the second blow of the cruel jemmy had reached the old man's head, he would never have risen from the floor in life again.

Arthur Wodyer had saved his life, but it was doubtful for a long time whether he had not given his own in exchange.

The millionaire's remorse was bitter.

"Can you forgive me, my boy?" the old gentleman muttered, when Arthur came to himself the next day.

Arthur Wodyer smiled faintly.

"I have nothing to forgive," he said. "How am I? The doctor won't tell me."

"Bad!" said Mr. Glyn. "I know I can tell the truth to a good plucked one like you. Bad! But we shall pull you through! And Arthur"—Mr. Wodyer started; the millionaire had not called him by his Christian name before—"Arthur, my lad, you remember what I told you—if you showed that you had grit. I've no objection. And you've showed it plainly enough. Heaven knows! You've saved my life, my boy, and I'm not the man to forget that! You are a noble lad, and I was wrong! Get well, my boy, get well; and as soon as you're well enough, there's Edith!"

The girl's hand slid into Arthur's. He pressed it.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "I shall get well, never fear, and I'll try to be worthy of my happiness."

At St. Jim's the excitement was great. Bernard Glyn had gone back to the school and carried the news. For days St. Jim's talked of nothing else. Figgins was stricken with remorse when he heard it.

"That's why old Woddy was out of a night," he said to Kerr and Wynn. "I ought to have guessed it. He was watching Glyn House, in case the burglars went there. Of course, we ought to have known that!"

"I don't quite see how we could have known it," Kerr said. "But it was just like Woddy! He is a splendid chap! Let's hope he recovers!"

Mr. Wodyer did recover, and he was not so long about it as had been expected, either. A strong constitution and the habit of keeping fit had pulled him through. When he came back to St. Jim's for the first time, the fellows—seniors and juniors—gave him a rousing reception. And, sorry as they were to lose him, the whole school wished joy to the man who had won a wife by real grit.

THE END.

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"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, dashing into the wrecked room. "Don't you knock my steam man 'bout like dat, Jonathan!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

How the Steam Man Entered the Hotel—A Lamentable
Smash—The Great Inventor—His Wonderful Invention.

CHAGGA is not a beautiful spot. It was once, but that was before it became a town. The inhabitants of Chagga call it a city, but that does not matter. It is in Africa, on the southern extremity of the Sahara. To the south is the most beautiful scenery; to the north is the desert, which is not beautiful.

Chagga enjoys a fairly large and considerably mixed number of inhabitants, a river, and periodical sandstorms from the desert, and the inhabitants do not enjoy these sandstorms.

Why Jonathan Cyrus Cestor, inventor, ever came to Chagga was a mystery to the inhabitants. They had come there for the sake of gold, but he never dug for it. He had built himself a house on the desert, and came into the town each evening to have a game of rings at the hotel, or some other intellectual amusement. He did not mind expressing his opinion to the inhabitants, and as he always carried a brace of revolvers in his belt, he had not yet been shot for his candour.

He was a tall, spare man, and wore a long grey frock-coat, lighter trousers, and a white, tall hat. He was never seen in any other dress, nor was he ever seen without a big black cigar—or the remains of one—between his teeth. A box of matches must have lasted Jonathan for a very long time, because he always lighted a fresh cigar from the stump of the old one. As for his age, it might have been anything between forty and fifty. Had you asked him, he would probably have told you that it was thirty-five, but then you could not always believe that worthy.

At the present moment he was seated in the smoke-room of the "hotel," and a motley crew were listening to him, for Jonathan had a way of making men listen to him.

The hotel was by far the best building in the town. It was the nearest building to the forest, and its grounds led in a sloping and fairly smooth lawn to the forest; in fact, you could walk right into it, and when the proprietor advertised

his hotel as a charming resort for sick people, he always described his grounds as consisting of several thousand acres of well-cultivated gardens.

"I tell you, boys, and I know," drawled Jonathan, "this rats' hole is the worst place on the face of the earth. If I had my way I would wipe it off the earth, and build a respectable village. As for the inhabitants—"

Jonathan never said what he would do to the inhabitants, for at that moment the French windows came crashing in, while Jonathan received a blow over the head that sent him sprawling to the floor, and in his fall he clutched at Potts' (the hotel proprietor) coat, and ripped it from top to bottom, while he dragged the unfortunate Potts to the floor. After that Potts was kicked half across the apartment, and he commenced to crawl from the room on his hands and knees.

"Good-evening, old hosses!" exclaimed a voice that belonged to Pete, the negro. "Dat's my steam man who has entered de room. Dat dog is Rory, and dese two guffawing individuals are Jack and Sammy."

"You great brute of a nigger!" howled Potts, picking himself up, while Pete was busily engaged in stopping his steam man's arms and legs. "How dare you enter my house in this manner! Look at the damage you've done!"

"M'yes! Dere's certainly some glass broken," admitted Pete. "Still, you hab got-de pleasure ob our company, my dear old hoss; dat's worf a bit. Fancie being able to look at me all day long widout any charge!"

"Waal, I reckon anyone who wanted to look at a nigger would also want a strait-jacket," observed Jonathan, fixing his eyes on the steam man, who was hissing away, and filling the room with steam and fumes. "So you are Jack, Sam, and Pete, are you?"

"You'm guessed first time, my dear old hoss!" answered Pete. "But dat may be because I told you. And who are you?"

"Jonathan Cyrus Cestor, an inventor."

"Look at dat, now! I only knew one inventor, and bought dat steam man from him."

"Waal, he was a man of some ability," observed Jonathan,

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glancing at the steam man. "I'd just like to see how he works, and then, if you come to my house, I'll show you some inventions that will fairly lift your hair."

"Should say de steam man could lift de hair ob anyone who didn't happen to be bald; but don't you tink, old hoss, you had better leabe dat steam man alone. You know, he doesn't like strangers fooling about wid him."

"I shan't hurt it!"

"Nunno! I wasn't tinkin' ob dat."

"Take the brutal thing out of my house!" howled Potts.

"My dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "dat steam man is as harmless as fried bacon!"

"Harmless be hanged! Look at the damage the thing has done. Look at my coat, and—"

"Yah, yah, yah! You will need cotton and a needle dere, and some putty for de window; but, after all, coats and windows don't last for eber!"

"It doesn't matter," declared Jonathan, still intent on the steam man, whose parts he appeared to be very pleased with.

"But I say it does matter!" hooted Potts. "I won't have my house upset with that brutal thing, and, what's more, I will have the damage paid for! You must be a raving maniac to bring it into my house like that."

"Well, I will admit dat was a little mistake," said Pete. "You see, he got too much ob a start ob me, and he slipped frough dat window before I knew his intentions. Now, if—"

"Waal, I calculate I understand the working of this little invention," observed Jonathan, who cared nothing about the damage, or anything else, while he had the steam man to interest him. "If you want to move his arms, all you have to do is—Fury! Stop it!"

Jonathan had touched the lever, and he had no sooner done so than he received a blow on the head that knocked him head over heels, while the steam man's arms went swinging round in the wildest manner possible, and he snorted forth steam.

"Yah, yah yah!" roared Pete. "I tought you were getting a little venturesome wid dat man."

"What's the sense in the brutal thing, anyhow?" snarled Jonathan.

"Tought you said it was ingenious."

"I wouldn't give a cent for a dozen of them."

"He's got 'most enough scent ob his own, hasn't he, old hoss? But neber mind. Dese little things will occur when you go fooling around wid steam men. Now, suppose you stop him?"

"I'll have nothing to do with it. It's a low-down, stupid invention, and the fellow who made it ought to be lynched. You come to my show, and I'll show you some inventions that would knock that thing sillier than it is."

"Yah, yah, yah! You don't seem to hab such a good opinion ob him as when you first made his acquaintance," said Pete, stopping his swinging arms. "I will admit de man is rough; but—"

"Rough!" cried Potts. "Why, the brute has nearly knocked my house down! Someone will have to pay for that; also for my coat."

"Well, dat seems sort ob reasonable, old hoss," said Pete. "Look here, we will put up at dis place, and you can send me in de bill for any damages. I don't spect dat will be de only one, if my steam man stops here."

"See you here!" cried Potts. "You and these gentlemen are welcome to stay at my hotel as long as you like to pay for the accommodation, but I'll be hanged if your steam man does. You can take him to Mr. Jonathan Cyrus Cestor's bungalow, if you like; but he doesn't stop here!"

"Waal, I calculate we'll pay a visit to my show. You can make this place your headquarters, but I want you chaps to come and see a few of my inventions. I built the place, and I will say I have done it something out of the common; but, then, everything I do is out of the common. There isn't a living man who can invent like me. You see that bridge over the stream? I built that. It's very ingenious; but, then, all I do is. These silly brutes here wouldn't be able to appreciate them."

Jack said nothing about the bridge, which did not appear to be anything like ingenious; in fact, it gave him the impression more of being shaky and dangerous.

Pete brought his steam man across it, however, without a collapse, and now they found themselves in open ground, and presently they came in sight of a bungalow with a verandah.

It was certainly very well built, and did credit to its constructor; but when Jack questioned Jonathan he found that he had designed it, but had built it by proxy.

"Come this way," said Jonathan, "and I will show you my great invention. It's the most wonderful invention that ever was—but then, I made every bit of it!"

He led them to a large, barn-like building, the door of

which he opened, then pointed to a really beautifully-made flying-machine.

"It may look nothing to you," he observed. "I know better, because I made it. That colossal invention is all out of my own brain, and if I were a conceited man I should brag about the thing. There are other flying-machines on this earth, but there's nothing to come up to that. You see, the others all go on the wrong principle. With that machine there's nothing wrong. What do you think of it, Jack and Sam?"

"It is beautifully made," answered Jack, with perfect truth. "Did you make the engine?"

"I made everything about it. There isn't a screw in the whole contraption that I didn't make. I made the petrol that works it—that is to say, I refined it. If I were anything like a conceited man, a marvellous invention like that would about turn my brain. You see, I know exactly all the beautiful parts about it. I've dreamed of that machine, and the more I think about it the more it astounds me to know that any one man has the stupendous intellect to make such a machine."

"But will it fly, old hoss?" inquired Pete, who, not being an inventor, was a little more practical than Jonathan.

"I am going to let you try it this morning. I haven't a doubt about the matter, because this isn't the first flying-machine that I have made. Get into it with me, and I'll show you how it works. If you can work that steam man, you ought to be able to fix up my flying-machine, because, like all truly great inventions, it's simple. Those rotating fan wheels at the top take it up. They work on universal joints, and these levers shift them in any direction you like. It's on the principle of those tops where you pull a string and they go flying upwards, and by shifting their angle you can turn the machine as you like. If you cant them forward, it helps the machine along; backwards, it sends it back, and so on. I don't want a machine that you have to run along the ground for a quarter of a mile or so to make it rise. I want one that will rise when it is stationary. Now, suppose you are high in the air, and the motor breaks down. What would happen?"

"Spect I would get killed."

"No, you wouldn't. You turn this lever, and it throws out side wings from the top of the contraption that practically turns the flying-machine into a parachute. You would come to the ground as gracefully as a lark—Here, don't go fooling about with the machinery! Listen to me!"

Pete did. He listened for quite an hour, and Jonathan described the working of the machine in a very lucid manner. Pete can learn when he wants to do so, and as he did want now.

"If you were to cant the starboard fans forward and the port fans backwards, you would spin round like a top," explained Jonathan. "Your common-sense tells you that. It also tells you that if you work the fans slowly the machine would rise slowly. See?"

"M'yes."

"If you work them quicker, she will rise quicker. You can regulate the speed to anything, and keep the flying-machine stationary if you like. It is all a matter of quickening or reducing speed. You can regulate that by this lever, just the same as you can regulate a clock. Now, this is really the steering-gear, and it is on much the same lines as the other fans. You regulate it—so, and so! Think you understand?"

"M'yes. But it seems to me dat you know so mighty much 'bout it dat you would be de properest person to go up for de first time."

"How can I watch its evolutions if I am in the machine?"

"I dunno."

"Of course you don't, you silly nigger!"

"Suppose it turns upside down?"

"It can't. The fiercest storm that ever raged will have no effect on it. All the weight is at the bottom, and wind will have no more effect on it than would rain. Safety is what I have gone for. You have got it there. She runs along the ground on her own wheels. I'll show you. You know a bit about motor-cars?"

"M'yes. More dan 'bout flying-machines; and I'm inclined to tink I prefer de motor-cars."

"Then you will understand how the motor works in this contraption. It's simplicity personified."

"Do you consider dat will make it dangerous?"

"I calculate you are the most cowardly nigger I ever came across! Stand clear there, boys! We are coming out!"

They came out in fine style, and Pete was pleased. It is true that they went rather slowly, but Jonathan explained that he could go quicker if he chose.

"I'm sorry there's no wind," he observed, glancing upwards at the heavens, which looked threatening, while now and then they could hear distant thunder.

The storm which had been threatening for some time appeared to be coming up.

Jack and Sam watched the proceedings with considerable alarm. They knew that it would be quite useless to try to dissuade Pete if he had made up his mind to ascend in the flying-machine; at the same time, they felt pretty confident that it would not rise.

Jonathan gave Pete some more instructions, showing him how to open out the top to form a parachute in case of accidents.

"Now, you chump of a nigger, are you going up or not?"

"Dat's just what I don't know, old boss. It all depends on your machine. If dat will go up, it follows dat I shall go up wid it. Now, I'm inclined to tink dat it will go up. Golly! Here comes de storm, too! Still, you say dere ain't de slightest danger in a storm, and dat de fiercest gale won't affect your flying-machine; so I tink we will chance it. Now, just you stand out ob de way, boys, and I will see what can be done wid de contrivance; but you'm got to remember, Jonathan, dat if I kill myself I shall bring an action against you for damages, 'cos you hab told me dere's no danger 'bout de concern."

"You are safer in that machine in the air than you are on the ground here. There's lions about this part, and they might seize us. They can't seize you if you are half a mile above the earth. Don't you forget any of the instructions I have given you, else you may come to grief."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Pete in the Air—How He Steered the Machine—A
Disastrous Ending—Pete's Hardest Blow.

"I SHA'N'T forget de destructions!" observed Pete, starting the engine; and his action was followed by a whirling sound, while he leapt out of the machine with a wild howl.

"You silly scoundrel!" howled Jonathan, leaping in and stopping the engine, for it looked very much as though the flying-machine was going up.

"I thought I was going to get an electric shock, old boss!"

"How could you get that, you raving maniac?"

"I danno, old boss; but it felt just as if it was coming, and I didn't seem to care to wait for it. Dere was a sort ob whizzy-whirling feeling dat seemed as dough it wasn't going to be good for my nerves. Still, if you are sure dere ain't going to be an electric shock, I don't mind habing anoder shot. Golly! Here comes de lightning! I hope de gas won't explode!"

"You are a perfect idiot!" snarled Jonathan. "There is no gas in the contraption. Jump in, and do try to behave yourself like a reasonable nigger, and not like a raving maniac!"

"Bery well! We will make a new recommencement, only I wish dis storm would hab waited for an hour or so."

"It's blowing nothing to speak about; besides, I don't care if it blows a hurricane!"

"I know you don't, old boss; but, you see, I do, and I consider myself de most interested party. Suppose you would not like to come up wid me?"

"Certainly not!" cried Jonathan, leaping out as Pete started the engine.

Again there was a loud whirling sound as the elevating fans spun round; but the machine showed no signs of flying.

"It's gibing me pins and needles in all my limbs!" observed Pete. "I rader tink it is frightened ob going up by de way it is trembling."

"You have got the motor working about as slowly as it can go," said Jonathan.

"De fans seem to be going mighty fast."

"Yes. That is the object. Now quicken the engine a little. There you are! She's lifting!"

"M'yes! And she's bumping, too!" growled Pete.

"Feels like being in a vessel on de rocks in a seaway. I'm

going to put de engine faster—like so!—to save de bumps."

Pete put the motor at full speed, and up shot the flying-machine at a pace that not only amazed Jack and Sam, but also alarmed them greatly.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dis is a splendid sensation! Shall get to Germany in no time at dis rate—dat is, if I don't get struck by lightning. Don't seem to care for anoder electric shock just at present. Ain't quite recovered from de first one. Golly! Ain't dere some storm knocking 'bout?"

There was a brilliant flash of lightning, and the crash of thunder came almost instantaneously. Pete knew that the storm was very close to him, and he was paying more attention to it than he was to the flying-machine.

"I must say, Pete, dat you work a flying-machine wid wonderful accuracy!" said that worthy, speaking aloud. "I wish you had Jack and Sammy here, so dat you could praise yourself to dem; still, you will be able to do dat, old boss, when you come down, unless you happen to come down too suddenly. I tink I will keep close to de ground for de first flying trip, so as to render de fall, if dere is one, sort ob less severe. Should tink I am 'bout high enough now for falling purposes. Let's hab a look."

Pete stepped to the side of the flying-machine, and, holding on by one of the upright iron rods, hung outwards over space. A man who had not been an acrobat would scarcely have dared to do so; but Pete's nerves were affected by no height.

"Why, golly!" he gasped. "I'm completely out ob sight ob de earth! Can see de storm, and dat's about de lot ob it. Golly—golly! Why was I born black? I'm most certain all niggers are unlucky, and tink it must be deir colour. Still, dis particular nigger has ascended quite high enough. We will approach a little nearer de falling place."

Pete slackened his engine, but unfortunately he was working it much by chance. Had Jonathan been aboard, as he should have been, there is not a doubt that they would have got on far better.

It seemed to Pete that he was in the middle of a raging storm, and the only redeeming point about it was that there was little or no wind.

Whether he was ascending or descending he had not the slightest idea, but as he slowed down the engine the vibration diminished considerably.

The storm was now raging with terrible fury. The flashes of lightning were almost continuous, while the thunder never ceased to roll through the black heavens; but its fury made Pete hope that it would soon pass away.

For about ten minutes he was in that storm, and then by the longer intervals between the lightning and the thunder he knew that the storm was passing, and almost suddenly he saw the earth beneath him, and found that he was descending rather more rapidly than he cared for.

He could see the bungalow, with his comrades standing at some little distance from it, and now he slightly quickened the speed of the engine.

The flying-machine still descended, but so gradually now that he felt convinced it would take the ground without damage.

This would have quite satisfied most people, but it did not satisfy Pete. He wanted to test the machine thoroughly, and he determined to see how fast he could travel in a wide circle.

Starting the propeller, he fixed it at an angle that he imagined would run the machine round in a circle; and this is exactly what it did, but Pete had never anticipated that it would go at such a terrific speed.

The earth seemed to fly past his gaze in dizzy circles, and every time he went swooping over his comrades' heads, he heard Jonathan yelling out instructions.

"Hallo, you dere!" bawled Pete. "Tell me when I am coming to de station. I tink I must be de Flying Dutch-

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man, or one ob dose non-stopping vessels. Golly! Ain't we going at a mighty pace! Should say we shan't be long in getting dere. I tink I will light my pipe while I'm furdur considering de matter."

Jonathan's howling became louder than ever, but Pete calmly filled his pipe.

What made Jonathan so fearfully excited was that the flying-machine, while rushing round in great circles, was gradually descending, and he knew that unless Pete stopped its wild career something serious would happen.

"Now den, boys!" roared Pete, when he had got his pipe alight, "watch me drive up in tip-top style."

Pete stopped his engine, then there was a terrific crash. The flying-machine had dashed into Jonathan's bungalow, and the wreck caused was something frightful to behold.

The veranda and the wall of the house was torn away, while parts of the building flew about in all directions.

The terrific impact caused Pete to sit on the floor of the flying-machine, which dropped to the ground with a heavy bump.

"All change here!" cried Pete, puffing at his pipe, and gazing at Jonathan with exasperating calmness. "I am perfectly satisfied wid de trial ob de machine, old hoss! What's de matter wid de man? He ain't been habing fits, has he, boys? Oh, do stop your laughter! Can't you see dat dis ain't a case for laughter?"

"Beast! Black scoundrel!" shrieked Jonathan, who was in such a state of excitement that he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Oh, you viper! Look what you have done to my aeroplane!"

Jonathan seemed to care more for the damage done to his flying-machine than to his house, and, after a careful examination, he came to the conclusion that there was not very much harm done to the flying-machine, and calmed down a little.

"Waal," he exclaimed, "you are sillier than a jibbing moke; but I suppose that is only what one might expect of a nigger. The brutes haven't got the brains of a monkey, let alone those of a human being; but they can't help that. The mistake was ever to set them at liberty. Look at the expenses it would have saved in labour, and you can keep a nigger on next to nothing."

"I dunno dat you would find my little food bill come to such a trifling amount," observed Pete.

"It would the way I should feed you," retorted Jonathan. "But that has nothing to do with the question. I shall have to make another rod there, and you will have to help me. Come into my workshop; I want you to blow the bellows."

"Jack and Sammy are rader clever bellows-blowers," observed Pete.

"You come along, and don't you try to shirk your work," said Jonathan. And Pete went, while Jack and Sam followed, laughing. They had an idea that if Pete got helping with red-hot irons there would be some fun, from their point of view.

Having explained that the forge was one of the cleverest inventions on the face of the earth, and quite unlike any other one, Jonathan lighted the fire, and ordered Pete to work the bellows.

"You don't want to blow too hard," explained Jonathan, "because those are mighty powerful bellows. The idea is to save labour."

"I ain't at all likely to waste any ob my labour," observed Pete. "I never have been accused ob doing dat all my life. Get your iron ready, dough I must say I don't see what you want to make it hot for, considering dat you hab got de rod all ready."

"Why, I want to flatten the ends, and punch two large holes through for bolts," answered Jonathan, shoving the rod into the fire.

Pete worked the bellows in a most leisurely manner, and he made Jonathan snarl at him because he stopped once to attend to his pipe.

"Will you go on, you silly villain? Do you think I want to wait six weeks to make this iron red-hot? I like working quickly."

"Funny ting dat, old hoss," observed Pete; "I don't like working at all. However, as you like working quickly, I can easy show you how dat has got to be done."

Then Pete worked those bellows as though his life depended on it, and the result was very funny.

About a painful of red-hot cinders flew into the air, and Jonathan uttered wild yells as he received a shower of them. As he sprang backwards he flung the red-hot bar into the air, and, stumbling over the anvil, banged the back of his head on the ground, while his legs hung over the anvil.

Pete fared even worse, for that bar flew straight for his face. It would certainly have hit him had he not caught it, but the worst of it was that he caught it by its red-hot end.

"Woorooh!" he yelled, leaping into the air, while, needless to say, he dropped the bar. "I'm burnt! Dat iron was mighty hot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "Red-hot iron often is uncomfortably hot. I hope you haven't hurt yourself, Pete."

"So do I, Jack, but I'm mighty certain dat I hab. Dere's a feeling in my hand dat makes me sure I'm hurt. Golly, golly! Jonathan may be a clever inventor, but I must say he's a mighty clumsy one. I dunno why you wanted to turn somersaults ober your anvil, old hoss. Still, I don't mind your doing dat, dough I must say I object to your frowning red-hot iron bars at my head."

"You stupid beast!" howled Jonathan, picking himself up. "How dare you blow a sackful of ashes into my face?"

"I didn't want de ashes to go anywhere in particular, and if dey chose to fly at your face, you must blame de ashes, and not de nigger. Do stop dat laughter, boys! Funny ting dat you always start yowling wid laughter directly any little accident occurs. You ought to be mighty sorry."

"Ha, ha, ha! We are, Pete. But the way you dropped that iron was funny, and the way you dropped Jonathan was funnier still."

"I dunno when I felt much hotter iron dan dat," growled Pete, gazing at his hand. "Still, neber mind about rubbing your noddle, old hoss. Just you get on wid your work. If I was your master, I should knock someting off your wages for your clumsiness."

Jonathan wanted Jack or Sam to do the blowing for the future, but Jack declared that Pete was doing it so nicely that he had better continue.

Pete got on better after that, but perhaps this was because he followed Jonathan's instructions more closely.

"Now listen to me, you empty-headed idiot!" growled Jonathan, who was not at all inclined to be polite. "Do you see that large hammer there?"

"What, de one wid de head to it?"

"Yes. Do you suppose I want you to use a hammer that has got no head to it?"

"Nunno; but I was just tinkin dat—"

"Oh, well, don't try to think! With a head like yours you're nearly sure to do some damage if you commence to think."

"Eh?"

"I say you haven't got the capacity to think. I want you to give the punch I shall hold a sharp blow, so as to drive it through the iron. Think you understand that?"

"Do you want de punch hit on de top?"

"Well, of all the silly villains I ever met, you are the worst! Do you suppose I want the punch hit on the point? I want you to give it a hard blow."

"About how hard, old hoss?"

"It's too awful! About as hard as a piece of patty."

"Well, I dunno how hard dat is, 'cos sometimes it's quite soft, and at others it's as hard as nails."

"Waal, put your head on the anvil, and I will show you with the hammer how hard I want the thing struck."

"Try Jack's. I ain't got time for de purpose."

"Pick up the hammer. Now then, are you ready? I don't want the iron to get cold," said Jonathan, withdrawing the glowing iron and placing it on the anvil, while he held the punch in the correct position.

"Dat iron don't look anyting like cold, old hoss," said Pete, giving the punch a slight tap that was no earthly use for the purpose.

"You stupid creature! Hit it; don't tap it! Here, hit it as hard as you can!"

Pete raised the hammer, and brought it down as hard as he could hit.

He smashed the handle of the large hammer, and its head flew up and hit Jonathan on the nose, while the force of the terrific blow was so great that it drove the punch on to the anvil, and as it was forced sideways Jonathan's knuckles came into contact with the red-hot iron, while the yells he uttered showed that he was considerably hurt.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I wonder what de man's yowling at now? I tell you what it is, boys. Dere's no satisfying him one road or de oder."

"I'd like to brain you!" hooted Jonathan, stamping about and clapping his burnt hand. "How dare you hit the thing like that?"

"Well, I tink I can hit it a bit harder, if you hab got a hammer wid a stronger handle. Just shove de iron in de fire again, and I will see if I can hit it a bit harder next time. I can generally manage to go one better wid my strength."

"It's too silly!" groaned Jonathan. "The idiotic brute has severely burnt my hand. Fancy the maniac hitting like that!"

"Well, I keep telling you dat I shall be able to hit harder next time. You're so mighty impatient."

"I don't want you to hit harder, you silly idiot! You hit about ten times too hard, and you smashed my fingers down on the red-hot iron. Here, Jack, you come and do it. It's no use trusting to this raving maniac. You would want a sledge-hammer to drive an ounce of sense into him. I am surprised that you take the imbecile brute about with you. I wouldn't have him at any price, let alone for nothing. It's nothing to laugh at. The fellow has burnt my hands."

"Well, you certainly told him to hit as hard as he could," laughed Jack; "and that is what he appears to have done, although I dare say he would be able to hit a little harder, especially if he had a heavier hammer. Now then, get your iron hot again, and I will see what I can do."

They got on much better after that. Pete seated himself, and gave them instructions as to how they ought to do it, but he took no active part in the affair, and perhaps this is why Jack and Jonathan got on all right. In fact, Jack proved so useful that Jonathan asked them to remain there that night, so that they could get on with their task early the following morning.

"We don't mind remaining, old hoss," said Pete, "provided dat I can bring my steam man into your sitting-room. I don't want him to be out in de rain all night."

"It's not raining."

"Nunno! But I tink it is going to do so. Besides, a lion might come along and eat him up, or someone might steal him."

"It's a pack of nonsense! However, you can bring it in, so long as you don't let it do any damage."

"Nunno! He ain't at all likely to do dat."

"I calculate from what I know of him, he's about the likeliest party to do damage on the face of this earth. All the same, you may bring him in, and stand him in that corner. I want to make a sketch of an idea I have got. Always like to put these ideas down, in case they should escape my memory, though when a man has an intellect like mine he very seldom forgets anything."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jonathan's Frightful Predicament—Another Disastrous Flight.

PETE got his steam man into the room all right, and then, as Jonathan commenced his sketching and calculations, probably with a view to impressing the comrades, they decided on going out to try for some game, as they had an idea it would be as well to replenish Jonathan's larder, unless they wanted to go hungry.

It was pretty late in the afternoon when they returned, well provided with game. Pete was leading the way, and he was carrying the bulk of the game.

"Do hurry up, boys!" he exclaimed. "You make me tired, de way you walk. Here, I hab got all de weight ob de spoils ob de chase, and yet you can't keep up wid me."

"No!" exclaimed Jack. "We were just saying that you must be fearfully hungry, or you would never go at a pace like that."

"Den you shouldn't make dose impersonal remarks, Jack. What you ought to do is to say— Hi, golly! What's all dat?"

Pete did not mean that Jack ought to say "Hi, golly!" His exclamation was caused by some of the most extraordinary howls proceeding from the bungalow. Pete dropped his burden and rushed into the place, and then the sight that met his gaze caused him to howl with laughter.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Don't you knock my steam man 'bout like dat, Jonathan!"

The steam man had got Jonathan by the hair, and was wrenching him up and down in a manner that, although undoubtedly painful, was really funny. He appeared to be trying to beat the carpet with the unfortunate inventor's body.

By the time Jack and Sam rushed into the room Pete had stopped his steam man and unfastened his grip on Jonathan's hair.

Jonathan was sitting on the floor, hooting, and tears were running down his cheeks. Pete was seated in an easy-chair, howling with laughter.

"Yah, yah, yah! Golly, golly! I dunno when I saw anything so funny!" he roared. "Yah, yah, yah! 'Scuse me laughing at you, Jonathan, but you're really too funny to lib on dis earth. Yah, yah, yah!"

"Oh, you villain!" howled the damaged man. "How dare you laugh at me? My hair is torn out by the roots!"

"Neber mind, old hoss. De seeds from de old hair are 'most bound to come up again. It's like mignonette, and sows its own seeds. Yah, yah, yah! I notice dat de steam man has got a handful or so. You must be like de ladies,

who use deir own combings to stop up any little gaps. You see, dey can den swear hard and fast dey wear deir own hair."

"You had no right to bring that brutal thing into my house!" howled Jonathan.

"Why, you told me dat I might! Ob course, if you will get fooling about wid de mechanism ob de man, you must expect—"

"Perdition! I was only seeing how it worked."

"Bery well. Now you hab seen exactly how he works. Yah, yah, yah! And it will be a sort ob guidance for future occasions. Don't laugh at de man, Jack. Can't you see my steam man has punished him enough, and dat his temper is in a frightfully rocky condition? De man wants smoothing down de right way. I tell you what it is, Jonathan, old hoss. If you like, I will put my steam man in motion, and let him smooth you down. I dessey if de man is correctly worked you will find him no end comforting. Don't seem to care for it? Well, suppose you lend me a razor, and I will start him shaving you. I bery much want to test his shaving abilities."

"You just take the brutal thing out of my sight!"

"Well, I don't consider dat's fair. I tested your invention widout any charge, and I tink you ought to test my steam man. You see, I want to watch his operations, and when you are performing wid him you don't get much time to watch anything except yourself."

Jonathan was too much hurt to appreciate Pete's pleasuries. Even when the comrades prepared a very good dinner, and Jonathan was seated at it, he remained in a sulky condition.

In fact, the inventor was sulky all the rest of the evening.

In the morning, however, when they were all seated at breakfast, there was quite a different look on his face. He even smiled at Pete.

"My flying-machine is ready for another flight," he said, rubbing his hands with delight. "I believe it is in even better trim than before. You must all come out and have a look at it. And you, Pete, had better get ready to make another flight."

"Golly!" gasped Pete. "I—"

"Come along!" said Jonathan, and, grabbing Pete by the arm, he dragged him outside where the flying-machine was lying ready for flight.

"Don't you think she looks a little beauty?" said the inventor. "Why, of course you do! I needn't have asked that question. Come, Pete, jump into the seat."

Pete got into the seat, and at the same time winked at Jack and Sam. The comrades guessed that lying at the back of Pete's mind was some ingenious scheme.

"Are you ready?" asked Jonathan.

"Not quite, old hoss," said Pete. "I'm not quite sure weder I remember all de directions for steering dis machine. I wish you'd explain dem once again."

Jonathan immediately got into the flying-machine, and commenced to give Pete the necessary directions. Pete did not listen to the man's words, but started the motor at full speed, and up shot the flying-machine at a most alarming pace.

For some minutes Jonathan did not appear to realise what had happened, and by the time he did realise it, they were so far from the earth that a fall must have proved fatal.

Nevertheless, in his excitement and terror, Jonathan rushed to the side of the machine, and took the leap.

"Hi, golly!" yelled Pete, grabbing him by the ankle with one hand, while he clutched at one of the upright iron rods with the other. "Do you tink you can fall two-free hundred feet widout hurting yourself?"

Jonathan realised his peril now, and commenced to howl for help. Each moment he expected that Pete would let him fall; but that worthy was holding on with all his strength, and all the time the flying-machine was darting straight upwards at a surprising pace.

Exerting all his strength, Pete gradually drew the terrified man into the flying-machine, and he sat on the floor trembling with fear.

"You villain!" groaned Jonathan. "Stop the ascent! We shall be dashed to atoms! The height we are at is terrible!"

"You told me dere was no danger."

"I meant for you. Here, I am going no higher!"

"Now, look here, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, grabbing him as he was about to stop the motor. "I ain't letting you feel wid de engine till you are a little calmer. If you stop it all ob a sudden, it stands to reason dat we shall descend rader faster dan will be good for our constitutions. Directly you hab recovered from your terror—"

"Terror be hanged! I have no fear—don't know what it is. But I don't want you to break your silly neck!"

"Dat's what I'm not wanting to do; and dat's de reason I

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ain't letting you get at de engine till you'm in a sort ob calm state ob mind."

"Waal, you slacked de engine!" exclaimed Jonathan, calming himself as best he could, for he knew that while he was discussing the point with Pete, they were rushing upwards, and that they had already attained a terrible height.

"You ain't going to jump out in your terror?" inquired Pete.

"Of course I'm not! I did not know we were so far from the ground before."

"Bery well, old hoss, den we will see what can be done in reducing de speed ob de ascent."

There was no difficulty in doing this, but Jonathan was not satisfied until they had brought the machine about thirty or forty feet from the ground, and then he commenced to manoeuvre it, and in about ten minutes' time he became quite bold, and commenced to boast about his wonderful invention.

"Nebber mind about de bragging part ob de business, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Just you attend to de engine, 'cos you hab got to remember dat a drop ob forty feet is painful, specially if you happen to fall on your noddle."

"Yes, we will get lower still, and then I will show you what I can do. There's no other machine on earth like it."

Jonathan certainly manipulated the machine in a very skilful manner, and Pete took notice of his instructions.

"Now, you see how simple it is!" exclaimed Jonathan, highly pleased with himself. "There is nothing to be afraid of, because, as I tell you, if the engine broke down, you could open the parachute. I want you to thoroughly understand the machine, because I am going to make use of you."

"Dat's mighty kind ob you, old hoss!"

"I want a man who, like myself, is absolutely fearless."

"Golly! Yah, yah, yah! I am tinkin' 'bout de ascending part ob de business. Dere seemed to be a good lot ob your absolute fearlessness oozin' out den."

"Now, I will show you how the parachute works. You extend it like this, and—Woohoo! Save me!"

Jonathan ended his sentence with a wild howl, for that flying-machine ducked downwards, and struck the earth with a frightful crash.

The parachute might have worked all right when the flying-machine was stationary, but as it was skimming along when Jonathan extended the parachute, the rush of wind caught it, causing the machine to dive downwards with most disastrous results.

Pete, who had grabbed one of the iron uprights, and stuck to it, came off all right; but Jonathan was not so fortunate. He was hurled against the machinery with alarming force, and by the time Pete had stopped the motor, Jonathan looked in a very dilapidated state.

He sat up, and gazed with a blank expression.

His clothing was ripped to pieces, and he had a black eye, while his cigar had been smashed into his mouth.

"Did you hurt yourself dat time, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"Hurt myself? Why, you stupid villian, can't you see I'm hurt?"

"Yah, yah, yah! I must say you look a little de worse for wear. But here comes Jack and Sammy to congratulate you. It's all right, Rory, we ain't hurt in any way. Yah, yah, yah! You look as dough you wanted a wash and brush up, Jonathan! I tink I would hab four-penn'orth dis journey. You look as dough you would require more dan de ordinary two-penn'orth. Yah, yah, yah! You hab made yourself in a state wid your fearlessness!"

"You are the stupidest nigger I ever met, and that's saying a great deal!" declared Jonathan, jumping to his feet, and examining his flying-machine to see the extent of damage done. "It was your fault that the accident occurred, as you would persist in seeing how the parachute worked."

"I dunno 'bout dat. Can't remember waiting to see anything like dat; and I must say dat I ain't favourably impressed wid de working ob dat parachute. It certainly brings de machine to de ground, but it brings it rader quicker dan I care for, and dere is a nasty jerk when it lands."

"What is the sense of talking to a nigger? They haven't got the intellect to understand your meaning. What I maintain is, that my invention is a perfect success!"

"Seems to be one or two drawbacks to it."

"There are drawbacks to every new invention. No man, however great his ability, can perfect a thing the first time. I have got that flying-machine more perfect than any other man on earth, but that is because I have greater ability."

"Well, I'm glad you tink so, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "It would be more to de point if you could convince oder people as well as yourself. But as you are neber likely to do dat, we won't boder ourselves 'bout de matter. Suppose we leabe dis invention for a time, and come and hab a look at de oder one."

"I am quite willing to do that. It is the work of many years, and one of the most wonderful pieces of mechanism you ever set eyes on. In fact, it is the most wonderful thing in the world."

"Sort ob more wonderful dan your flying-machine?"

"Mark my words, and I never speak anything but the truth, as the stars pale before the brilliant light of the sun, so does that invention—mighty as it is—pale before one that is infinitely mightier."

Jonathan placed one hand in his breast, and pointed with a new cigar at his flying-machine.

"Look at dat, now. I can't quite understand a flying-machine palin, dough I noticed you did all dat when you went up in it. Still, you can't help being a miserable coward, can you, old hoss? And perhaps your best plan is to try to make oder people believe you are a brave man. De only ting is, dat you oughtn't to yowl like a frightened cat, if you want dem to tink you are brave."

"You are an ignorant, half-witted nigger, and cannot comprehend the minds of great men."

"Well, we won't boder 'bout dat. Hab you got de oder invention here?"

"No, stupid! It could not be brought here. But I am quite willing to take you to it. In fact, that is only fair, as I intend to allow you to take a share in the great concern. We will start a small company, and you shall be the shareholders. Quite a private concern."

"What are you going to be in dat company, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"The managing director and chief cashier."

"Golly! Den I shall buy a full-sized safe, and keep you locked up in it wid de money. I ain't gibing you permission to fool around wid my money, if I know it. You may be honest, Jonathan, but you don't look it, by any means."

"Are you prepared to make the journey to the place where my mighty inventions is?" inquired Jonathan.

"Myes! I 'spect Jack and Sammy want to see it. Is it anything like a child's kite, or a trap for bluebottles?"

"Of course it isn't!"

"Well, I'm rader glad ob dat, 'cos I dunno dat I would care to see anything like dat."

"I tell you it is the most wonderful thing on the face of this earth."

"What, more wonderful dan you are?"

"I'm talking of inanimate things."

"Don't you come under dat heading?"

"You see, it is perfectly useless my talking to such an utter idiot," said Jonathan, turning to Jack. "I can get on all right with a man of education. Now, let's come to the house, and you shall write out a full description of the wonderful invention. You can do it as a reporter would, and I will shove it in a lot of European papers."

"Don't you think it would be advisable for me to see this invention first?" inquired Jack.

"Not a bit of it! I will describe it for you, and you can write as though you had been all over the thing."

"Look here, Jonathan, how long is this article to be?"

"Three columns."

"Well, if you think I am going to write three columns of abominable falsehoods, you are mistaken. We don't mind looking at your invention, but we are not going to crack it up before we have seen it. Your flying-machine is all right, I admit; but the other may be all wrong. You will have to leave that article till I have seen it."

"Well, it makes no odds. We will start to-morrow morning."

And so they did!

THE END.

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