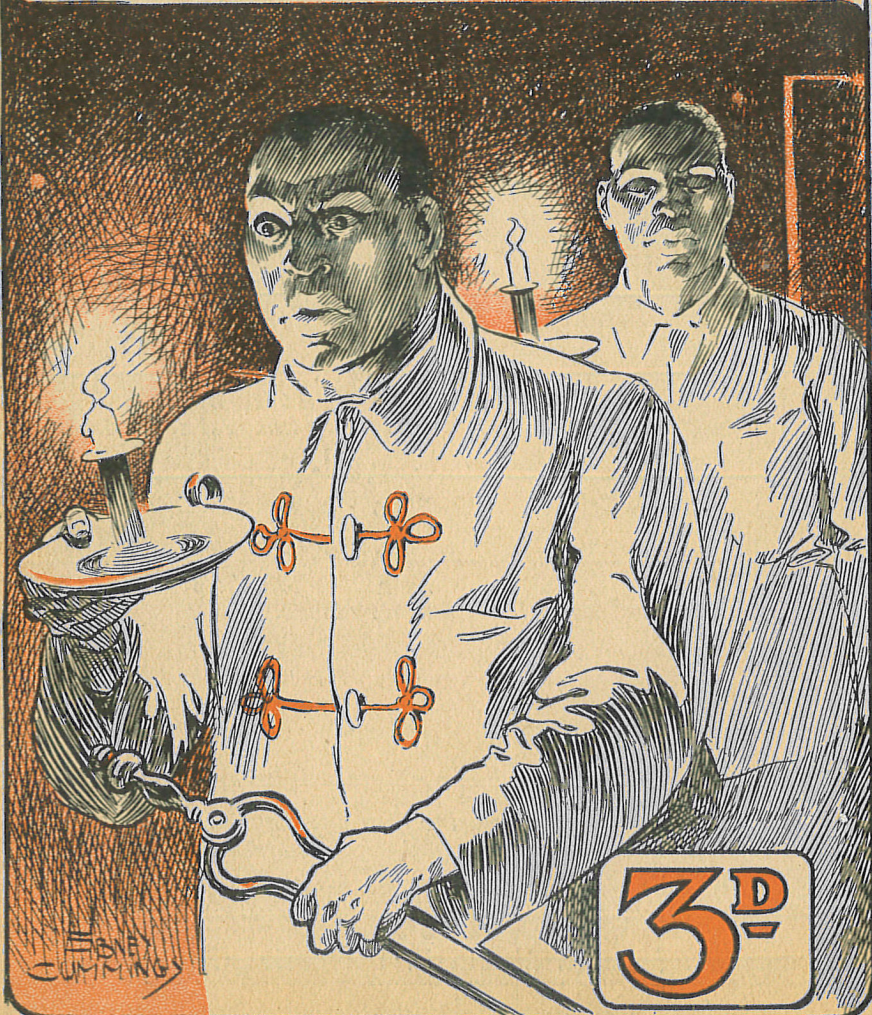


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PETE'S CHRISTMAS



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PETE'S CHRISTMAS

A New and Original Tale of the Three Famous Comrades, Jack, Sam, and Pete.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

CHAPTER 1.

Pete Gets a Shock to his "Cistern," and Treads on Somebody's Corn—An Angry Argument—P.C. XX99 Takes a Hand, but Fails to Get a Capture.

F F-F-F-IZ! Bang—bang—bang!
"Golly!"
Bang—bang!
"Hellup!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack, Sam, and Pete were having a grand time.

This remark is strictly true with regard to Jack Owen and Sam Grant, but is perhaps inapplicable to Pete.

When one has a particularly brisk and fat cracker attached to one's coat-tail by a yard of fine black thread, the consequences thereof are likely to be of a lively rather than of a very pleasing nature to the subject of such attention.

Bang—bang!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack, as the cracker flew to the length of its cable, and then, with another bang, described a semi-circle and exploded within two inches of Pete's left ear. "Ha, ha, ha! Why don't you get hold of it?"

"Dat's one ob dose silly remarks dat am better said dan done!" panted Pete, as he swirled round like a puppy dog after its tail. "Oh, golly!"

In his frantic endeavours to seize the erratic firework, Pete slipped on the greasy pavement and sat down with a bump that would have shaken the breath out of any ordinary person.

"Where's dat ting gone to?" he muttered, gazing at the ring of laughing faces that surrounded him.

Shrieks of laughter went up as a muffled bang followed Pete's inquiry.

"Golly! I'm sitting on it!" he yelled, leaping to his feet in one bound.

"Haw—ha—ho—hie! You stupid, clumsy fool!" hooted a very fat man who had been laughing loudly at Pete's antics.

"Golly! Why do you change dat lubly laff?" inquired Pete, gazing calmly from the cracker, that was spluttering to its last bit of gunpowder, to the excited stranger. "Oh, dry dose tears, old hoss, and don't try to stand too long on one foot! Best— Yah, yah, yah! Tought dat would happen. What's dat you say?"

"You fool—idiot!" snarled the fat man. "Oh! Hi, oh! Corn, you fool!"

The crowd fairly howled with mirth.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "What's de man want corn for? S'pose he'm a donkey!"

"Look you here!" cried the man, struggling to his feet and glaring at Pete. "I won't stand it! You trod on my corn!"

"Eh?"

"I say you trod on my corn!"

"Funny ting I neber noticed it. Must hab took place 'bout de time when you had your mouf wide open, distended, laffing at de misfortune ob dis pore child. How would you like to hab a——"

"I won't have any of your cheek!"

"Mind, old hoss!"

"Fool!" snarled the man. "I demand an apology!"

"Eh?"

Pete laid his muddy hand on the fat stranger's sleeve.

"Take your dirty hands off me!"

"Bery sorry, but you'm mistaken. Dere's only one hand dere. My pore old hoss, can't you count?"

"I'll give you in charge!"

"Hum!" muttered Pete. "What for?"

"For treading on my corn and making fun of me."

"Golly! 'Twasn't dis old hoss made de fun. Seems to me dat in de second act ob de drama ob de cracker dat it was de gent wid de corn on him left foot dat did dat. Don't you tink so, Sammy?"

"I'm mighty sure that we had better leave this gentleman to nurse his corn with his grievance, and get away," replied Sam. "Between the two of you you've managed to attract a sight too much attention. Look at the crowd!"

"Dat so, Sammy? Den we must bid you adieu, old hoss. Eh?"

"You're not going like this!" cried the man, stepping in front of Pete.

"How shall we go, den? Can't expect us to go down on our hands and knees. P'r'aps Jack and Sammy will oblige, dough."

"Chuck it!" muttered Sam. "Come on!"

"Fetch a constable!" roared the man, working himself up into a rage.

"Fetch me a constable!"

"Golly!" cried Pete, in affected dismay. "Reminds me ob de king who cried, 'My—my what-you-call-it—my what-you-call-it for a hoss!' 'Fraid you will hab to get de bobbie on your own hook."

"So I should think!" growled a bystander. "Grumpy old beggar! Ought to be ashamed of himself!"

But, as it happened, the fat man was to have his desire fulfilled, for at that moment a dark-blue helmet bobbed up and down on the edge of the crowd, and an officially gruff voice repeated with monotonous regularity the phrase:

"Move erlong, there—move erlong, there!"

The crowd dispersed sufficiently for the policeman to get to the centre, and he stood regarding the fat man with a prodigious frown.

Probably it was due to the man's excited appearance and muddy clothes that the official regarded him with suspicion. Anyhow, the constable's hand went to his pocket, and he pulled out his notebook.

"Now then," he growled, "what's all this fuss about? Who's been creating a disturbance? Come along, some of you? Haven't you got tongues in your heads?"

Jack and Sam assumed a disinterested attitude, and Pete filled his pipe.

The fat man glared around.

"I charge that man," he shouted at last, "with assault!"

"Which one?" demanded the policeman, fumbling for his pencil. "What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" repeated the policeman. "Look here, my man, you'll find yourself in hot water if you don't——"

"That's the ticket, gov'nor!" cried a voice from the crowd. "Give the old josses a bath! He wants it!"

The man of order ignored the interruption.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Crober," replied the fat man. "I've been assaulted."

"Address?" went on the policeman.

"Never mind about my address!" cried Crober. "Arrest that man!"

Now, P.-c. XX99 had his own way of conducting affairs, and his brow wrinkled ominously.

"None of your impudence! I know my duty, and——"

"Why don't you do it, then?" snapped Crober.

One or two indiscreet members of the crowd chuckled audibly at this, and the constable's face assumed a beautiful beetroot tinge, and he hitched up his belt.

"Look here," he roared, glaring at Crober, and forgetting the dignity of his calling, "are you going to charge the man that—— Hallo! What do you want?"

A thin-visaged little gentleman tapped the policeman's sleeve.

"I want a word with you."

"You'll have to wait, then, till I've settled this matter!" retorted P.-c. XX99. "Unless," he added sarcastically, "you're the man that committed the assault."

"Oh, no, it wasn't me!" cried the other hastily. "I merely wanted to act the part of—er—er—peacemaker. You see—er—this gentleman here—er—was the victim of a wicked and dangerous plot. An explosion—er—took place, and—er—well—er—this other gentleman here"—he pointed a finger encased in black kid at Crober—"er—had his toe—er—I should say his corn—trodden on, and—er—well——"

P.-c. XX99 squared his shoulders.

"Explosion!" he cried. "What do you mean—dynamite?"

"No—er—no. Just a small one—a crack—crack——" replied the little man, stuttering in his eagerness to put matters right. "A small crack——"

"Oh, you're cracked!" muttered the policeman, turning away. "Rub-bish! Now then, you," he went on, addressing Crober, "where's that man you assert assaulted you?"

"There!" burst forth Crober, extending his hand in Pete's direction. "There is the man I charge!"

The policeman made a step towards Pete.

"You'll laugh the other side of your face directly!" he murmured under his breath as he glared at his smiling face. "And you'll have to come to the station and charge this man," he went on, turning to Crober. "Come on!" he added, laying his hand on Pete's arm.

"What for, old hoss?" inquired Pete. "What station?"

"Never you mind what for!" retorted the constable. "Come along!"

P.-c. XX99 gave Pete a gentle shove, and was surprised to find that worthy quite immovable.

"Golly! Dis child wants to know first ob all what station you'm going to take him to!" exclaimed Pete, calmly lighting his pipe. "Am it Liverpool Street, 'cos, if so, dat won't do."

"I'm going to take you to the police-station!"

"Nunno, old hoss!" mumbled Pete, puffing out clouds of smoke. "Nunno!"

"I say I am!" cried XX99, getting more angry than ever. "Are you coming quietly, or shall I have to use force?"

"You can use porridge, or anyting you'm best fond ob," declared Pete. "Dis child am not going to any old police-station. Habn't got time for stupid tings ob dat kind. What a funny sort ob place Lunnon am!"

P.-c. XX99 tightened his grip on Pete's arm, and, giving a mighty shove, succeeded in causing Pete to move about three inches.

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" he panted.

"Nunno!"

The constable set his teeth and had another go, and succeeded in losing the three inches he had gained. "Here, you," he grunted, looking round for Crober, "catch hold of this fellow's arm! We'll——"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Am you looking for de prosecutor? "Oh, golly! What am you going to take dis child to de station for now?"

The constable released Pete's arm and glared around. The people were shouting with laughter, not unmixed with some sympathy for Pete, who, to the knowledge of those who had seen the commencement of the affair, had done nothing that could warrant his arrest.

"Serve the copper right!" muttered a spectator in Sam's ear. "He ain't got no business to take any notice of a stupid, silly charge like that chap that's gone gave. He must want a job pretty badly, I should think. Look at 'im! Oh, my!"

The policeman was nonplussed. He looked ready to arrest anyone and everybody, and his temper did not improve when half a dozen people tried to explain to him what had occurred from the beginning.

The words "boy," "cracker," "corn" buzzed in his ears till he sought refuge in the usual formula: "Move erlong, there!"

This change of tactics on the part of XX99 had a singular effect.

A shrill shriek rang out from the edge of the crowd.

"Let me go! Let me go!" cried a boy's voice.

Jack, Sam, and Pete turned in the direction whence came the shrill cries of expostulation. Sam looked at Jack and smiled. Jack winked.

"I bet that's the cause of all this rumpus," he murmured. "Just look at old XX99!"

Like a hound hot on the scent, P.-c. XX99 pushed his way through the people, followed by the three comrades.

"What's all this?" he demanded gruffly, as he glared at a small boy in the grip of a foxy-faced man. "What's he been doing?"

"Why, this 'ere is the imp wot 'ooked the cracker on to the black gentleman's coat-tail!"

The constable did not wait for any more, but made a dive for the struggling captive's coat-collar, and the unfortunate victim gave a shriek of terror as he was swung round in front of Pete.

"You'll come to the station now, I expect?" said the constable, addressing Pete.

"What for, old hoss?"

"Why, to charge this young scamp, of course!" gasped XX99.

"Golly! But you'm mighty impetuous, old hoss!" replied Pete. "How do you know dat de prisoner am guilty? Nunno, you'm not to open your mouf!" he added, addressing the boy, who looked sick with fright.

Very wisely the boy obeyed Pete's order, and as the fact that Pete did not intend to charge his captive dawned slowly on the constable, his fingers as slowly relaxed their grip, and the boy darted away.

Perhaps that hand would not have loosed its prey had not Sam quietly slipped a coin into XX99's disengaged one; but we must remember that Double X had had a very trying time, and that it is but fair to consider that under more ordinary circumstances he might have shown himself, if not a more zealous officer, at least of a more impartial turn of mind.

"Ta-ta, old hoss!" cried Pete. "Remember me to de missus, and kiss de baby. 'Spects dat before you wore such big boots dat you were not above habing a bit ob a practical joke yourself. Don't you tink, Sammy, dat it would do most men a lot ob good if dey were to 'member at times de time when dey were boys demselves?"

"I reckon," growled Sam, as they moved off, "that it would do a certain silly chump that I know of a mighty lot of good if he were to remember that he is now a man, and forget that he was once a boy!"

CHAPTER 2.

Pete is Cornered—Tim's Treasure—A Trip in a Taxi-cab—Pete Argues on Superstition—No. 13.

"ALLO! What's this?"

The comrades had now turned into a side-street, and the cause of Sam's exclamation stood in front of Pete, grinning nervously.

It was the boy who had but a few minutes before vanished as if in fear of his life.

"'Twas me, guv'nor!" he blurted out at last. "I did it."

Pete put on a most solemn expression, and gazed at the boy in silence. For the life of him, he could not think what to say. And Jack and Sam were convulsed with inward mirth as they followed his thoughts.

"I reckon the beggar's up against it this time," murmured Sam. "He can't say much to the youngster, for his own habit of playing off practical jokes puts that kid's little dodge in the shade."

"H'm!" growled Pete at last. "Dis am a bery serious matter. Shall hab to tink it ober. Hab you had any breakfuss? No? Dat 'splains de matter. Now look here, my lad," he went on serenely, "just you take dat an' go an' hab a feed. Nunno! Buzz off, or I shall hab to consult de opinion ob Mr. 99. Come along, Jack and Sammy; don't stand dere grinning like dat. We'm got to find dose apartments."

To say that Tim—for this is the boy's name—buzzed off would not be the strict truth, for it was Pete and Jack and Sam who went through this interesting process, leaving standing behind them on the kerbstone a youngster whose life up to that time had been more kicks than ha'pence.

We will not go very deeply into this subject now, for even Tim himself could not realise his feelings; but, suffice it to say that, if Pete left behind him a boy bewildered to the point of speechlessness, he also left behind him the seed of kindness, sown in that boy's heart, that would flourish for ever.

Tim was barely conscious of any feeling at all at the time. He was hungry, and the half-sovereign in his dirty little hand represented eggs-and-bacon, roly-poly, washed down with a huge cup of steaming coffee, and he bounded away in the direction of a coffee-shop.

"What am you giggling about?" grumbled Pete, as they walked on.

"You," chuckled Sam.

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now you hab started, also Jack, shall hab to frow two-free pails ob

water ober you, case you go into 'sterics. Don't see anything dat any sensible chaps could laff at."

"Never expected you would," chuckled Jack. "You're never given to seeing those things which don't suit you to see."

"It's a case of when Greek meets Greek," interrupted Sam. "And I reckon that if Pete and that youngster were placed side by side, and condemned for practical joking, there's one of them wouldn't die innocent, and who that would be we needn't mention. Now, look here," he went on, "if we are going to find rooms before dark we had better get a move on. Look out, there!"

Pip, pip! Pip, parp! Unk-unk!

"Why don't you look where you're going to?" bawled an angry voice.

"D'ye think the blessed road belongs to you?"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, as he gazed at the driver of a taxi-cab. "What's de matter, old hoss? Am you 'fraid dat if you run into dis child, dat ting would upset? Am you disengaged? Yes? Golly! How de point ob view does alter tings!" added Pete, as the three entered the taxi. "Dat man was angry as turkey-cocks just now, and at de present moment ice-cream wouldn't melt in him mouf. Eh?"

"Where do you want to go to, sir?"

"Where do we want to drive to, Sammy?"

"I reckon we had better tell the man to drive us round the West Central district," replied Sam. "We shall be more likely to find apartments there than anywhere else."

"Right, sir!" said the chauffeur, touching his cap. "Thankee, sir!"

Pete had slipped a coin into the man's hand, who spat on it.

"Golly!" he muttered. "What did he do dat for, Sammy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! For luck, I suppose."

"Dat's a funny sort ob idea. How can de fact ob spitting on a coin make any difference to de luck, good or oderwise?"

"Don't ask me!" cried Sam. "Look at the tuppences piling up!"

Pete glared at the little metal box indicating the distance travelled. Every now and again a figure popped up.

"Hi, driber," he yelled, "cut de corners off! We shall be ruined at dis rate! Oh, golly, dere's another tuppence gone smack!"

The driver grinned appreciatively. People who tipped him half-a-crown before they even started could joke as much as they liked.

Up one street and down another the driver skillfully guided his motor. They passed several houses with cards announcing that accommodation was to be obtained therein. But Pete made no sign.

"Well," growled Sam, at last, "how much longer is this going to last? We seem to be burning petrol to no purpose."

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete suddenly. "Did you speak, Sammy, or did de driber put de brakes on?"

"How much longer are we going to keep this up?" demanded Sam, ignoring the personality of Pete's remark.

"Dunno, Sammy. Dis child am tinkin someting out."

"What's that?" inquired Jack. "Don't think too hard, or you may break something."

"Don't you be cheeky!" cried Pete. "Dis am a most important matter. Do you tink dere's anything in superstition?"

"I should say there's a good deal in it for fools," declared Sam.

"Dat sounds bery nice, Sammy," declared Pete. "But, you see, you ain't capable ob judging."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" muttered Sam.

"Nunno! P'r'aps you don't."

"Oh, don't I?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, we'll leave it at that."

"No, we won't leabe it at dat!" retorted Pete. "You an' Jack am too much inclined to take tings for granted. Now, no sensible man takes anything for granted—dat is, ob course, if he hab a brain-box. Now, de assertion am dat dere's nuthing in superstition. Do you beliebe dat when you hab a cold sort of feeling down de back ob your neck between your braces dat somebody am walking ober your grave?"

"Of course not!" cried Sam. "Don't be so silly! How can anybody walk ober my grave before I'm buried? Do talk sense!"

"Now, see here, Sammy, dis child am trying to improve dat mind ob yours. Dere's some tings dat superstitious people do dat bring luck, and dere's oder tings dat dey don't do 'cos dey would bring misfortune. What do you tink about it, Jack?"

"I'm of the same opinion as Sam," replied Jack. "I think it's all rot!"

"Why?"

"Because it is!"

"Dat's no sort ob an argument," retorted Pete. "De fact ob de matter is, neider ob you two hab eber tried de effect ob doing dose tings dat you should do, and teetotaling from dose tings dat you should not do, an'——"

"Here, half a minute! Not so fast!" cried Sam. "What do you mean by that word?"

"Golly! How you interrupt de flow ob dis child's thoughts! What word am you after?"

"Teetotaling."

"Dat—why, dat means not—not—— Oh, golly, you know what dat means!"

"You don't, that's very evident," said Sam. "I suppose you mean abstaining?"

"Dat's it. Same ting. Just dat memory-cistern gone wrong again, dat's all. But dat don't matter; de argument am right, all de same, an' dere's no need for you to disinterrupt dis child."

"Then get on with it!" said Jack. "What is it you want to say?"

"It am not what dis child wants to say," said Pete calmly—"it am what he'm going to do. What's de matter, Sammy? Got a pain?"

"No."

"What am you making dat funny noise for, then?"

"I'm not making a funny noise," replied Sam. "I'm thinking."

"Golly! Dey must be bery painful sort ob thoughts, den!" retorted Pete. "Jest keep dose thoughts ob yours silent for two-free minutes while de object ob dis discussiön am settled. You, too, say dere's nuthing in superstition, an' in de same bref you assert dat you know nuthing 'bout de matter, an' don't believe in it; so dis child am going to probe de matter to de bottom."

"Scissors!" gasped Sam, in alarm. "Then what do you propose to do?"

"Investigate, ob course."

"Well, you're a mighty clever chap if you're going to investigate so untangible a thing as superstition, that's all I can say about the matter!"

"Nuff said! Sammy, you hab got to leabe dis matter to me now. We hab had de discussing part, now we come to de practical part. Nunno, Jack! Just you wait a bit. Dis child am going to find out if dere am any truth in superstition or not by doing dose tings which superstitious people say we should not do, an' not doing dose tings which dey say we should do."

Jack sighed, and Sam knocked the ashes out of his pipe with the air of one who was bracing himself for a difficult task.

"Hi! Stop de cab!" bawled Pete a few minutes later. "Nunno, not dere—here! Dat's de house. We will hab a sample ob dat superstition."

"Scissors!" gasped Sam, as they alighted from the cab. "No. 13! See here, Jack, we're in for trouble of some sort! I bet the beggar doesn't know whether 13 is considered unlucky or not."

The delighted taxi-man drove off, feeling quite convinced that his action when Pete had tipped him had decidedly brought him luck, leaving the three standing gazing at the front door of a house of the superior lodging-house type, bearing in large figures the number that had so taken Pete's fancy.

CHAPTER 3.

Knock and Ring—An Amiable Lady—The Best Dinner-Service—Sally—Sam Makes a Bargain.

IN one bound Pete cleared the newly-hearthstoned steps of No. 13, and gave a loud rat-tat-tat at the door.

"Golly! What's dis?" he cried, peering at a little square of brass beneath the knocker. "'Knock and Ring.' Dat's a funny ting to put on a door, 'cos if dey don't hear de ring, how can dey hear de knock? An' if dey don't hear de knock, how can dey hear de ring? Wonder if you hab got to do bofe at de same time? Golly! Can't reach dat little lot. You hab a go, Sammy, while dis child does de knocking part ob dis business."

"Not me!" growled Sam.

"You hab a go, den, Jack."

"No fear!" cried Jack. "You're making enough row to disturb the whole street! Hallo! There's somebody coming."

Sure enough the knocker gradually receded from Pete's grip, and a tall, stern-faced lady in curl-papers stood eyeing him with haughty stare from the doormat.

"What do you mean by making that disgraceful noise at my door?" she demanded in icy tones. "Why don't you ring the bell?"

"Bery sorry, ma'am," muttered Pete, stretching out his hand to the bell-knob; "but shall I do it now?"

"Certainly not!" said the lady. "What do you mean by such impertinence?"

Jack and Sam chuckled with joy.

"I reckon," murmured Sam, "that the silly cuckoo won't be so mighty anxious to patronise lucky numbers in the future. Scissors! What's he up to now?"

Pete had removed his hat, and was bowing low before the astonished and angry lady.

"Excuse me, madam," he said, in a deferential voice, "but we are in search ob a place where we can rest our weary bones."

"Sir!" cried the landlady—for such one would imagine her to be, judging from her air of disagreeable authority, and the card displayed in the window of the front sitting-room. "Sir, how dare you address me in such a manner!"

"Oh, golly!" cried Pete, stepping back hastily and treading on Sam's toes. "You hab a go, Sammy. Can't face dis little lot!" he murmured under his breath.

Sam made a wry face. Perhaps it was at the pain, the actual physical pain, that Pete had caused him, or maybe it was the disagreeableness of the task before him; but, anyhow, he quickly recovered himself as he saw the lady's eyes fixed upon him.

"I believe you have some rooms to let?" he said.

"Yes, I have!" snapped the landlady. "I should think that you ought to know that, seeing that that card has been in my window for the last three weeks."

"Well," said Sam, "you see, we've only been here about three minutes. But I must say that we seem likely to learn a good many things. For instance——"

"I can't waste my time with you," interrupted the amiable lady. "I infer that you want apartments. Yes? Well, my charge is five pounds a week, without lights or attendance; fires extra."

"Oh, golly!" muttered Pete. "What am we going to do without lights?"

"Oh, you can have lights," snapped the sharp-eared lady, "if you like to pay for them!"

"Dat's all right, my dear!" ejaculated Pete hurriedly.

He would willingly have fled, but for the vein of stubbornness that made him anxious not to abandon any project that he undertook.

"Sir!" cried the lady. "I would have you know that I'm not your dear, or anyone else's, either. I consider your behaviour abominable to the highest degree!"

"You must not—er—take any notice of my friend's remarks," interrupted Sam, who was getting tired of standing on the doorstep. "It's only a habit of his. And—er—could we see the rooms? If they are suitable we will pay a week's rent in advance."

"It's a very bad habit, then," said the landlady, brushing a few straggling hairs out of her eyes. "But you can see the rooms; and my terms are five pounds a week, and not a penny less."

"Look here," growled Sam in Pete's ear, as they entered the hall, "I don't see much luck attached to this little lot!"

"Dat's because you don't know anything 'bout dese 'sterious matters," murmured Pete, who, truth to tell, was enjoying himself hugely now that the brunt of the negotiations were being borne by Sam. "You wait till de time comes, den you will see. P'r'aps if we had to go to any oder place it might hab caught fire in de night, or it might hab fallen down, or——"

"Pigs might fly!" muttered Sam. "Now you keep your mouth shut, or I shall leave you to deal with this charming creature."

This threat effectually stopped Pete for the time, and he followed Jack and Sam up to the first floor.

"Sally! Sall-y!" cried the lady of the house.

"Coming, mum!" replied a voice from below. "Coming!"

"Gracious!" exclaimed the landlady, as a terrific crash of breaking china reached their ears. "The wretched creature has broken something!"

"I should say that's the first word of truth she's spoken for a long time," muttered Jack. "Ugh! What a voice!"

"Sally! Sally! Come here this instant!" yelled the landlady. "This instant! Do you hear me?"

But no Sally replied to that call. Instead could be heard the sound of sobbing.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, plunging his hand into his pocket. "How much damage is dat?"

The landlady paused in the middle of a tirade against clumsiness, and turned a flushed and heated face towards Pete.

As she had been shaking her head in emphasis at each word addressed to the invisible Sally her curl-papers had come undone, and one strip of tissue hung daintily over her left eye, making her squint horribly.

"Yah—oo—ah!" gurgled Pete, as he gazed into her face.

The lady ignored his obvious attempts to strangle his desire to laugh, and turned a piercing eye on the coins in his hand.

"That's the best dinner-service gone, I'm sure it is! Cost me twenty-seven-and-sixpence last April, as I'm a living woman! I'll discharge that wretched girl, I will!"

"Golly!" muttered Pete, as he still heard the sound of sobs coming from below. "What am you going to do dat for?"

"For breaking my china, of course!"

"S'pose we free pay for de damage?"

"Then I will overlook the carelessness on this occasion!" snapped the lady promptly, and without betraying any outward signs of surprise at Pete's unusual offer.

"Send for Sally, den!" exclaimed Pete, who had no great opinion of his future landlady's honesty. "Tell her dat she'm forgiven, and dat you'm going to gib her a rise."

"What! Nothing of the sort! I declare I never heard of such impudence! The lazy wench!"

"Oh, well, neber mind 'bout dat part ob de business!" exclaimed Pete hurriedly. "Send for Sally. Sal-l-y!" he bawled, imitating the landlady's gentle voice. "Come here! I want you!"

Jack and Sam boiled over with laughter at the look of absolute amazement on the woman's face as she heard her own voice, as it were, coming from Pete's mouth. But any expression of her surprise was cut short by the appearance of Sally at the bottom of the stairs.

"Come up here!" commanded her mistress. "I wish to speak to you."

"Half a tick, my dear!" interrupted Pete. "Here, Sally, what hab you done?"

"Please I've broken——"

"I knew you had, you wicked girl!" cried her mistress. "You've broken the best dinner-service—the one I paid twenty-seven-and-sixpence for! Now, not a word!"

"Please, ma'am, I've only——"

"Now, Sally, hold your tongue, or I shall dismiss you on the spot! This kind gentleman has offered to pay for the damage you have caused by your carelessness, and in consideration of that I will overlook your offence. You may go."

Sally went.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete.

"Pray do not make that horrible noise!" cried the landlady tartly. "This is a respectable house, and I expect my lodgers to behave themselves as gentlemen."

"Golly! My dear, we'm not ladies. An', 'sides, we'm not eben your lodgers!" muttered Pete.

Whether this remark was overheard by the comrades' prospective landlady will never be known, for she dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand and the words, "Follow me." She paused as she came to a door.

"I will place the amount on your bill. You need not pay me now. This is the drawing-room."

The comrades saw before them a tidy-sized room, comfortably furnished—that is, judging from what they could see of the furniture, for all the chairs were covered with linen sheets, and the picture-frames masked with some yellow material.

"M'yes!" muttered Pete. "Dis looks bery nice. But what hab all de chairs got nightshirts on for?"

"Sir!"

"Where are the bed-rooms?" inquired Sam hurriedly.

"Through those folding-doors," snapped the lady. "Two rooms—one single, one double. This nig——" She stopped abruptly. The thought of the twenty-seven-and-sixpence Pete had promised to pay crossed her mind. "This gentleman can occupy the single room."

"Tanks!" murmured Pete, carefully lifting one of the chair-coverings and gazing beneath it. "Do you always keep dese tings on de chairs?"

"Always."

"Dere's nuthing de matter wid dem, is dere?"

"I don't follow your meaning. Those chairs cost me thirty shillings apiece, and I'm not going to have them spoilt. Now, if you will pay me the first week's rent," the lady went on, turning to Sam, "I will allow you to book them for three weeks. I can't let for less."

Sam gazed at Pete, but the latter kept his eyes fixed steadily in an opposite direction. Jack, too, appeared to be interested in what was going on in the street.

"Well, boys," exclaimed Sam at last, "shall we decide to have them?"

"Ob course, Sammy," replied Pete. "What a funny chap you are! You neber seem to know your own mind. Lubly rooms, charming landlady—what more could you want?"

The landlady looked at Pete rather suspiciously; but his calm gaze assured her mind, and she smiled sourly as her vanity gave way before his shaft of flattery.

"Ahem!" coughed Sam, taking a five-pound note from his pocket and laying it on the table.

"I don't think it is necessary to give you a receipt," said the landlady, as she secured the note. "My name is Marchmont—Mrs. Marchmont. I've lived in this house for over five years, and——"

"Quite so," interrupted Sam—"quite so, Mrs. Marchmont. I am sure that you must have a great reputation, and—well, we need not trouble you about so small a trifle. I beg your pardon?"

"Of course, you understand that lights, cruet, coals, and attendance are extras?"

"Oh, quite!" replied Sam, eager to get away at any price.

As they passed through the hall, Pete tried to have a word with Sally, but Mrs. Marchmont glared at the pale-faced little servant and ordered her to the kitchen.

"We shall come back 'bout tea-time," said Pete, as the door closed behind him. "Golly! Wonder if she heard dat little lot? Shall I ring again?"

"No, for goodness' sake don't!" cried Jack, grabbing his arm. "Let's get away while we have the chance."

"I reckon the best thing we can do is to forfeit that note, and find somewhere else," declared Sam. "It's all through your stupid idea of luck that we have been landed in this mess!"

"Dunno 'bout dat, Sammy," replied Pete, in a thoughtful voice. "You see, dere's Sally in de question."

"Sally!" cried Sam.

"Sally!" cried Jack. "What's she got to do with it?"

"Well, you see, dere's someting rader funny 'bout dat landlady, an', somehow or oder, I don't tink dat Sally has a bery good time. Wonder if she gets 'nuff to eat?"

The same idea had occurred to both Jack and Sam; but they chaffed Pete unmercifully about the fallacy of being superstitious.

"See here," exclaimed Sam at last, "if we go back to No. 13 you've got to deal with Mrs. Marchmont yourself! I'm not going to have any more to do with her."

"Bery well, den," muttered Pete. "Dis child will face de raging lady an' look after—Sally. Come 'long! Must get back to dat station now." Jack and Sam followed as best they could.

CHAPTER 4.

Pete Lets Himself Go—Rory Does Some Damage, and the Owner of a Fowl Gets Angry—Settling a Difficult Matter.

"GOLLY!" muttered Pete presently, as he tore along. "Dat dog must be getting mighty hungry by dis time! Come 'long Sammy, or we shall find him starved to deff!"

"It's a sure thing you wouldn't find him starved to life!" exclaimed Sam, his long legs keeping pace with Pete's eager stride. "Have you got the ticket all right?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete, stopping abruptly and gazing at Sam. "Oh golly! I must hab lost dat ticket! Let's hab a look."

"Scissors!" cried Sam. "Don't stop here. You're blocking up the pavement!"

"Can't help dat, Sammy. Must find dat ticket widout delay. S'pose dey refused to gib dat dog up? Now den, sah, who'm you knocking 'bout?"

"You, you idiot!" snarled out an angry man, giving Pete a vicious prod with his umbrella, and striding past.

Sam gave a low whistle of surprise as he caught sight of the man's face.

"Thunder!" he murmured. "Good job Pete ain't disengaged! Did you notice who that was, Jack?" he went on.

"Crober?"

"Yes."

"Praise the pigs, then, that that beauty didn't spot his phiz, or there would have been trouble in the land!"

The three were now standing in the roadway, and the passers-by cast curious and half-amused glances at Pete, for this worthy was frantically going through his pockets in search of the missing ticket.

"Golly! Dis am drefful!" he muttered, plunging his hand for the twentieth time into the same pocket. "In here? Nunno! In here? Nunno! Woohoo! Here it am!"

Pete drifted away at top speed, and a nervous little man whom he appeared to be charging skipped nimbly aside and fled.

"Here," growled Sam, "don't be so thumping impulsive! A few minutes more or less won't make the slightest difference."

"Dat's what you say, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete, whisking round the corner of London Bridge and dashing up the slope leading to the main-line platform. "S'pose you had a gnawing pain in your inside? Spec's you would sing a bery different song den. Here's de place. Golly! What's all dis? Get out ob de way, old hoss!"

"Who are you pushing?" shouted a very angry-looking man, who had, until Pete's arrival, been standing at the narrow opening of the office. "I say, who are you—"

"Pete, old hoss!"

"Insensate fool! I don't want to know who you are—I want—"

"Golly! Shove someting in dis man's mouf!" groaned Pete, leaning over the counter. "Here, Rory, come here! What eber's the matter? Seems as if dere's a bit ob a rumpus going on here!"

There came a fearful crash from the back of the office, and Rory suddenly appeared, carrying in his mouth a dilapidated portion of a chicken.

"Oh, Christopher!" groaned Sam, as he looked over Pete's shoulder. "What's he got there?"

"My chicken!" roared the man Pete had pushed aside. "That's my chicken!"

"Dere you are, den!" cried Pete. "Drop it, Rory—drop it!"

Rory reluctantly released his fowl, and Pete slapped it down on the counter.

"I won't have it!" roared the owner of the chicken. "I left that fowl in your charge!" he spluttered, glaring at the flushed face of the booking-clerk. "I shall hold you responsible! It's disgraceful! I shall sue the company for damages! You shall pay for my chicken! You've no right to keep a dangerous animal like that!" he raved.

"Spec's it am all de chicken's fault," declared Pete. "An'—an' 'spec's Rory was hungry. Dere's your ticket for de dog."

Pete flung a crumpled piece of paper down in front of the booking-desk and turned away.

"What about my chicken?" roared the man.

"Your chicken, old hoss?"

"Yes, my c-h-i-c-k-e-n! Are you going to pay for it?"

"Eh?"

"That chicken cost me four shillings, and that brute of yours has eaten half of it! I——"

"Tought you were going to sue de company for de bird, old hoss."

"I don't see why I should," rejoined the man. "It was your dog that had it, and you ought to buy me another!"

"Eh? 'Umph! Dunno 'bout dat," muttered Pete gravely. "You see, you'm not so bery polite as you might be—in fack, you'm like de chicken—rader fowl."

"Don't you talk to me!" spluttered the man, shaking his fist in Pete's face. "You pay me four shillings!"

"Eh?"

"Four shillings!"

"What fer?"

"My chicken, of course!"

"But you said dat's what you paid for de fowl."

"That's right."

"Golly! No, dat's not right. Dis am where you get left, old hoss! You see, it's like dis. Dat chicken cost you four shillings. M'yes! Dat's what you say. Still, we won't disbelieve dat statement. But, taking dat for granted, den, I shall gib you two shillings."

"What!"

"Two bob, old hoss!" said Pete, holding out a two-shilling piece.

"How do you make that out?"

"Golly! Ain't de man dense in him tinkin apparatus? De half ob four am two, ain't it, Jack? Dat's what dey used to teach you at Oxford. An'——"

"But I tell you that chicken cost me four shillings!"

"Dat's so, old hoss! But dat was for a whole chicken wid two legs and two wings. Now just calkerlate dis carcass." Pete held up the fowl and carefully examined it. "Dere you are!" he cried. "Dere's a leg on dis side an' a wing on de oder. When you bought dis chicken it had two legs an' two wings. Ain't dat so, old hoss? Bery well, den, dere's half ob your chicken, and dere's de two shillings for de oder half. How's dat?"

An involuntary chuckle of delight burst from the lips of the booking-clerk, and he brought the full blast of the chicken-owner's wrath on his own head.

"Excuse me, sir," said Sam suavely. "Allow me to make good your loss. You see, it was really quite an accident, and really not altogether

unnatural for a hungry dog to desire intimate acquaintanceship with so succulent a morsel. Pray accept this in payment."

"Golly!" cried Pete, as the man hurriedly departed with sixteen shillings to the good. "You'm mighty fond ob frowning your money 'bout, Sammy!"

"Anything for peace," declared Sam. "Besides, you don't want to get that clerk into a row, do you? It's quite as likely that his boss would refuse to recognise his logic as our friend of the fowl was with your endeavours to convince him concerning something that he was equally convinced that you were in the wrong about."

"Anyting for peace," murmured Pete, slipping a sovereign into the clerk's palm. "S'pose you stop dat funny noise, Sammy."

CHAPTER 5.

Pete and the Black Lobster—A Lively Time—Rory Gets His Tail Pinched Pete Gets a Fright—Finding a Lucky Cab.

"NOW that matter's settled to the satisfaction of all concerned," said Jack; and they left the station. "I reckon we may as well have some dinner. We can call back for our luggage after we have dined."

"Right-o!" cried Pete. "Knew dere was someting wrong wid dis child's cistern. Let's find a place quick. What's dat ober dere?"

"A fish-shop," replied Sam.

"De bery ting for you two!" muttered Pete. "Fish am good for de brain-box, and I tink dat a slice or two ob cod would do you a mighty lot ob good."

"Not so much of your cod!" growled Sam, as they dodged across the busy street. "Now, then, let's see if you can behave yourself for half an hour."

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, as they approached the counter. "Black lobsters. Dat's funny! Hab neber seen black ones before."

"Oh, they are quite natural!" said Sam, winking at Jack and the owner of the shop. "I only hope that they don't start moving," he added in a low tone. "Look Jack—quick!"

Pete was poking the crustaceans about with an inquisitive finger, and Rory was standing on his hind-legs beside his master, evincing the same curiosity.

Jack and Sam held their breath. Suddenly Rory gave a low growl and backed away, his hair bristling all along his spine.

"What's de matt— Hi! Yow—woohoo! Hellup!" yelled Pete, dancing from one leg to the other, and giving a series of dismal yells. "Take it off! Oh, golly! Dis am worse dan eber!"

The three howled with laughter as Pete, in his frantic endeavours to free himself from that pugnacious grip, had somehow managed to let that lobster get another finger imprisoned.

This would not have been so bad if those fingers had belonged to one hand, but now Pete was fixed by the first finger of either hand, and the more he pulled the more the lobster squeezed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he!"

"Bow-wow-wow!"

Rory added his voice to the company's, and appeared to be thoroughly aware of the joke, though he took good care not to get too close to Pete, and backed away whenever Pete came anywhere near him.

But a terrible thing happened. In walking backwards, Rory bumped against the sloping stand on which squirmed and wriggled the brothers and sisters to the shellfish that had taken such a strong hold on Pete. The next instant a shaggy stump of a tail was gripped, and a more surprised dog than Rory never existed.

For a moment he stood stock-still, then he gave a terrible and savage growl, and round he flew.

The faster he went the higher flew his lobster, till it described a perfectly level circle.

Bump, bump, bump! Bang, bang, bang! Rory careered round that shop like a catherine-wheel, and Jack and Sam skipped out of his way in double-quick time.

The lobster put on a little more pressure, and Rory became a spinning round spot of yellow with a black band.

All this time Pete had been staring at Rory with wide-open eyes, his hands held out in front of him, fascinated by the gyrating canine top. Certainly for Pete this was a fortunate proceeding, for the lobster had only obeyed its fighting instinct in squeezing all the harder while Pete endeavoured to free himself. Directly he held his hands still for a few seconds the lobster obeyed the same natural instinct in letting its vanquished enemy free.

It dropped with a clatter to the floor, and simultaneously Rory's foe flew off at a tangent out of the door into the middle of the street, holding in its massive claw a generous bunch of hair, that showed it had by no means released its hold of its own accord.

Pete mopped his brow, and in his anxiety to see if Rory had suffered any real damage he quite forgot his own tingling fingers. As for Rory, he barked and made a pretence of flying at the lobster that had fallen from Pete's fingers. But it must be mentioned that his jaws snapped on air; for although we know Rory to be a good fighter, we also know that his pluck is at times tempered with a good share of discretion.

The fishmonger's boy raced out into the road, and with accustomed fingers recovered the lobster that had landed in the street.

"It's all bery fine for you people to laugh," grumbled Pete, as he surveyed the smiling faces around him, "but I tink de next time dis child touches a live lobster dis child will keep his hands in his pocket! Now, chuck dat cackling, an' let's hab someting to eat."

"Certainly, sir!" cried the owner of the shop, stifling his laughter. "What would you like? Boiled salmon, fried plaice, oysters, or"—here the man's eyes twinkled humorously—"a nice fine lobster—eh?"

"See here, old hoss," cried Pete, seizing a large black fellow in the manner in which he had observed the boy, "if you get poking fun at dis child any more I shall hab to ask dis gentleman to take you by de nose an' teach you better manners!"

The fishmonger's face grew grave, and he promptly withdrew behind the counter.

"My dear fellow," he added hastily, "I mean no offence, though—he, he, he!" he cackled—"you must admit it was real funny!"

"Dis child am not going to admit anyting ob de sort," observed Pete, seating himself, and quietly dropping the wriggling lobster on the chair next to his. "Come 'long, Sammy, let's get on wid dis dinner. S'pose we start wid a dozen oysters each."

Greatly to Pete's disappointment, Sam Grant solemnly winked, and took a seat on the opposite side of the table.

"Not this time, you old rascal!" he murmured. "You can try that clever dodge on someone else."

Pete waited patiently for Jack to seat himself, and then, as that worthy

also showed his knowledge of what was waiting on the chair beside Pete, the latter gave a prodigious sigh and began to talk about the weather.

Presently the fishmonger placed before the comrades a huge dish of oysters, and for the next five minutes Pete was too busy to do any talking—indeed, he was so occupied with the consumption of his natives that he quite forgot his neighbours.

“Golly!” he mumbled, as number ten disappeared. “Dese am lubly, simply delic— Ugh! Ow! Hi! Biting leg! Hellup!”

Jack and Sam gazed at Pete in consternation as he leaped to his feet, nearly overturning the table.

“My stars!” cried Sam. “Ha, ha, ha! Serve you jolly well right! I have been watching that beggar while you’ve been gobbling down those oysters; and, of course, if you will sit next to a lobster you must expect him to take an occasional nip at you.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” chuckled Jack. “There seems to be a sort of mutual affinity between Pete and that lobster. They’re both black, and they’re both fishy.”

Luckily for Pete, the fishmonger came forward, and by a dexterous twist relieved him of his enemy.

“Tanks, old hoss!” said Pete, rubbing the side of his leg. “Dat chap ought to be boiled! He’m too mighty forward for dis child. Let’s hab another two-free dozen oysters.”

In due course the fresh supply of succulent bivalves arrived, and Jack and Sam wisely gave up chaffing their comrade in order to get their fair share of the meal.

The last of Pete’s third dozen had just disappeared, when he gave an awful yell.

“Oh, Sammy,” he groaned, gazing at his comrades with a terrified expression, “I hab swallowed someting!”

“Guess you have, mate,” replied Sam. “But I don’t see what you want to make that unearthly row about it for. Scissors! What’s the matter with him?”

“Oh, oh, oh!” groaned Pete. “You two will be sorry for dis one ob dese days! Oh, oh, oh!”

The frightful faces that he was making sent Jack and Sam into fits of laughter. They could not imagine that anything serious was the matter.

“What’s up?” gasped Jack at last.

“I hab swallowed someting!” groaned Pete, bending himself nearly double.

“So you told us just now!” cried Sam. “It’s a funny thing that you should only notice that you’ve swallowed something after you’ve despatched five-and-thirty natives.”

“But I hab eaten someting else!” groaned Pete. “I felt it tickle in my froat as it went down.”

“Sure you haven’t swallowed that lobster?” chuckled Jack.

“Golly! Dis am no joking matter!” cried Pete. “Oysters habn’t got bones, hab dey? An’ I am sure dat someting solid went down wid dat last one.”

“P’raps it was a pearl,” suggested Sam, winking at the fishmonger, who was standing close by regarding Pete doubtfully.

“Golly! Dat’s it!” cried Pete, brightening up a little. “But, oh,” he groaned, “s’pose dis child gets appendiciticleus!”

“I reckon if you get it you’ll have to put up with it,” said Sam. “Judging by its name, I should say it’s a mighty bad thing to catch. Why not swallow a pint or so of vinegar? That might dissolve the pearl.”

“You’m a bery unfeeling person, Sammy, an’ you’m not got de proper sort ob tender, lubing feeling dat you should hab.”

Pete groaned again, and rising slowly to his feet, walked slowly out of the shop.

"I believe it's only an artful dodge of his to get out of paying for his lunch!" growled Sam. "How much is it?"

"Eighteen shillings, sir."

Sam whistled.

"Sure you won't charge for the pearl Pete's taken away with him?"

"Oh, no! We give those away," laughed the fishmonger, as he made out the bill.

"I know what it was," mumbled Pete, when Jack and Sam joined him outside the shop. "I beliebe dat I upset some salt. Shall hab to pay more 'tention to dese matters ob superstition, oderwise someting more dreiful dan swallowing pearls am likely to happen."

"Hallo!" cried Sam. "So you believe in superstition after all, do you?"

"Nunno, Sammy! Dis child habn't got to de beliebing part yet; but must gib de subject a fair trial."

"That's all right," declared Jack, "so long as you don't start playing any tricks with us, then I for one shall begin to believe that there's something in superstition."

"Come 'long, Rory," said Pete, ignoring Jack's remark. "We free hab got some work to do now. Must get dat little lot ob luggage."

Rory wagged his tail as if he quite understood the business in hand, and trotted along close to Pete's heels.

Ten minutes later Pete emerged from the station carrying his heavy bag.

"Cab, sir? 'Ere yer are, sir! Cab?"

"What's you're number, old hoss?" inquired Pete, putting down his bag and feeling in his pocket.

"Number, sir?" inquired the cabman.

"Yes. Golly! Can't you understand a simple little question like dat?"

The cabman eyed Pete with doubtful eyes. (A stranger who for no apparent reason wants to know a cabman's number is naturally, and always, an object of suspicion.)

"What yer want ter know my number for?" inquired cabby again. "I ain't done nothing!"

"Nunno, old hoss, you'm not done nuthing! All dis child wants to know am your number."

"Which number?"

"De number ob your cab, ob course. Why, you habn't more dan one number, hab you?"

"Well, there's the number on my cab, and there's this 'ere," explained the man, thrusting his badge in front of Pete.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam, coming up. "Now you're done! Which has got to make thirteen?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Pete, looking very solemn. "No. 2,764," he went on. "Nunno; dat won't do. Must try again. Eh, Sammy? De number on de badge? Nunno; de number ob de cab, ob course."

Pete dropped a shilling in the cabman's hand, and picking up his bag, walked slowly down the rank.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped the astonished cabman. Then, as he caught a porter's eye, he tapped his forehead significantly. "I suppose the other chap's his keeper," he muttered. "Crumbs! I wish there was a few more loonatics about!"

"Look here, you silly chump," declared Sam, as he followed Pete, "if you want to make a fool of yourself, I don't see why I should!"

"No need to do dat, Sammy," muttered Pete. "Free and six am nine,

an' two an' 'leben an' free—how much does dat make? Oh, golly! Dere's two-free too many dere; can tell dat by de look ob it. Wonder if dis little lot will work out all right?"

Pete leaned over the wheel of a cab and peered at the number-plate.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam, as the horse belonging to the next cab raised his head and caught Pete a clump on the side of the head with his nosebag.

"Golly!" cried Pete, springing back and looking around. "Who did dat?"

"Ho, ho, ho! Here, come along!" chuckled Sam. "If you will be so silly, you can't wonder if you get into trouble."

"But it am de right number!" cried Pete. "Free frees an' a four. Hab a look, Sammy."

Sam Grant groaned as he surveyed the ramshackle vehicle.

"Why, it's the worst one on the rank!"

"Dat's nutthing to do with it," declared Pete. "Dis am de lucky one. Nine an' four am furteen. In you get! Where's dat Jack? Hi, Jack!"

"Jack's wise," muttered Sam. "He knows a thing or two. The beggar's been keeping out of the way purposely. Here he comes!"

Looking as innocent as a lamb, Jack strolled up.

"Got a cab?" he inquired.

"Yes," growled Sam; "and a rotten old thing it is! I'd rather ride on a 'bus."

"You'm got to get in dis cab, Sammy," declared Pete. "After all de trouble dis child hab taken to get dis lucky cab, I tink it am bery dispolite ob you to talk ob such common tings as 'buses.'"

The wheezy old cab-driver, after much trouble and expenditure of breath, succeeded in piling the luggage on top of the cab.

"Now den, in you get!" cried Pete. "Golly! What's dat funny noise?"

"I reckon this old cab has seen its best days," muttered Sam, as he clambered in, accompanied by the strange creaks and groans of the springs.

"Now we'm off!" cried Pete, as he slammed the door. "Mind dat tail ob yours, Rory. It must be rader tender where dat lobster bit it. Golly!" he exclaimed after a few moments. "We'm not off yet. What's the man doing?"

Jack and Sam burst out laughing, and the old cab fairly rocked.

"What's de matter wid you?" demanded Pete.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "Have you engaged this old crock by the hour?"

"Nunno, Sammy!" replied Pete, looking rather mystified. "What do you want to ask a silly question like dat for?"

"Oh, nothing," said Sam. "Only you might tell the cabby to drive on."

With some difficulty Pete managed to squeeze his shoulders through the narrow little window, and he bawled at the cabman:

"Dribe on, Stick-in-de-mud!"

"Ugh!" grunted the cabby. "You're a fine, clever sort of chap, you are, telling a fellow to drive on, and he don't know where to drive to!"

"Oh, golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Bery sorry, old hoss! Just tickle dat gee-gee ob yours under de left rib, an' pull him nose round to No. 13."

"What's that?" asked the cabman, who besides being asthmatical was rather deaf. "What's that?"

"No. 13!" howled Pete, in a voice that made the old horse prick up his ears like a two-year-old. "No. 13, Berknard Street!"

"Gee up!" said the cabman, with a surly sort of nod. "Gee up!"

The old grey horse obeyed his master's command, and the noise that cab made as it left the station caused more than one to wonder whether it were the bones of that venerable animal or the cab itself that rattled so much.

CHAPTER 6.

The Luck of No. 13—Pete On Fire—The Joy of Jack and Sam—An Indignant Cabby—Sam Solves a Difficulty.

"**D**ID you choose this cab for luck, or otherwise?" demanded Jack jerkily, as the antiquated vehicle swayed and bumped and jolted along.

"Eh?"

Pete was trying to fill his pipe, but he succeeded in spilling more tobacco on the seat and floor of the cab than he could get into the bowl of his pipe.

"Steady on!" growled Sam. "That's my 'bacey when you've finished with it."

"Thanks, Sammy!" replied Pete. "Funny ting how de moshun ob dis conveyance am 'zactly like de moshun ob a ship. What's de matter, Sammy? Feel sea-sick?"

"No," grumbled Sam, "I don't feel sea-sick, but I do feel sick of your wastefulness. "Look here," he went on, getting his pouch, "you're not going to chuck my 'bacey about any more. There was over an ounce in that pouch before you started on it. Now look at it!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, looking very solemn. "Dere's still a few crumbs ob comfort, Sammy, at de bottom. Put dem in your pipe, an' make de best ob your miserable existence. Try to bear up 'gainst adverse circumstances, Sammy. You neber know what's going to happen next. You see, dis am a cab dat's either lucky or unlucky, an' dere's not de slightest shadow ob a doubt dat something am most bound to happen."

"Seems to me," declared Jack, "that the most unlikely thing that will happen will be our arrival at our destination. I should say we shall get there somewhere about six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Don't you get into de bad habit ob worrying 'bout nuthing," answered Pete, leaning back comfortably and puffing away at his pipe. "Take a lesson from Rory. Dat dog am sensible—he don't get oxciting ob himself ober nuthing. Golly! What's dat funny smell? Dis 'bacey ob yours, Sammy, am above a bit strong."

Jack and Sam sniffed. There was certainly a funny sort of vapour floating about.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam.

"What's de matter wid you now?" inquired Pete, blissfully unconscious of the cause of Sam's mirth. "What, hab you got dem, too, Jack? Yah, yah, yah! What funny faces you two do make when you'm larfing!"

"He, he, he!" spluttered Jack, edging closer to the window. "I'm mighty sure that you'll make a funnier one presently! Ha, ha, ha!"

Pete eyed his comrades' laughing faces with a serious expression.

"Dunno 'bout dis little lot," he muttered at last. "Golly! Dere am a most distobacco-like kind of scent 'bout dis. Ow! Pricking—burning! Put me out!"

A glowing little plug of tobacco had fallen out of Pete's pipe, and now he was feeling the effects of it, and the way he slapped at his leg sent Jack and Sam into roars of laughter.

"Oh, golly!" he groaned, scrambling to his feet. "Stop de cab, Sammy—stop de—"

The effect of this last performance had peculiar and, for Pete, disastrous results, for on rising to his feet, his head had caught the roof of the cab with a bump that threatened to lift it off. And this would most likely have happened had not something else given way.

With a crack, that should have, but did not, reach the driver's ears, the floor of the cab gave way, and Pete's legs went clean through.

Rory jumped on to the seat beside Jack, and Sam lay full length on the opposite one.

Pandemonium broke loose in that cab. Pete howled, and Rory barked, and above the din rose the shrieks of Jack and Sam's delighted laughter.

"Ho, ho, ho!" spluttered Sam. "That's right, you beauty—run! Ho, ho, ho!"

This was indeed the only thing Pete could do. The hole in the floor of the cab was just large enough to enable him to take little, short, quick steps; and it was either this or submit to being dragged along.

"Keep it up!" gasped Jack, wiping his streaming eyes. "Ho, ho, ho! We sha'n't be long!"

Pete made a wild grab at one of Jack's legs; but that worthy promptly retreated to the corner of his seat, and alternately choked and gasped and spluttered for breath.

"S'pose you two tink dis mighty funny!" mumbled Pete, pounding along. "Why don't you stop de cab? Why don't you— Oh, golly! De speed am increasing!"

Renewed shrieks of laughter burst from the two comrades.

Cabby had just turned into Berkward Street, and he whipped up the old grey in grand style.

Pat, pat, pat! went Pete's boots along the asphalt road with the increasing speed. His jolly face was glum, and bathed in perspiration, and he groaned as his shins banged against the rough edges of the hole.

Jack and Sam were now reduced to a state of utter collapse, but they managed a feeble chuckle as the cab stopped suddenly at No. 13, and the unexpected shock sent Pete forward, clutching wildly at nothing.

"Golly, golly, golly!" he groaned, as he clutched at the edge of the seat and dragged himself to a standing position. "Dis am awful! Send for de doctor, Sammy!"

"Hi, guv'nor, what's the matter wif that old cab of yours?" yelled a small boy as the vehicle stopped. "Luvus! It's growed a pair of legs! Crikey!"

The cabby scowled at the boy.

"Get orf, yer young himp!" he growled. "None of yer lip, now! Clear orf!"

The boy dodged the angry man's whip, and from a safe distance bent down with hands on knees and surveyed Pete's legs.

"Why, someone's come clean through the bottom!" he yelled.

"Wot!" cried the cabman, scrambling down backwards. "Wot's that?"

Just as he reached the pavement, Jack and Sam opened the cab door and came out, followed by Rory, who promptly went for the small boy and sent him flying down the road.

The cabman eyed the pair of smiling faces doubtfully.

"Where's the other one?" he asked. "Ain't he coming out? Here, wot's this?"

Jack and Sam burst out laughing again at the expression on the cabby's face as he glanced by them and saw Pete—at least, the upper half of him—standing in the centre of the cab.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered the driver. "There ain't no words for it! 'Ere, you, you've been and busted my cab up! How am I going on?"

trousers you—you can laugh, you can," he hooted, glaring at Jack and Sam, "but the cabby not about my blessed cab? That's right—break her all up!" he added sarcastically. "I don't mind—oh no!"

There was a rending of wood as Pete struggled free and gained the pavement.

"Golly!" he groaned, bending down and picking the splinters from his calves. "Dunno 'bout leabing dat little wooden hut, but dis child am mighty glad to leabe dat old cab ob yours, old hoss!"

"You ain't left much!" howled the cabman. "Who do you think's goin' to pay for a new floor to my cab—eh?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete. "Ask Sammy. I reckon dat you ought to pay dis child. Dat cab ob yours was s'posed to carry us here, and dis child hab had to run nearly all de way!"

"Well, I ain't goin' to have it!" shouted the driver.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, who was really none the worse for his adventure. "Dis child don't want dat old cab. Best send it to de museum."

"See here," cried Sam, with difficulty keeping a straight face, "you've had your fun; Pete, now you had better pay for it!"

"I like dat!" exclaimed Pete indignantly. "Dat's a bery fine sort ob proposition. Dis child habn't had any fun at all. Golly! You'm coming it a bit too fick, Sammy!"

For once in his life Pete was really indignant, and Sam chuckled 'till his sides ached.

"Scissors!" he gasped, at last. "I suppose we had better settle this matter."

"You can do what you like 'bout dat," declared Pete, mounting the steps of No. 13 with a very dignified air. "Dis child washes him hands ob de whole affair."

"Well, I reckon it's cheap at—what?"

The cabman mumbled something about summoning them for damages.

"Very well, then," declared Sam, "we'll pay your fare, and you can sue us for the rest."

Cabby looked rather sad at this. He knew very well that Pete, and not himself, was the party to get damages, and he tried another tack.

"Say, guv'nor," he mumbled, "don't be 'ard on a chap. I've had this 'ere cab for nigh on forty years, an' nobody's ever gone through the bottom of her afore. Now, that's straight."

Sam gave a grim smile, but his sense of humour prevailed.

"Here you are, then," he said, handing the cabman a five-pound note. "The fun was worth it."

"Thankee, sir—thankee!" cried the cabby, banging the door to and clambering to his box. "Gee up!"

"Here, hi!" bawled Pete. "Stop dat cab, Sammy! We habn't got our traps off yet!"

"Sorry, sir," muttered the cabby, pulling up. Sam's unexpected gift had quite thrown him off his balance. "I quite forgot them portymantles."

Laughing heartily, Jack and Sam secured their luggage, and once more the cabman whipped up his old grey and departed.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, who had calmly watched Jack and Sam transfer their joint property to the pavement. "Good job dis child was here to look after you, or we should hab lost all our tings."

"Suppose you come down from there and help us carry them up the steps," suggested Sam.

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said!" growled Sam.

"Nunno! Dis child am a bit deaf," muttered Pete. "'Sides, it will make tings a bit equal if you two funny chaps do a bit ob work. Dat run frough de bottom ob de cab hab incapacitated dis child from doing any sort ob work till Christmas."

Jack and Sam knew it was useless to argue the matter, so they put their pride in their pockets, and hauled the portmanteaux and gun-cases up the steps.

CHAPTER 7.

The Terrible Mrs. Marchmont—Three Slices of Bread-and-butter, and Three Sardines—Sally is Cross-examined—Pete's Hint—The Three Go Out to Find Some Tea.

PETE grinned at Sam as he plumped the last bag down.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared. "Dat was a funny ride! Golly, but dis child hab got him legs full ob bits ob wood! Eh? Nunno, Sammy, dere's no wood in my noddle. Might be some dere, dough, judging by de sound."

"Chuck it, you black beauty!" growled Sam. "Knock your pipe out on someone else's head!"

"Sorry, Sammy!" said Pete, calmly lighting his pipe. "Tink dis child must be suffering from de mind gone away."

"Well, suppose you fetch that mind back again," growled Sam, laughing in spite of himself, "and knock at the door."

"Eh?"

"Knock at the door, stupid!"

"Nunno! Dis child hab retired from business," declared Pete gravely, as he seated himself on Jack's portmanteau. "You do de knocking, Sammy, while Jack pulls de bell. Dis child will look after de luggage."

"Obstinate beggar!" growled Sam.

Rat, tat, tat!

"Dat's rader cleber," observed Pete, turning his head on one side. "Tink you could get a job as a postman, Sammy."

"I know what sort of a job you'd get!" retorted Sam.

"What's dat?" inquired Pete, stretching himself, and drawing a bit nearer to his comrade.

"No, you don't!" declared Sam, keeping a wary eye on Pete. "You keep your distance. We don't want any of your silly tricks. Look out! Here's somebody coming."

Pete pretended to tie up his bootlace as the door opened and Mrs. Marchmont appeared.

The lady had donned her afternoon dress, and she looked a little less as if she had been mangled; but her face was the same, and she surveyed the comrades with a sour expression.

"We've come——" commenced Jack.

"So I observe," snapped the landlady. "Perhaps you will be good enough to step inside and clear those boxes and things off my steps. This is a respectable house, and I have no desire to become the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood. Who does that dog belong to? Send him off. Shoo!"

Rory sat down, with his tongue out, and blinked at Mrs. Marchmont.

"Who's dog is that?" she demanded.

Jack and Sam looked at one another and then at Pete.

"Dis dog belongs to de free ob us," said Pete. "Say how d'ye do to de pretty lady, Rory."

Rory sat up and worked his jaws.

"Pleased to meet you, madam!"

at will Mrs. Marchmont for a moment was taken off her guard, and she retreated
at run into the hall with a gentle screech. But she speedily recovered, and glared
y sort at Sam.

"I will not put up with such insolence!" she declared vehemently. "Send
their hat dog away! I won't have the beast in here!"

"Very well, madam," replied Sam, who felt very small inclination to put
up with the amiable creature's bad temper, "we will go somewhere else.
Come along, you two."

This had the effect of bringing Mrs. Marchmont to her senses. She had
no desire to lose so generous paying guests as the three had shown them-
selves likely to be, and she gulped down her wrath.

"You will have to pay extra, then!" she snapped.

Sam sighed and looked at Pete, but his hopes that that worthy would
abandon his desire to stay at No. 13 went down. He saw from the expres-
sion on his comrade's face that he was thinking of Sally, and that Sally
would carry the day.

"Bery well, my dear!" exclaimed Pete, rising to his feet and lugging a
bag on to the mat. "Consider dat little matter settled. Sammy will pay
out on for Rory's lodging."

With very bad grace, Mrs. Marchmont gave way, and while they brought
child in their luggage she made mental calculations regarding the amount she
should charge for Rory's keep.

"You will find your tea laid in the breakfast-room," she snapped, as she
closed the hall door. "And I insist that that dog shall be kept in order."

"Dat's all right, my dear," replied Pete, with unruffled good-humour.
"Rory am a bery well-behabed, gentlemanly sort ob dog. You will not hab
de least reason for complaint. Golly!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of the tea-table.

Mrs. Marchmont had descended to the kitchen, and Jack and Sam seated
themselves, and grinned delightedly at Pete.

"What about luck now?" muttered Sam.

"Free fin slices ob brem-butter," groaned Pete, "an' free sardines! Oh,
golly! What hab you got dere, my dear?"

The pale-faced little maid-of-all-work had entered the room carrying a
bit tray, on which reposed a battered teapot and a small jug of hot water.

"Tea, sir," she murmured, in a timid voice. "And the mistress said that
if you wanted any more hot water that you were to ring for it."

"H'm!" muttered Pete. "What am you two laughing at? What's your
name, Sally?" he went on absentmindedly.

Sally stared at him in amazement, and began to look more frightened than
ever, and the corners of her mouth went down in an unmistakable manner.

Pete came out of his reverie suddenly.

"Nunno, my dear!" he said, addressing the timid girl in a gentle voice.
"You just turn on de smiling side ob your face—like dis." The extra-

ordinary face he pulled had its effect, and Sally's pale, pinched one looked
quite pretty as she smiled back at him. "Dat's better, my dear! As
Wagglespeare says, 'Smole, and de world smoles at you; cry, an' you cry
alone,' Golly! What a funny world it is! Hab you been here long, my
dear?"

"Nine months, sir."

"H'm! How much money hab you?"

Sally looked frightened again, but a smile stole across her face as she
caught Pete's eye.

"I haven't any."

"Golly! Do you work for nuthing?"

"Oh, no!"

"How am it, den, dat you habn't any money?"

"Well, you see, the mistress stops some of it for the things I have broke and the rest she is taking care of for me."

Pete scowled at this so horribly that Sally retreated.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared. "Dis child's bark am like Rory's—wor dan him bite. We must hab anudder talk 'bout tings after tea. El broken a dinner-service, Sally?"

"Oh, no, never!" gasped Sally.

A gleam of satisfaction shone in Pete's eyes.

"Tought not," he muttered. "Sally!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Tell de old hoss—— Golly! Dat won't do. Tell Mrs. Marchmont dat dis child wants to speak to her."

Sally vanished. When she had gone the comrades held a whispered consultation.

"All right!" exclaimed Sam at last. "If you think you can tackle the o wretch, you can."

"Shoo!" murmured Pete. "De sound ob fairy trotters echoes in d child's ear."

"What is it you require?" demanded the landlady, as she entered wi silent step.

"Someting to eat, my dear," said Pete mildly.

"What?"

"Someting to eat, my dear," repeated Pete.

"I have just provided you with an excellent tea!"

"M'yes! De excellence part am all right," replied Pete. "It's a quantity part dat dis child hab called you to see to. You see, bef Jack an Sammy hab mighty good appetites, and dis child am feeling more dan usu peckish."

Mrs. Marchmont made a noise vulgarly known as a snort, and followe her first expression of disapproval with a sniff.

Pete stretched out his hand and calmly appropriated the three slices bread-and-butter.

"Hab a sardine, Jack? Pour out de tea, Sammy. Golly! Habn't yo gone for dat brem-butter yet?" he went on. "Dese pore chaps am hungry. An' dere's Rory, too—he wants some sort ob nourishment. Bring him mutton chop."

"I never heard of such gluttony!" cried the landlady, showing no sign of obeying Pete's order. "It's disgraceful!"

"Don't see dat you hab any call to make rude observations ob dat kind my dear, seeing dat we pay for de brem-butter, de sardines, de chop, an' an' de broken dinner-services. What do dey do to people dat get mone under false 'tences, Sammy?" inquired Pete, turning away from Mrs. Marchmont. "Do dey lock dem up, or—— Golly! She'm gone!"

"I reckon she took the hint," muttered Sam. "If we go on at this rat we shall have to get our meals out. I'm not a particular kind of chap, bu I'm bothered if I'm going to make a meal off a mouldy sardine!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Neber seen you so anxious 'bout feeding before, Sammy. S'pose we try de simple life for two-free weeks. What's dis?"

"Suppose to be tea!" growled Sam, as he poured out the yellow, luke warm fluid.

"Tink dat dey hab forgotten someting or oder, den," muttered Pet cautiously, tasting the unsavoury mixture. "Ugh!"

"I reckon I'd as soon drink ditch-water!" cried Jack. "It's awful stuff. Oh, let's get out and find something to eat! I'm ravenous!"

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"Wait a tick, den," muttered Pete. "Come 'long, Rory!" Followed by Rory, he tiptoed across the room, and presently the comrades heard the stairs creak as he went up them. A few minutes later he returned.

"Shoo!" he murmured mysteriously. "Come 'long!" Nothing loth, Jack and Sam followed, and two seconds later the front door gave a faint click, and the three breathed the air of freedom.

"What have you done with Rory?" inquired Sam, as they walked up the street.

"Left him in charge ob our luggage," replied Pete. "Don't like de look ob honesty 'bout dat lady, somehow. Gabe him a biscuit and some water, and your obercoat to lie on."

"Did you?" growled Sam.

"Dat's so, Sammy. Surely you don't mind de poor dog habing a bed to lie on, do you?"

"Why didn't you give him one of your own coats?" grumbled Sam.

"Golly! Neber tought ob dat, somehow. Shall hab to make a note ob dat for de next time."

CHAPTER 8.

Mixed—The Result of Pete's Laugh, and Subsequent Superstition—A New Acquaintance.

"TEA for free, my dear!" cried Pete, as they seated themselves at a little marble-topped table in a tea-shop near Hyde Park.

"Anything else, sir?" inquired the waitress, with a giggle.

"Eh? Golly! Yes!" exclaimed Pete, seizing the printed bill of fare. "Sausages and mashed. How's dat?"

"That'll do me!" cried Sam.

"And me!" exclaimed Jack. "Anything so long as it's something to eat."

"Three sausages?" inquired the waitress.

"Dat's right, my dear."

"Three altogether?"

"Ob course, we don't want dem on free separate plates. Free for Sammy, free for Jack, and free for dis child."

"Then you want nine?"

"Nunno!"

"Nine altogether, I mean?"

"Nunno! Free togeder!" exclaimed Pete, mopping his brow. "Free—Golly! She'm gone!"

"So I should think!" exclaimed Sam. "About time, too. You were both of you getting a bit mixed."

"You'm quite wrong, Sammy. De order was giben as plain as de nose on your face. Free for dis child, free—"

"Oh, all right!" cried Sam. "Don't, for goodness' sake, get repeating all that lot again! I reckon we know what you mean, even if you don't make your meaning plain."

"Golly! Sammy, seems to me dat dere's nothing dat is perfectly plain to de simplest mind."

"Quite so," agreed Sam.

"Eh?"

"I said quite so," repeated Sam.

"M'yes!" drawled Pete. "De words are all right, but it's de funny way you say dem dat makes me tink you'm poking fun at dis child. Let's hab de question an' answer ober again."

"I reckon not," declared Sam. "Here come our sausages. Perhaps they'll keep you quiet for a while. Thank you, miss!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, half rising from his chair, with an expression of affected dismay on his face, as the waitress laid a large dish piled with sausages in front of Sam. "Golly! Where's dis child's sausingers?"

"Don't you be greedy," said Sam, quickly helping Jack and himself. "There you are—you can have the dish."

The waitresses exchanged looks of amusement as they watched the little comedy. They were not used to Pete, and his little game was quite real to them. They thought he was in earnest.

"He's got a nice face, though," murmured a dark-eyed girl. "It's pity he's so greedy."

Jack and Sam nearly choked as they overheard this remark, and Pete began to shake with laughter.

The heaving of his broad shoulders attracted the waitress's notice, and with heightened colour, she moved to the far end of the shop.

At last Pete could keep it in no longer, and he burst out with so hearty a "Yah, yah, yah!" that an old gentleman, who was seated at an adjoining table delicately negotiating a boiled egg, got his spoon mixed up with his false teeth, and gurgled and spluttered in a most alarming manner.

"What's de matter wid de old chap?" whispered Pete, bending over to Jack. "Tink he'm choking? Shall I pat him on de back?"

"Better not," advised Jack, pulling a straight face. "What's he going to do?"

The offended old party succeeded at last in extricating the spoon, and with great dignity he seized his plate and cup and saucer, and, with an angry glance at Pete, rose from his chair and marched to a table far from theirs.

"Oh, golly!" exclaimed Pete, who had been so interested in the old gentleman's proceeding that in turning suddenly he upset the salt-cellar. "Look what I hab done, Sammy!"

"What?"

"Upspill de salt. Golly! Dat's bery unlucky! What do de superstitious people do when dey do dat?"

"Throw some over your left shoulder," suggested Jack.

The next instant Jack was sorry for his words, for Pete grabbed a handful of salt and flung it over his shoulder.

The intention was good, but the result disastrous, for the clatter of china and an angry growl sounded just behind Pete.

"Who did that?" cried a little man with side-whiskers, springing to his feet, and vainly trying to clear the back of his neck of the salt.

"Most certain it am unlucky to upspill de salt," muttered Pete. "Eh?"

"What do you mean by flinging salt down the back of my neck?" demanded the man, glaring at him.

"Eh?"

Pete was nonplussed. To explain his action was no justification, and he helped himself to another sausage.

"It was quite an accident," said Sam, coming to the rescue. "You see—er—well, I trust you will accept our apology."

"Shake hands, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Bery sorry. It am most unlucky to upspill de salt."

The stranger accepted Pete's hand, the while his sharp, close-set eyes darted from one to the other.

"As you put it so nicely," he said, quite as unconscious of the danger he was running in trusting his hand in Pete's grip as that worthy was of

Perhaps the bad luck that was to follow, "I will accept your apology. My name is Brunswick—Silas Brunswick. There is my card."

"We are Jack, Sam, and Pete," replied Sam.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure!" declared Brunswick.

"Seems a decent sort ob old hoss," muttered Pete, as their new acquaintance returned to his table. "Most forgiving sort ob chap."

CHAPTER 9.

Brunswick Again—Sweated Labour Interests Pete—An Icy Greeting—Caught in the Fog—A Friendly Bobbie—Rory's Bone.

ROASTED muffins followed the sausages, and after these had in turn been followed by a large assortment of pastry, Sam suggested they should stroll along towards the Park.

"Ugh!" muttered Sam, as they elbowed their way through the hurrying crowds of people bearing Westward. "This beats Klondyke for mud! Let's go through the Park."

As the three entered the gates the strident voice of a Park lecturer attracted Pete's attention.

"Golly! What's de man making dat funny noise for?" he said. "Let's go an' hab a look. What's dat you said, Sammy? Listen! Golly! Don't you be so mighty cleber! S'pose dis an what dey call spouting?"

"Well, I don't know why they should call it that," declared Sam, as he followed Pete towards the circle of people surrounding the speaker. "I should say he's making a mighty horrible row."

"Oh, no!" said Jack. "The gentleman is merely voicing his opinion, and endeavouring to right the wrongs of his poor, suffering country. Just listen!"

"The men of England are slaves!" shrieked the orator. "Why don't you stick up for your freedom, stick up for your liberty, strike for—"

"More money!" cried a voice from the crowd.

At this stage of the proceedings the head of the speaker vanished suddenly from the comrades' sight. The sound of the splintering of wood was drowned by the roars of laughter from the crowd, and the impassioned speaker ended his oration with a dismal howl.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, in a voice that rose high above the others' laughter. "Where is de man got to? Pity dat a lubly voice like dat man's should vanish from de view ob de public. Yah, yah, yah! I'm sure I shall laff in two-free minutes. Golly! Why, it's Brunswick!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Sam, as the little man struggled to a standing position on the edge of the crowd. "You must have been mighty quick. How did you get here?"

"Oh, I came round the other way!" explained Brunswick. "Are you interested in the welfare of your country? You see," he went on rapidly, "I am a delegate of the Society for the Suppression of Sweating."

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Shouldn't tink dere was any need ob a society for de suppression ob dat sort ob ting during de winter. Yah, yah, yah!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Brunswick, rubbing his bony hands together. "He, he, he! Good joke! Of course, I mean sweated labour."

For some little time the comrades listened attentively to his voluble exposition of his views. Pete in particular seemed very interested.

"We must hab anodder talk 'bout dese matters," he said, as they bade Brunswick good-night.

"Certainly!" exclaimed the little man, pulling at his straggling whiskers

and darting a peculiar glance at Pete. "I shall be delighted! You will find me here most evenings."

"Queer sort of chap that!" muttered Sam, as they walked back through the fine drizzle that was now falling.

"Don't you be so mighty suspicious, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Seem to me dat if he am a bit cranky he am not a bad old hoss."

"Well, we won't argue about the matter," declared Sam. "For one thing, I feel too tired, and for another I don't see what good can come of it. Now, then, take your hand out of my pocket!"

"Hahn't got a hand in your pocket!" declared Pete, with a great air of offended innocence.

"No; I know you haven't now," growled Sam; "but I do wish you would use a small pipe when you steal and smoke my 'baccy. Here we are! Who going first?"

With a great show of bravery, Pete banged at the door of No. 13. We know full well that he fears neither man nor beast, but it must be admitted that the terrible Mrs. Marchmont was a bigger handful than he cared to handle.

"Dat woman," he muttered, as they stood waiting on the doorstep, "an' too mighty full ob prickles for dis child."

"Well; you can't grumble if she has her good points," chuckled Sam.

"See here, Sammy," commenced Pete, "you am——" He stopped suddenly as the door opened, and they looked once again at the amiable face of Mrs. Marchmont.

Greatly to their surprise, and to their unspoken satisfaction, she maintained an icy silence as they passed through the hall into the breakfast room.

"Tank goodness!" murmured Pete, as he eyed the remains of a bone—it could hardly be called a joint—that had been placed on the table for supper. "Tank goodness dis child had anodder muffin! Shall just take Rory for a walk, an' den go to bed."

"All right!" said Sam, with a yawn. "I reckon that's about the best thing we can do."

Thoroughly tired out, Jack and Sam went to their bed-room, and before they had removed their boots they heard the hall door slam as Pete went out with Rory.

Rory scampered all over the place, searching for cats. London seemed to him a fine place for fun—almost equal to the wilds of Africa.

"Now, den, Rory, you behave yourself!" muttered Pete, as the dog returned to him after a wild chase. "Mustn't catch dose cats, you know or dere'll be trouble. Golly! Where's all dis mist coming from?"

Smoking away contentedly, Pete paced along slowly for some distance. He was thinking about Sally, and the girl's thin, worn face troubled him.

Pete is a kind-hearted chap, and the knowledge that someone was carrying a bigger burden of sorrow than they could bear set him thinking of a way of setting matters right.

"Hallo!" he muttered presently. "You come here, Rory!"

In obedience to his call, Rory came trotting up.

"Can't hab you running 'bout an' losing yourself in dis fog," muttered Pete, slipping a leash through Rory's collar. "Golly! Where's de street gone to?"

Pete peered about him in dismay. Beyond a shadowy mass of building close to him, he could see nothing, and every second the waves of dense and acrid fog seemed to thicken.

With cautious steps, Pete retraced his way; at least, he fondly imagined

he was returning the way he had come, but he was sadly mistaken, for, after half an hour's walking, he might just as well have been in Central Africa for all trace he could find of his street.

"Golly, golly, golly!" he murmured. "Rory, we'm lost in London!"

Rory merely wagged his tail, and tugged a little harder at his lead. So long as he was with Pete, he did not mind if they were lost or not.

"Dis seems to be a mighty quiet sort ob street," said Pete to himself, after another ten minutes or so. "Golly! Dere's a bobby!"

"Say, old hoss, can you——"

Pete stopped abruptly, for the fog had eddied slightly, and a pillar-box stood revealed.

"Golly! Must be pretty bad when pillar-boxes turn into bobbies!" growled Pete. "Dat sounds like somebody's trilbies."

This time there was no mistake about the matter, and a few seconds later the light from a bullseye-lantern flashed in Pete's eyes.

"Say, old hoss, can you tell me where No. Thirteen—— Oh, golly! What's de name ob de street?"

"What's that?" demanded the policeman.

"Dunno!" muttered Pete dejectedly. "Turn dat ting out ob dis child's eyes! I hab forgotten where I lib. It was someting 'bout Berk."

"Berknard," suggested the constable with a grin.

"Golly!" yelled Pete, with delight. "You 'am hit de bullseye de first time! Take dat, old hoss, an' show me de way."

The policeman pocketed the half-crown Pete had slipped into his hand, and, with a civil: "If you'll come with me, sir," led the way round a corner, and in about two minutes Pete was standing outside No. 13.

"Tanks, old hoss!" he said. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" replied the constable.

"Dunno 'bout dis!" muttered Pete, as he watched the figure of the policeman disappear in the fog. "Wish I had a key! Don't feel berry inclined to face dat lubly lady again. Wonder if dis would fit."

Greatly to his surprise and joy, the key he had drawn from his pocket glided into the lock, and the door opened noiselessly.

Pete chuckled as he tucked Rory under his arm and softly shut the door behind him. "Now for dat bone!" he muttered, as he stole, with soft tread and the caution of a burglar across the dimly-lighted hall.

Rory wriggled with joy as Pete removed the bone from the table and placed it in his pocket.

"Shoo!" murmured Pete, as he mounted the stairs. "Dere's nutting to wag your tail 'bout, Rory! 'Fraid dat dis poor bone hab been scalped ob all him meat!"

Without disturbing anyone, Pete reached his room, and, with a sigh of relief, closed his bed-room door. In less than five minutes he was sound asleep, and while Rory, comfortably curled up at the foot of the bed, was gnawing and crushing his bone, Pete's snore gradually got up steam.

CHAPTER 10.

The Awakening of Pete—And Jack and Sam—Jack's Dream.

"URGH! Yah—oo—oh!"

Pete's black face popped up from beneath the bedclothes.

"Golly!" he murmured, groping about for his watch. "What's de time? Golly! Past eight! What a drefful dream dat was!

Tought dat landlady had landed me dat time. Coming for a walk, Rory, you lazy beggar?"

Rory signified his approval of his master's proposal by wagging his stumpy tail, but showed no sign of leaving his comfortable nest. He knew very well that that walk would not come off till Pete had got his hat on, so he tucked his nose away again, and shut one eye tight. The other he employed in taking an occasional peep round the room.

Pete did the best he could in the way of a wash in the small basin, greatly to the detriment of the wallpaper, and then pattered across to Jack and Sam's door.

"Tut, tut!" he muttered, as he peeped in, and saw that they were both asleep. "Can't allow dese lazy habits! B'lieve dose lazy chaps would lay dere an' sleep till dinner-time."

Pete returned to his washstand, and took up his sponge. "Dis will do for Jack," he murmured aloud. "What shall me hab for Sammy? Dis'll do—nice bit of scented soap. He'm a luxurious sort ob customer. Yah, yah, yah!"

Pete's laugh was a silent one, and when he once more stood in his chum's room they were still soundly slumbering.

"Sammy first," he chuckled, dropping the piece of soap delicately between Sam's teeth. Then, crossing swiftly to Jack's bed, he dropped the wet, cold sponge full on his upturned face, and as swiftly bent down and dived beneath the bed.

"Urg-h! B-r-r-r!" spluttered Jack, starting up in bed and gasping for breath. "B-r-r-r! Sammy! Couldn't have been him!" muttered Jack, shivering. "Must have been that beauty Pete. The beggar's cleared out pretty sharp! Good heavens! Sammy!"

Sam opened one eye, and stared sleepily at Jack. Then he became conscious of a most horrible taste in his mouth. "Bah! Pouf! G-r-r-r!" he gasped, spitting and spluttering.

"What ever's the matter?" cried Jack, gazing in astonishment at Sam's mouth, which was covered with froth.

Sam did not reply, but with one bound he sprang out of bed and rushed to the washstand. "Ugh! Bah!" he growled and spluttered, grabbing the water-bottle and swilling his mouth out. "Ugh-ar! Soap! Did you play that silly trick?" he demanded, glaring at Jack.

"Not me!" declared Jack, pointing to the wet sponge that lay on the floor by the side of his bed. "That's what woke me up, and—"

"It's that thumping silly chump, then!" grumbled Sam. "I'll take good care he don't disturb us again!"

Sam skipped across the cold oilcloth, and turned the key in the lock. "Now, then!" he said, as he tumbled into bed again. "We'll serve that beauty out by staying in bed and having another snooze, and he'll have to get his breakfast by himself—and I pity him when he comes to tackle our amiable landlady."

"Good!" chuckled Jack, as he followed Sam's example, and snuggled down between the warm sheets. "Serve him right!"

Had Jack and Sam been of a more suspicious nature, and not quite so eager to get back to their comfortable beds, they might have saved themselves a lot of trouble, and decidedly, had their heads been above the bed-clothes, they would have heard a distinct chuckle.

A glance beneath Jack's bed would have revealed Pete lying there full-length, doing his utmost to control his feelings of delight.

But they lay there unconscious of the fate that awaited them, and, as they sunk deeper into the land of sleep again, Pete was there, very much awake, and thinking.

Presently he poked his head cautiously out from beneath the hanging valence and listened.

A broad, gratified smile stole over his face as he heard the deep, regular breathing of Jack and Sam; then his woolly head disappeared, and all was quiet and undisturbed.

Presently Jack began to dream, and his dream gradually became very vivid. He was on a wild, raging sea. The motion of the boat became worse and worse. Great waves bore down upon her and lifted her on high, and as he dreamed Jack clutched the taffrail—which was the head of the bed. Then Jack's dream became quite pathetic. He was alone on this terrible sea. His comrades were far away, and he wished he had given Rory a pat before he had embarked.

Now, Jack's dream had been caused by a strange occurrence that started soon after Pete's head had disappeared beneath the bed.

Slowly, but surely, the four feet of that bed had risen from the floor, and as Pete had drawn himself up on all-fours the bed had given a slight lurch, and then, as he lifted it higher and higher, till he stood fairly planted on both feet, the motion of Jack's bed in reality resembled the motion of a boat at sea.

The weight was nothing to Pete, but caution was necessary, and he chuckled until Jack's ship trembled with the shock.

"Shall hab to walk sideways," he murmured. "Can't turn round in dis space."

Step by step, and with the care and caution worthy of a better cause, Pete crossed the room and stood exactly parallel to Sam's bed.

"One, two, free!"

With a mighty heave of his shoulders, Pete turned Jack's bed over on top of Sam's as cleanly and neatly as if it had been a pancake. Then he fled.

It was the work of fifteen seconds to unlock the door and regain his own room, where he astonished Rory by careering round in silent mirth.

CHAPTER 11.

Trouble With the Landlady Again—Saved by Pete's Ventriloquism—A Fresh Move.

THE upheaval of Jack's bed was to him the foundering of his dream-ship, and he struck out right manfully.

Sam did the same, but he was wakened from a dream of peace and green fields to a reality that resembled an earthquake more than anything else.

When Jack had struck out he had caught Sam a biff in the eye, and the blind instinct of the pair resulted in a fierce struggle amid tossing blankets and a whirlwind of sheets.

At last Jack landed on the floor with a bump, and lay staring at Sam's astonished face sticking out above him between the two beds.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Jack.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" growled Sam.

"What the——"

"What's the meaning of it all?" cried Sam, coming out head-foremost and landing on all-fours on the floor. "Just look at those beds!"

"Why, it's mine!" exclaimed Jack, rubbing his eyes, half wondering if he were still dreaming. "Extraordinary!"

"Bit out of the ordinary, I should say!" growled Sam. "How ever did he manage it? Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

They sat on the floor and howled with mirth.

"Ho, ho——"

"Golly!" cried Pete, opening the door and gazing at them. "What am you cackling 'bout? Golly! Who eber upended dat bed like dat? Yah yah, yah! Nunno! Ta-ta!"

"How did he get us?" exclaimed Jack, as he and Sam removed the upended bed to its proper place.

"He must have been concealed in the room when I locked the door. Under your bed, I suppose. I'll take good care another time to have good look round. Let's get dressed. I'm hungry."

"You can't touch me now, boys!" cried Pete as, a few minutes later, the two entered his room. "I hab got my fingers crossed."

"All right!" cried Sam. "We won't go for you now, but we'll get our own back some other time."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, sticking his hat on. "Shall lock my door before de donkeys come in. Yah, yah, yah!"

"All right, my boy!" declared Sam. "You can laugh now, but— Well, see here, what about breakfast?"

"Eh?" muttered Pete, shaking his head.

"Breakfast!" bawled Sam.

"Dunno," mused Pete. "I habn't got any brekfus, Sammy."

"No, I don't suppose you have," retorted Sam. "But you insisted on bringing us here, so you'll have to get the right side of Mrs. Marchmont. I'm not going to have any more of her dish-water and leavings."

"Golly!" muttered Pete. "'Fraid dere's no right side to dat lady. S'pose," he added, "dat we go out to brekfus."

"And dinner and tea and supper, I reckon," said Sam grimly.

"What a disconnected lot you two am!" muttered Pete, as he led the way down the stairs. "Shoo!"

"This is a fine way of going on!" growled Sam. "Fancy paying five pounds a week for rooms for this!"

"Bery well, Sammy," whispered Pete cheerfully, "you hab a go wid de landlady, an' make her gib us a decent sort ob brekfus."

"Not me!"

"Bery well, den, don't get so disgumbled," muttered Pete. "We hab to make de best ob a bad job. Oh, golly!"

Even Rory seemed taken back at the sudden appearance of the landlady at the foot of the stairs.

"I left half a leg of mutton on the table last night," she said, glaring at Pete.

"M'yes, my dear!"

"I want it."

"Eh?"

"I say I want it! There was enough there for six people!"

Pete opened his eyes wide with astonishment.

"'Nuff for six people?"

"Yes. I believe you've stolen it."

"Golly!" muttered Pete. "Can't bery well steal what am your own. How many pounds ob meat do you tink dere was on dat bone?"

"At least three!" snapped the lady.

"You greedy dog!" observed Pete, looking at Rory severely.

"What! Do you mean to say you gave my meat to that dog?" cried the landlady. "You wasteful creature! You will come to want! You will have to pay me for that joint!"

"Spec's we should most likely come to want," murmured Pete, edging towards the front door. "Seems dat we'm wanting our brekfus. Hi Golly! Keep her off, Sammy!"

"I would not demean myself by touching you!" exclaimed Mrs. Marchmont,

standing in front of Pete and pushing her pointed nose right into his
 e. "Pay me for the joint you stole!"

"Woman, hold your tongue!"

The astounded landlady rounded on Sam like a virago.

"You—you——" she stuttered.

"Madam, I beg of you!" exclaimed Sam. "I did not speak, I assure
 u. I——"

"Me-ow! Me-ow-ow!"

"Keep that dog of yours away!" cried Mrs. Marchmont, darting towards
 e breakfast-room door. "Tibby, Tibby, go——"

While the astounded lady was looking round for her pet tabby—whose
 let tones had been so successfully imitated by Pete—Sam wrenched open
 e door, and the three jumped down the steps like escaped schoolboys.

"What a tartar!" gasped Sam. "Scissors! The woman must be
 t—id!"

It may be wondered why Jack and Sam and Pete put up with what they
 ; but it must be remembered that they seek adventure, and whether it
 in the depths of unexplored forests or in a common lodging-house, they
 ck to their guns—so long as it suits them.

For years they have travelled all over the world; for years they have
 countered every kind of foe, including the snake and—Mrs. Marchmont;
 d in justice to the latter it must be admitted that some of the former
 rned out to be quite harmless—their appearance was all that was against
 em. But in respect of Mrs. Marchmont, it must be admitted that she had
 t even this in her favour.

Some people are born bad, some are made so, and it is difficult to say to
 hich category must be relegated our landlady. The fact remains that she
 owed no good points, and if she had any little weaknesses in the way of
 uman kindness she was remarkably careful and successful in keeping them
 id hidden.

"She's absolutely stark, staring mad!" declared Jack. "I can't make her
 t at all."

"I tink she took rader a fancy to you, all de same," said Pete. "Dough
 spec's you would rader be hugged by a bear dan dat gentle creature."

"Sure!" exclaimed Jack, with a shiver. "Ugh, it's cold, and I want my
 eakfast!"

"Here we am, den!" exclaimed Pete. "You can smell de rashers and de
 eon from dis side ob de road. 'Pull up for carmen'—what's dat mean?"

"Never mind about that!" cried Sam, leading the way into the humble
 it scrupulously clean little eating-house. "It's breakfast we want just
 ow. What shall we have?"

"What could be nicer dan eggs-and-bacon and coffee—eh, old hoss?"

"Certainly, sir!" replied a fat little man in a large white apron.
 Coffee and heggs-and-bacon. Ready in five minutes."

Pete fairly surprised the owner of that coffee-house.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I do get some chaps in here with a twist on
 m, but 'pon my soul, you take the biscuit! Beg pardon?"

"How much?" inquired Sam.

"Let me see," said the man, checking the items off on his fingers.

Three 'am-and-heggs, and two ditto, that's five, and two more, that's
 a willen. Three-and-sixpence. Five cups of corfee, that's four-and-fourpence;
 id—any bread?"

"Three breads," replied Sam.

"That'll be four-and-four and three—four-and-sevenpence. Thank you,
 r!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, as they walked down Park Lane. "Dat looks

a likely sort ob place. S'pose we take dat house for two-free weeks? D child am tired ob libing in lodgings."

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "You always fly from one extreme to anothe Any particular reason for choosing that place?"

"Nunno, Sammy!" replied Pete, eyeing the house. "Nunno! Hab gib up superstition for de time. Seems to me dat it am one ob dose tings d require a lot ob study. Shall take it up again when we retire from acti life. Take down de address ob de agent, Sammy."

"I reckon they'll want a thumping big rent," muttered Sam.

"Dat don't matter, Sammy. "You hab got plenty ob money."

As a matter of fact, it did not matter in the least who had the money of the three; they have a joint fund, and each drew on their enormous fortune as he liked and when he liked. But it pleases Pete to keep up the pretence of spending either Jack or Sam's share.

"Got it, Sammy?"

"Yes, I've got it," replied Sam.

Ten minutes later a hansom dropped the three in front of the estate agent office.

"Pay de cab, Sammy!" cried Pete, as he alighted, and pushed open heavy mahogany door and entered an office.

"Come on, Jack and Sammy!" he bawled. "Dis am de shop where d hab houses on de hire cistern."

CHAPTER 12.

Pete Astonishes the Clerk—A Deal with Barter, Estate Agent, and Stroke of Diplomacy.

AS the three entered the office, a supercilious and dandified young man rose from a large roll-topped desk, and, twisting the ends of a pair and wispy moustache between his thumb and forefinger, gazed, with an air of mingled concern and a false assumption of haughtiness, into Pete's smiling, good-humoured face.

He stood thus for some few seconds, then tried to relieve the monotony of things by twirling the other end of what he fondly believed was the sign of manliness.

Pete's smile gradually developed into a grin, and then into a loud and healthy laugh.

"I—I beg your pardon!" exclaimed the clerk nervously. "But—"

"Dat's all right, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Dere's nobody here who wants you to beg deir pardon—unless, ob course, you hab offended Jack and Sammy."

The clerk abruptly left off torturing his upper lip, and bestowed his attention on his latest thing in neckties. His hand trembled slightly as he fingered it to see if its folds were in the correct position; but it must be admitted that this action was more from force of habit than anything else. So for the advent of Pete had thoroughly thrown this young man out of his usual attitude.

"Am you in pain?" asked Pete, seating himself on the table and gazing with solemn eyes at the disturbed assistant.

"I—I beg your—"

"Golly! What a lot ob 'I's'! Now den, young man, leab off mauliny pr dat bit of rag 'bout an' 'tend to business. We free want a house in Park Lane, wid furniture, an' gas, an' 'lectric light, an' servants, an' blankets—Nunno! Flunkets— Golly! No; dat's wrong."

"You mean flunkets," said Sam.

"Dat's right. Knew it was someting ob dat sort. Now den, let's resu

disinterrupted shovel— Nunno! Dat's wrong. Can tell dat by de und ob it."

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "Get on with it. Schedule, you mean."
"Tanks, Sammy. But don't you be so mighty anxious to worry dis child, he might forget someting, and den dis young man might let us hab de ob place for residing in dat we don't want to lib in. Let me see. We diagnosed de case so far as de flunkkeys, an' now we come to de most important matters."

As Pete rattled on the clerk backed away from him; but Pete followed m all round the office, rolling out a catalogue of the things he required.

"Now, see here, young man, we must hab free bed-rooms, an' a kitchen, a barf-room, an'—Golly! Mind dat chair—a cellar for de coals, wid a big dlock on de door, 'cos dey hab gone up in price, an' two-free water-taps— in de barf-room, an' one in de kitchen, an' one— Dere, what do you want to bang into dat table for? Do de customers always hab to walk ter you when dey am telling you what dey want? You hab made me forget where we want dat oder tap. Still, dat don't matter. We will let it pass. Dough we might hab it put in de drawing-room, 'cos dat chap ummy am a bit hot-headed at times. Can't tink ob anything else just on de arch ob de moment. Golly! Dat memory-cistern hab gone wrong again."

"Spur," murmured Sam.

"Dat's de ticket! Must revise dat cistern a bit. Shall hab to get a ary an' keep a note ob all de tings dat suggest something else."

"I should suggest that we get to business!" exclaimed Jack, choking back his desire to laugh at the unfortunate clerk, who was now gazing at Pete er the top of his desk as if ready to fall at a minute's notice.

"Well, I neber!" cried Pete, rolling his eyes in a frightful manner. "You'm neber satisfied. Hahn't I been 'splaining de requirements ob we a pae wid de greatest ob circumnavigation an' lucidity?"

"See here," said Sam, making a move towards the clerk's desk.

"You just wait a bit, Sammy!" cried Pete. "Am I getting dis house or n you?"

"I reckon you are doing a lot of talking!" exclaimed Sam. "But as for etting what we want, that's quite another matter. Now, see here, young an," he went on, addressing the clerk, "you have a house to let in Park lane, and we want to take it."

Under Sam's interrogation, the young assistant regained some of his usual r of dignity, and he blurted out a remark, accompanied with a somewhat dointed glance at Sam's well-worn and unfashionable tweed suit:

"The rent is fifteen hundred a year, payable in advance."

Sam gazed at the pasty-faced youth in silence.

"Well?" he drawled at length.

"I said the rent was fifteen hundred a year," repeated the clerk, with eightened colour.

"So I understood," replied Sam calmly. "Kindly make out a receipt, of ill you? We will take the house for six months."

As he concluded his remark Sam pulled out a bundle of banknotes and gazed proceeded to count out on the desk the required amount.

"But—but—" exclaimed the clerk, pushing his chair back hastily. "I I can't take you as a tenant without due—er—formality! Er—I must see auly principal first."

Sam picked up his notes again and put them in his pocket. The offensive ets—anner in which they had been greeted on entering the office had had its ffect on his usually even temper.

"Look here," he growled, turning to Pete, "if you're so mighty anxious

to take that house, you had better see the boss of this concern yourself. The way they have of doing business is a mighty sight too slow for me!"

"Bery well, den, Sammy," answered Pete, puffing away at his pipe and filling the sacred office with the fumes of his pungent tobacco. "As the house occupyes de bery site we'm requiring, we will now summons de boss."

Pete proceeded to carry out this part of the business by seizing a heavy ruler and banging on the top of the desk.

"Am you dere? Am you dere?" he bawled.

"I—I shall call a constable!" cried the clerk, springing to his feet in terror and alarm for his own skin.

"Eh?"

The clerk made a move for the door, but as Pete happened to be standing in the way he stopped. But he did not stop in the same place long, for Pete made a pretence of bringing that ruler down on his head, and the clerk skipped away to the other side of the office.

"Where's—de—boss, you silly imitation of a tailor's dummy? Dere, now see what you hab made me do, wid your silly nonsense! Oh, Bertie, Bertie, what will your mudder say?"

As the result of Pete's last whack with the ruler, Bertie's inkpot had hopped off the desk on to the carpet, and what Bertie, or, for that matter, his mother had to say about the matter will never be known, for with the downfall of the inkpot a door leading into an inner office opened suddenly, and a portly, red-faced man glared under a pair of bushy eyebrows from one to another.

"Good-morning, old hoss!" cried Pete, dropping the ruler and advancing with extended hand. "Am you de boss?"

The new-comer ignored Pete's outstretched hand, and turned towards the trembling Bertie.

"Thompson," he snapped, "what is the reason of this outrageous conduct? What do you mean by it, sir? Turn these men out instantly!"

"Oh, golly!" cried Pete, with an air of dismay. "Don't set dat dreadful powerful man on to dis child!"

Pete retreated a few steps, then the comical side got the best of him.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared. "You'll make me laff d'rectly!"

The portly gentleman, head of the great, the high-class, select firm of estate agents known as Messrs. Barter & Barter, fairly lost his presence of mind.

"Thompson," he roared, going purple, till his eyes fairly bulged out of his head, "turn that insolent madman out of the place! Do you hear me?"

Bertie heard quite clearly; but to carry out the command of Mr. Barter was quite another matter.

"I—I beg——"

"Oh, golly!" cried Pete. "De man's going to beg pardon again! Here, old hoss," he roared, turning to Barter, "we want a house in Park Lane!"

Now, Barter was first of all a business man. His one object in life was to make money, and letting houses happened to be his way of doing it. He shot a quick glance at Bertie, and apparently gained some information from the expression on that young man's face.

"Fool!" he growled. "Why didn't you tell me these gentlemen were clients? Fool, dolt!"

"Where are your credentials?" he said, addressing Pete.

"Golly!" exclaimed that worthy. "We don't want credit or anything dat kind. Sammy, here, has de money."

"I want to know if you're a bona-fide client," said the agent.

What's dat, Sammy?" inquired Pete. "Bonny fly? Golly! We'm or one nor de oder; we'm just plain Jack, Sam, and Pete—leastways, two, Jack and Sammy, believe dey'm handsome, but for confirmashun at fack you'm only got to look at deir faces to know dat it am not de Golly! What's de matter wid de man?"

Barter had undergone a most marvellous change. "Pleased, I'm sure! Jack, Sam, and Pete!" He positively purred. "Pleased, I'm sure! hted to do business with you!"

"Golly!" murmured Pete. "Don't like dis soft-soapy manner at all. r prefer dat man when he'm angry. Shall we go somewhere else, ny?"

"Come this way, gentlemen!" cried Barter, leading the way to his office. "What an escape!" he muttered to himself, as he seated himself at his in the inner room. "Every one a millionaire! Goodness gracious! arly lost them!"

"May be seated, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "Thompson, shut the

or Bertie obeyed mechanically. His brain was in a whirl. Recent ts had been a little too rapid for him.

"Tanks, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, seating himself on the edge of the man's table and proceeding to fill his pipe.

"Won't you take a chair?" said Barter, indicating one beside Jack and who were already seated.

"Nunno, old hoss! Dis am bery comfy just here," observed Pete. "w let's get to business."

r. Barter edged his chair away a little. His sense of smell was rather ate, or Pete's tobacco too strong for him.

"Ahem!" He cleared his throat. "Ahem! You gentlemen require a e? Well, I have the very thing that will suit you, fitted with every enience, and——"

"Ebery kind ob de same?" asked Pete wildly.

Barter's eyebrows went down rather sharply, and he eyed Pete doubtfully.

"I said all conveniences," he repeated, with an air of finality.

"M'yes!" observed Pete. "But am dere any ob de oder sort?"

"I don't catch your meaning," replied Barter, getting rather red.

"Well, it's like dis, old hoss," explained Pete. "Dere's all sorts ob eniences, but dere's some particular kind dat we free don't want, an' am——"

"What?" interrupted Barter.

"Don't disinterrupt, old hoss! De kind I mean start wid an 'i' an' n."

Barter looked puzzled, and Jack and Sam stifled a desire to laugh.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete gravely. "Should hab tought you'm de bery to put two an' two togedder."

Barter looked seriously annoyed.

"I believe," he said stiffly, "that my capacity in that direction is not than any other man. But I might add," he went on, with a slight h of sarcasm, "that I'm here to do business, not to solve riddles."

"Dunno 'bout dat," replied Pete. "Should say dat if you found there cent. per cent. to be made at doing de guessing business, your brain-would be quite equal to de task. But, still, if deir meaning am not e clear to you, must 'splain de matter. Nunno! Dere's no need to angry wid yourself. De question am simply dis: Am dere any inconiences?"

Barter gave a feeble sort of laugh. His motto in life was: "If you can't ly your clients, humour them."

"Oh, now I understand!" he exclaimed. "He, he, he! My fault sure. No, I'm not aware of any inconveniences at all."

Pete heaved a huge sigh of relief.

"Habing settled dat most 'portant little matter to de satisfaction parties," he said, "Sammy will now take up de running, an' P'rent."

If Pete had anything to do with the final settlement of the business, it is more than likely he would have agreed to taking that house on a six months' tenancy. But Sam was naturally of a more cautious turn of mind, and despite all the objections and endeavours of the agent to persuade him to agree to the longer period, Sam succeeded in getting the place on a month at really a reasonable figure, and with the option of renewal.

"Will you take the keys now?" inquired Barter, as he made out the receipt. "The house is quite ready to go into; and, in fact, as the present tenant has only just vacated it, you will find the servants still there."

"Rader!" muttered Pete, with visions of Mrs. Marchmont before his eyes. "For goodness' sake don't forget de keys, Sammy!"

With a great show of politeness, Barter ushered the comrades out of the private office.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Pete, looking at his watch and glancing at Bertie who was sitting dejectedly at his desk. "Golly! It am just in time for my lunch. What time do you hab your lunch?" he went on, turning to Bertie. "Eh?"

If there was another person in that office more astonished than Bertie, it was his employer, Barter. But, then, Barter did not know that Pete knew him sufficiently well to judge that poor Bertie would have a very rough time of it directly their backs were turned; so Pete solved the difficulty of the position in his own particular way.

"Come 'long," he said, tapping Bertie on the shoulder. "S'pose you come an' hab lunch wid us. Any objection, old hoss?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Mr. Barter. "Not the slightest!"

And thus it came about that when Bertie went out with the comrades he left behind him the impression in Barter's mind that, after all, a clerk so honoured must have something in him. In fact, it may be mentioned that, as a result of Pete's little stroke of diplomacy, the same evening Bertie received a rise.

CHAPTER 13.

Thompson Resolves to Lead a Sensible Life.

"GOT a match, old hoss?" inquired Pete when they got outside. "Way of breaking the ice. 'Tanks! What a pretty box!" Bertie flushed with pleasure.

"Yaas," he drawled; "it's not so bad, is it?"

"Nunno! Might be worse," muttered Pete. "Now, den, 'bout your lunch. Where do you generally go?"

"Oh, anywhere!" muttered Bertie vaguely.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Dat's funny. Don't you go to de same place every day?"

"No—er—yes!" exclaimed Bertie.

"No, yes!" cried Pete, gazing at him. "Dat's a funny sort ob an' hear it."

"What do you hab as a rule?"

"A glass of milk and a bun," replied Bertie desperately, and in resentment of Pete's cross-examining, but not knowing how to avoid it, he had a digestion's rather bad," he added as an afterthought.

H'm!" muttered Pete. "Glass ob milk and a bun. Should say dat would most likely be able to get anyting ob dat kind anywhere. But 's not de sort ob food for a fine, manly chap like you am. Eber play tball?"

I beg your——"

Football, old hoss!"

Football he means," said Sam.

Oh, no; not now," replied Bertie. "I've chucked it, you know."

Sort ob got too old for it—eh?"

Well, you see, a fellow can't attend to business and footer as well, don't

know," said Bertie, "so I had to give it up."

M'yes! I see," murmured Pete, winking at Jack and Sam. "Smoking am bad for de wind."

Bertie looked puzzled. He had no idea of Pete's object, and he thought was merely asking questions out of idle curiosity; but by the time the entered a restaurant Pete had extracted from Bertie a full and pretty exact account of the way he spent his time and money.

H'm!" muttered Pete to Sam as they seated themselves. "De first part de remark dat waitress made 'bout dis child applies to dat chap Bertie. 'm not a bad sort when you scratch de varnish off. A bit of a fool,

igh. S'pose we hab some soup to start wid?" he went on, addressing Bertie, who was seated next to Jack. "Dat suit you?"

Yes, rather!" replied Bertie, dropping his drawl and his man-of-the-world itude.

Soup—thick oxtail!" ordered Pete.

While this was being discussed, Pete skilfully led the conversation round their adventures, and Bertie listened with interest to Sam's stories of breadth escapes.

Four huge steaks followed the soup, and still Pete chattered about their adventures.

"I can't make out how you manage it!" exclaimed Bertie at the conclusion of a particularly thrilling account of how the comrades had been lost in the desert for three days, and had at last struggled back to civilisation. "You say you were without food or drink all the time?"

Dat's so, old hoss. Bring de cheese, waiter. You see, we keep fit. We take a pipe sometimes. Seems to me dat de only ting in dis life am to keep fit, wedder you'm fighting raging lions or dribbing a pen. We free hab an hard up at times, an' de last ting we knocked off was de beefsteak. 't dat so, Sammy?"

"That's right!" exclaimed Sam. "Here, Rory, this is what you like!"

Rory had had a bit from each, but he was quite ready to tackle the bone m had kept for him, and he retired under the table.

"Ob course," went on Pete, keeping his eyes anywhere but in Bertie's direction, "some chaps would rader hab a packet ob cigarettes dan a square al. Dere's a lot ob people in dis world dat deny demselves de ting dat good for dem, for de sake ob getting dose dat am bad. Golly! What's out time?"

"It's getting on," said Jack. "Shall we make a move?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Bertie, rising from his chair. "I must be going, or we're'll be a row. I have enjoyed myself very much, and," he added, as he tipped Pete's hand, "I shall take up football again."

"Golly!" cried Pete heartily, and slapping him on the shoulder. "Glad an hear it, old hoss! So long! Shall gib you a call one ob dese days."

Hero-worship is often the means of making a heap of difference, and it is maintain that Bertie dated his return to a sensible frame of mind from the ne he lunched with the comrades.

CHAPTER 14.

A Question of Colour—Pete's Friend in Need—A Difficult Task—S
Park Lane Again.

"GABE dat Bertie two-free hints worf knowing, don't you tink?" said Pete, as they walked in the direction of Park Lane.

"The hints were all right," replied Sam, with a laugh, whether he will stick to them is quite another matter. I must have appeared to be a mighty easy sort of customer to deal with. Some would have resented your inquiries as a piece of impertinence."

"Nunno, Sammy!" said Pete, shaking his head sagely. "Dose characters am bery good-hearted when you touch dem on the right spot."

"Oh, all right!" agreed Sam. "We won't argue the point, you—"

"Best not," interrupted Jack, "or he'll be starting to lecture us nex—"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Should start dat lecture wid stick, an' do de talking part afterwards. Dose noddles ob yours am too fick for dis child to try an' get anyting into widout de aid of in de shape ob a chopper. Where's dat Park Lane got to?"

"Here we are!" replied Sam, as they turned up by the Park. "You suppose you start by making a resolution to behave yourself like a being from this day henceforward. Noblesse oblige, you know."

"Eh? What's dat?" cried Pete, stopping in the middle of the and gazing at Sam in astonishment. "What was dat funny ting you Golly! Where's dat directory? Shall hab to take you out for a run brekfus ebery morning if you start frowning dose funny words at dis like dat. Fetch him, Rory!"

"Here, stop it!" exclaimed Sam, as Rory scampered round, playful dabs at his legs. "Just remember that this is a very select neighbourhood. And here's our house."

"Hallo! They've taken the board down!" exclaimed Jack.

"M'yes!" said Pete. "So dey hab. But," he went on, cocking his on one side and stepping out into the road and eyeing the place up and critically. "Don't like de look ob it quite so well now dey hab dat board. Seems to hab upset de balance ob tings. De colour scheme, not quite in harmony. Don't you tink," he shouted, "dat we might an advertisement for somebody's pills, or someting ob dat kind, in de ob it?"

"Well, never mind about that now!" exclaimed Sam, pulling out keys. "Let's go inside and have a look round."

"Fraid dat you habn't got a bery good eye for colour, Sammy," mut Pete, as Sam inserted the latchkey in the door. "Shall hab to gib few lessons in de— Oh, golly! What 'bout our tings at No. 13?"

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "I had forgotten all about them. Never we'll go round and fetch them now."

"Nunno!" exclaimed Pete hastily. "You two go in an' inspect an' de butler, an' see dat eberyting am all right, while dis child baggage from dat baggage, de landlady. Nunno, Rory! You stop wid and Sammy."

Pete went off at a great pace, but his steps slackened considerably as he approached Berkward Street.

"Don't know," he murmured to himself, "quite how to tackle dat lady. S'pose she won't gib up our luggage?"

Pete's steps became slower and slower, until finally he came to a dead outside No. 13.

"Must tink ob some plan ob champagne," he mused, half "Can't—"

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"Good-afternoon, sir!"
 He came out of his reverie with a start, and gazed at the face of the
 able who had guided him home through the fog the previous evening.
 "Golly!" he cried, as a brilliant idea struck him. "De bery ting! You
 n of de 'sacly old hoss dis child wanted to meet. Can you spare two-free
 tes? Nunno! Don't want you to break into a bank, or anything like
 ough," he went on, as he saw the policeman was looking at him rather
 st saffully. "Just want you to stand on dose steps an' say nothing. How's
 come?"

The policeman slipped a coin into his pocket and nodded.
 "All right, sir," he said.
 "Now you stand just dere," said Pete, as he rang the bell. "Sha'n't be
 u—dan two-free minutes. An' if you see a cab come 'long, tell him to
 is nex"
 wide he had barely concluded his instructions when the door opened, and
 am Marchmont stood glaring at him.
 f somplad you'm at home, my dear," said Pete genially. "I hab just come
 tch dose bags ob ours."
 k. "You—you sha'n't have them!" snapped Mrs. Marchmont. "You're
 a civ'"

The wizened landlady stopped abruptly. She had caught sight of the
 pavement, and not having by any means a clear conscience, she promptly
 youated.

He did not waste time about the matter, and in less than two minutes
 t dis ame down the stairs loaded with baggage.

"Tanks, old hoss!" he said, as he threw the things into a cab the con-
 l, mde had secured for him.

Again the policeman slipped a coin into his pocket.

"You're quite welcome, sir," he said. "She's a bit of a tartar, ain't
 —jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of No. 13.
 g his body ever stops there more than a couple of days. I believe she's a
 and r—that's what she is. Well, good-day, sir! I must be getting along."
 b renTa-ta, old hoss!" cried Pete, getting into the cab. "Dribe me to Park
 scheme," he added to the cabby as he shut the door.

"What number, sir?" inquired the cabman.

"De Dunno," replied Pete, poking his head out of the window. "Dribe
 g till dis child tells you to stop. It's de house widout a board on it."

With this lucid information the cabman had to be content, and he
 re off.

"Golly!" muttered Pete blissfully, unconscious of a pair of vindictive
 gib, watching his departure from behind the curtains of No. 13. "Hope
 ?" bottom doesn't come out ob dis little lot. Let me see, what's de
 ever bress?"

He closely scrutinised the back of an envelope he had drawn from his
 ct deket.

Notwithstanding the short time he had spent in No. 13, he had contrived
 o wid find Sally, and, moreover, had succeeded in obtaining from her the
 ress of her mother, who lived in the country.

Presently Pete pushed his head out of the window again.

"Cabby!" he shouted, in a voice that startled the passers-by. "Cabby,
 dat o at de next post-office!"

The cabman growled some unintelligible reply, but apparently under-
 dead, for a short time after he pulled up.

Pete jumped out and strode into the office. A series of giggles from the
 lff ang ladies behind the counter greeted his entry.

"Golly!" he murmured, as he gazed from one smiling face to another

through the stout wire screen running the full length of the counter. "Mighty good job dey am caged in! Wonder if dey am dangerous. S Dat dat wire screen am put dere to stop dem from kissing de customers. I ob see anything so funny 'bout dis child. Wonder if dere am a black on No, nose?"

This last remark was made out loud, and a pert little damsel stanete behind a card bearing the word "Stamps" burst out laughing.

Pete gazed at her gravely.

"What am you larfing at?" he demanded.

This only made matters worse, and the young lady retired to arr Wh "Parcels" end of the counter.

"H'm!" muttered Pete. "Can't stop now; but shall hab to ask he 'bout dis. He'm a sort ob authority on de oder sexes." shal

Up to this time a ripple of laughter had been running up and down be pos the counter; but the entry of a staid, middle-aged lady, who took her sta Mis at the registered letter department, caused this to cease, and every lng- clerk there pretended to be mighty busy. ete

This sudden change did not escape Pete, and he busied himself in wri Ho out a telegram at a little desk fixed to the opposite wall. rig

Altogether, he spoilt about a dozen forms before he got down whatase wanted, and the floor was littered with unfinished messages. ly!

"Think dis will do bery well," he muttered, marching up to the courri and handing it over the top of the screen, instead of passing it thro di the space provided for customers between the screen and the counter. her

Nobody took any notice of him, and he stood with his arm in the "Sp for over a minute. "Golly!" he exclaimed at last. "Hab I got to hold he telegraft all day?" hin

"I beg your pardon?" said the registered letter lady sternly. "Telegr Fe the other end!" Eh

"Tanks, my dear!" replied Pete. "Tought dere must be someting wron at Ah, here we are!" ong

Arrived at the exact spot, Pete again thrust his arm over the scre, h and waved his form over the head of the clerk. fear

In vain she tried to reach it.

"Golly!" cried Pete. "Shall I drop it?"

"No," said the girl. "No, no; pass it underneath!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Pete, pulling his arm back. "Well, I neber fancy try- M to climb ober like dat. Funny ting! I neber saw dat opening!" opp

The young lady felt the postmistress's eye on her, and bit her lip W stop from laughing. th

"Golly!" said Pete anxiously. "Am you in pain, my dear? Eh?" pol

"What—what's this?" gasped the girl. "A 'g'?" "Y

"Nunno! Dat's a 's.'" opp

"And this?" "D

"Dat's a 'b,' my dear, and a bery nice one, too. Don't you tink so?" t's

It is safe to say that had anyone else handed in a form as badly writands as Pete's, they would have had it politely returned to them. But "O genial face carried its own reward, and with great patience the girl wag t through his awful scrawl. h-h

"Eightpence, please," she said, tapping each word with her pencil. "D

"Tanks, my dear!" exclaimed Pete. "Now, 'bout sending some mon and Can you send dis little lot wid de telegraft?" s a

To the utter astonishment of the girl, Pete planted a handful of g "E on the counter and pushed the coins towards her. ot n

"Oh, but I can't send it like that!" she cried. "Besides, you have E counted it." ay-

"Dat don't matter, my dear," said Pete. "Don't 'spect you would steal
 it!"
 "No, I don't think I should. But you must count it, and then I will
 you a money-order."
 Pete sighed. He liked to do things at once and without any trouble;
 willy-nilly, he had to comply with the regulations, and at last every-
 thing was settled.
 "Thanks very much, my dear!" he cried, and, greatly to the girl's
 embarrassment, insisted on shaking hands.
 "What? Can't reach? Stand on de stool, den!"
 The spectacle of the girl standing on a rung of her stool reaching over
 to shake hands with Pete was a bit too much even for the officialism of
 the postmistress, and her lips curved in a quickly suppressed smile.
 "Miss Brooks, how could you?" she admonished, as Pete went through the
 long-doors. "Really! Dear me!"
 Pete was very thoughtful as his cab proceeded on its way to Park Lane.
 "Hope dat girl's mudder will get de money, and fetch Sally away
 right!" he muttered to himself. "Don't 'spect dat landlady will be best
 ased when she finds dat her slabe am going to leabe her! Yah, yah, yah!
 ly! Here's de mansion-house!"
 He arrived at their new house, Pete planked all the luggage on the steps
 and dismissed the cabman.
 Then he placed his finger on the button of the bell and held it there.
 "Spose it am ringing al——"
 The door opened with a jerk, and an angry-looking footman glared
 at him.
 "Fellow!" he cried. "How dare you ring like that?"
 "Eh?"
 Naturally, Pete thought he was expected, which was just where he was
 long, for Jack and Sam, who were sitting in the front drawing-room listen-
 ing, had omitted to acquaint Jeames of his expected arrival.
 Jeames, the footman, was now having the full benefit of Pete's stare.
 "Don't stand there like a stuck pig!" exclaimed the footman. "Bring
 those things in! They're for the gents what's taken this house, ain't
 they?"
 "M'yes, old hoss, dey am!" muttered Pete, picking up a heavy bag and
 dropping it down in the hall.
 "What's de matter wid you?" he inquired of Jeames, who, simultaneously
 with the release of that bag, had leaped into the air, muttering forcible, if
 not polite, phrases.
 "You clumsy brute!" howled the footman. "What do you mean by
 dropping that bag on my foot?"
 "Did it drop on your little tootsie, old hoss?" inquired Pete. "Well,
 it's a funny ting! Tut, tut! Neber mind, my poor old hoss! Shake
 your writs, just to show dere's no ill-feeling."
 "Ow—er! Hurting!" howled Jeames, losing all his dignity, and stand-
 ing first on one leg and then on the other. "Re-re-release my—my
 h-h-hand!"
 "De man don't look best pleased," cried Pete, moving the unfortunate
 and helpless Jeames's arm up and down like a pump-handle. "Seems dat
 s ain't de proper sort ob feeling. Hallo, Jack!"
 "Here, stop it!" muttered Jack. "That is not the way to treat a
 footman!"
 "Eh?" exclaimed Pete, releasing the man's hand. "P'r'aps dis am de
 way—eh?"

Evidently it was, for Jeames, despite his aching fingers and ruffled temper, had sufficient sense left to speedily take hold of the coin Pete dropped in his palm.

"Sorry, sir!" he muttered. "You see, I didn't know! I thought—"

"Dat's all right, old hoss!" cried Pete, slapping Jeames on the back. "Best get to know fust ob all nodder time! Bring de rest ob dose in!"

"It am all your fault!" said Pete, as he entered the drawing-room. Sam offered some advice as to the dignity of their positions now they were living in Park Lane. "You should hab told dat blanket dat dis child coming. Golly! Ain't dis a lubly place? Reminds me ob a circus, all dese lights an' gold mirrors. Golly! We shall hab to gib a swob or a conversationally!"

For the next half-hour or so, Pete amused himself by trying all the chairs. Then he wandered discontentedly round. Half an hour of a quiet life was too much for him, and he idly opened cupboard-doors and peeped into drawers.

"What a restless chap you are?" exclaimed Sam at last. "Can't you still?"

"What's de good ob sitting still?" muttered Pete. "Seems to me am a most tiring sort ob exercise."

"Golly! What's dis?" he exclaimed, as he examined a crumpled sheet of newspaper he had found at the back of a cabinet-drawer. "What all dese pictures mean? Just look at dat chap wid one arm up an' de other arm down! Am he signalling, or trying some ob dose physic exercises?"

"Let's have a look!" drawled Sam, reaching out lazily for the paper. "Why, it's that game that they made such a fuss of!" exclaimed Jack as he bent over Sam's shoulder.

"Diabolo!" muttered Sam. "We had better keep that black beauty this!" he added, in an undertone.

"What's dat?" cried Pete, who had tiptoed close up to his comrade's chair. "Keep dat black beauty off dis? Nunno! We am mixing in de ob society, an' we am got to follow de latest fashions. Must ring de bell Jimmy, an' ask him if de tenant before us hab left a—a—a— Oh, golly! What am de name ob de ting?"

"Scissors!" murmured Sam. "That's done it!"

"Now, den, Sammy! You'm got to stop dat mumbling! 'Side 'scissors' am not de name ob dis game."

"Oh, very well then!" said Sam. "Have it your own way! I expect you won't be satisfied until you have smashed up the place!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, don't make that ridiculous noise!" said Jack. "Try some other exclamation for a change."

"Dis child am not going to try any oder sort ob explanation till de explanation ob dat game hab been explained."

"Eh?"

"Oh, bother!" muttered Sam. "If you want to know anything, you better read the thing for yourself, though I don't see what benefit you likely to get out of it. It's only a kid's game, after all!"

"M'yes!" mumbled Pete, taking the strip of paper and carefully smoothing out the creases. "M'yes! 'Spects it am only a sort ob kid's game but still, dat don't matter, 'cos some kids' games am bery lively."

For a few moments Jack and Sam puffed away at their pipes in silence while Pete diligently read through the article describing the game that had so attracted his interest.

Well?" exclaimed Jack at last. "Can you understand what it's all about?"

"Afraid not!" answered Pete, peering closely at the paper. "Dere's a fine part ob de most interesting part ob de obscription ob de game. You see dat de player frows de debil into de air, an' den— Golly! Can't de rest ob it out!"

"Drops him!" suggested Sam.

"And not a bad idea either!" exclaimed Jack.

"Seems to me," muttered Pete, "dat although dis appears to be a funny ob game, dere's no occasion for funny remarks ob dat sort! Golly! You got de missing line!"

"I wish de silly owl had got hold of de limerick craze instead of dis," groaned Sam. "Then that missing line might have been of some use. At any rate, it would keep him out of doing mischief."

"Oh, nothing!" replied Sam.

"Very well, when you'm finished doing nutting, dis child will— send it! De player gracebully extends his right arm an' receives de spinning spool on de string. Now, dat sounds bery nice—especially de bit ob gracefulness. An', as we am libing in de dest ob society, it am de sort ob ting dat we free—"

"Here, chuck it!" cried Sam.

"Yes, do!" exclaimed Jack. "For goodness' sake, leave us out of de der altogether."

"Nunno!" said Pete, carefully folding the piece of newspaper, and taping it into his pocket, eyeing Jack and Sam critically. "Dat's where de two make de biggest mistooks of your lives. You am not graceful, it says in dis article," he went on, tapping his pocket, "dat it improves de figure, an' dat's what you am lacking in."

Jack and Sam groaned.

"Look here!" exclaimed the latter. "I—"

"It am not a bit ob good you talking!" interrupted Pete. "You hab de bell to hab de graceful part ob you developed, an' dis child am going out to buy a set ob Diabowlow."

"Here!" cried Sam. "Stop a— Oh, sugar it! He's gone!"

"Sure enough he has, too," said Jack, as they heard the hall door slam. "Side hope to goodness he won't be able to buy the game, that's all!"

"Trust Pete for that!" exclaimed Sam. "Once de silly beggar's got an ect ya in his head, there's no getting it out, and I bet he'll scour London what he'll manage to dig out a set of Diabowlow, as he calls it."

"Treatly to their relief, however, when Pete returned about half an hour e other his hands were empty.

"Couldn't get a set?" asked Sam.

"Nunno, Sammy! But it am on order, an' dey'm going to send it along till morrow. You don't seem bery sad 'bout dis child's failure. Where's de ry?"

"Oh, he's all right!" replied Jack. "We found a dog-kennel out at de you ask, and he simply refused to come out once he got inside."

"Sensible sort ob dog dat!" muttered Pete, glancing round the splendidly smootpointed room rather disdainfully. "Specs he don't like all dese gee-games—"

"What?" gasped Sam.

"Gee-gees—ain't dat de word?"

"Gawgaws, I suppose you mean," exclaimed Jack.

"Seems to be a lot ob jaw 'bout a little slip ob de tongue! Golly! ish we could go out an' shoot tigers, or someting like dat—eh?"

"How did you get on with our amiable landlady?" inquired Sam.

"Berry nicely, tank you, Sammy! She was most 'bliging."

"Hum!" muttered Sam doubtfully. "By the way, what about Sally?"

"Eh?"

"Sally!"

Pete pretended to be thinking very deeply.

"Here, come off it!" cried Jack. "You know what Sam means."

"So I do!" exclaimed Pete, lighting his pipe. "Ob course, Sally de servant at No. 13."

"Yes; but what about her?"

"What about her? Why, what a funny question to ask! Am conundrums?"

"No, no!" persisted Sam, who was interested in the unfortunate servant. "What have you done about her? Oh, I see! It's all right, Jack he added, as he scanned Pete's face. "All right, you old silly! You nee try to invent some impossible yarn! I'm sure you've managed it some, even if you have gone about the business in some extraordinarily ro about fashion."

Pete got out of all questioning by quitting the room.

"Where's he off to now?" cried Jack.

"After his pet, I expect," replied Sam.

Pete's absence did not trouble the comrades very much, as they thought he had gone to pay Rory a visit. But when tea was over supper-time had passed, they began to get rather anxious.

"I hope the beggar hasn't got into trouble with any bobbies," said Jack as they sat waiting in the cosy little smoking-room. "He must have out."

"I reckon not," drawled Sam, stretching himself out before the fire. "In any case, the only thing we can do is to wait till he returns. I expect he's tired of a quiet life, and has gone for a walk, as you say."

"It's not like him, though, to go out by himself," murmured Jack. "What are you thinking about?"

For a few moments Sam pondered deeply.

"Come on!" cried Jack at last.

"What's that?" said Sam absent-mindedly. "Did you speak?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Jack. "Of course not! I only asked you a question that's all."

"Oh!" muttered Sam, relapsing again into a brown study.

"Well, I'm blest!" exclaimed Jack, banging his pipe out on the of the grate. "If this goes on much longer, I shall go to bed!"

Jack filled his pipe again and lighted it, glancing curiously all the at his comrade.

Sam was sitting staring straight in front of him. Suddenly he out laughing. "Sorry, old man, he said. "I believe you spoke."

"I did," replied Jack. "Only you seemed too deeply interested in thing to take any notice of your humble servant."

"Chuck it!" growled Sam. "I was thinking that we have some scores to settle up with our friend Pete. You remember his little with the sponge and soap."

"Yes, I do," replied Jack, laughing at the recollection of his "Why? Have you thought of anything to get even with him?"

"No; that's the worst of it!" muttered Sam. "He's such an beggar. Where's he got to? I wonder if he's come in yet?"

Sam's question suggested to each of them the advisability of

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us while they were plotting, and they both simultaneously sat up
 eered round the room.
 "Scissors!" exclaimed Sam at last, having satisfied himself that Pete was
 hiding anywhere in the room. "We shall have to be mighty careful,
 shall find ourselves with another score to mark off. I wonder where
 ot to!"
 "Well," replied Jack, "I don't care very much where he is, so long as
 Sally's not overheard us talking. Perhaps while we are playing something
 occur to us."
 Am pair made their way to the billiard-room, built out at the rear of
 ouse.
 they passed along the corridor Sam stopped suddenly. "Let's see if
 n his room!" he murmured.
 ht, J's bed-room was over that of Jeames, the butler, and Sam silently
 ed the short flight of stairs and cautiously listened at Pete's door.
 some muffled sound of snoring came from within.
 ily ro

CHAPTER 15.

Does Some Investigating, and Strikes a Bright Idea—The Silent Kitchen and Its Inmates—Light at Last—A Rude Awakening.

ACK!"
 "Yes," whispered Jack from the foot of the stairs. "Is he
 there?"
 "Rather!" muttered Sam. "Come and listen!"
 goodness! There's not much doubt about that!" exclaimed Jack in a
 voice, when he stood beside his comrade. "I should think he is,
 being by the row he is making. There's not another man in the whole of
 e return with a snore like that! What do you propose to do?"
 say." "Bothered if I know!" growled Sam.
 ck. "Wonder if the beggar's really asleep! It's so funny him going off like
 without saying good-night."
 may as well be explained that Pete was in that room right enough, and,
 over, he was sound asleep. He had gone up to find a fresh pipe, and,
 ng rather drowsy, had thrown himself on his bed and fallen sound
 p fully dressed.
 s the door locked?" inquired Jack, after they had stood listening and
 elling their brains for some time.
 "I'll try it!" whispered Sam. "Get ready to bolt!"
 the ith infinite care, Sam slowly turned the handle of the door. It yielded
 is touch, and a stream of light from the electric bulb over Pete's
 the sing-table lighted up their anxious faces as they peeped in.
 he Scissors!" whispered Sam. "Just look at him! This is too good a
 he bice to be missed! Fancy the beggar going to sleep with his pipe on
 that! He'll set fire to the place one of these nights. Sh!"
 d in sor the fraction of a second Pete's snore varied in its regularity, and
 rtered uneasily.
 some he crack through which Jack and Sam were peeping narrowed to an
 ttle doth of an inch.
 False alarm!" whispered Jack. "He's all right!"
 is dre Don't know so much about that, mate," replied Sam. "We'll soon
 though."
 an ar am's training as a scout came just as handy in a modern up-to-date
 sion as in the wilds tracking wild beasts and savages, and the way
 of be opened that door and slid silently in and crossed the room to the side
 ete's bed would have aroused the envy of any rubber-soled burglar.

By way of an experiment, Sam removed the pipe from Pete's jaw, had relaxed in sleep, and replaced it. Then he joined Jack, who was eagerly watching, and closed the door.

"That's good!" muttered Jack. "But what shall we do?"

Sam uttered one word: "Bath-room!"

"Well!" exclaimed Jack, as he switched on the light in the splendidly fitted bath-room. "Here we are! Now, the question is: What are we to do? We can't fix that thing up over him, can we?" he added, pointing to the shower-spray fitted over the huge bath.

"No, mate," replied Sam. "We can do better than that. Didn't I tell you the length of hose somewhere about? I know! It was in that outhouse behind the kitchen. Let's go and get it."

"But I don't see—" exclaimed Jack.

"Never mind about that now," replied Sam, a smile playing round the corners of his mouth. "Don't ask questions now! Come and help me get that hose. You'll soon understand. We shall have him waking up, thinking it's breakfast-time if we don't look sharp."

All the servants barring Jeames, who slept in the room under the stairs, had retired to the upper part of the house, and Jack and Sam found the way without disturbing anyone to the regions below.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Sam, as he struck a match and peered round the silent kitchen. "Ugh! Look at 'em!"

"Why, the place is swarming with them!" cried Jack, stepping on one side.

The floor and skirting was covered with beetles—hundreds of them!

"Beastly things!" growled Sam, stepping gingerly across the floor to get the electric switch. "I reckon the landlord of this place ought to have called his attention to clearing out these things before he starts decorating the rooms with all sorts of pretty wallpapers and fixing a lot of new-fangled inventions. I'd rather sleep in the open any night than anywhere near this lot!"

"Same here!" declared Jack. "Still, we've got so far, so we must make the best well get on with it. Is this the door? Yes, here we are!"

"There it is!" exclaimed Sam, looking over Jack's shoulder as he opened a little door. "And I reckon we've been through enough to get it, too." Jack picked up the hose, which was lying neatly coiled on the floor.

"Ready?"

"Yes," growled Sam. "Ugh! I can't stand beetles at any price." Click!

Without thinking what he was doing, Sam touched the switch, and plunged the kitchen into darkness.

"Chuck it!" cried Jack in dismay.

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "Sorry! Ugh! I believe one of those wretched things is crawling up my leg!"

"Where's the door?" muttered Jack. "Switch that light on!"

"I can't find it!" growled Sam, barking his shins against a door.

"Ugh! Can't you find the door?"

"Haven't you got a match?" grumbled Jack. "My—sister's—country—seat! What ever's all this?"

A most fearful clatter ensued. Pots and pans tumbled down on the floor, and the trades' heads and jangled on the floor.

"What the dickens are you up to?" growled Sam. "Here, stop a moment. I've got the matches."

Jack stood perfectly still, while Sam struck a match.

The tiny flame revealed a strange state of affairs.

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "We're in the cupboard! Ha, ha, ha!"

ho, ho!"

pair stood and laughed at one another till the light grew dim.

s won't do!" exclaimed Jack hastily. "Let's get out while we have
ance!"

heaved a sigh of relief as they just managed to cross the kitchen
and reach the door as the match went out.

onder those things we brought down in that cupboard didn't wake
"whispered Jack as they softly trod their way upstairs. "He must
point: ighty sound sleeper."

ad job, too!" muttered Sam. "We don't want him prowling round
In't I
we're busy."

chuckled. "Busy is good!" he replied.

as the work of a few minutes for Sam to connect one end of the
the cold-water tap in the bath-room.

better have a squint first, and see if that beauty is still asleep,"
red Jack, as Sam uncoiled the length of rubber tubing and laid it
ng with
the passage.

careful!" growled Sam. "Don't wake him now, for goodness' sake!"

nodded, and cautiously took a peep into Pete's bedroom. "Hasn't
found an inch!" he murmured.

od!" whispered Sam. "Now for the great wheeze!"

l the
ling the hose noiselessly behind him, Sam slowly, cautiously
ched his sleeping victim.

ing handle twist of the hand, and Pete's pipe was removed from his mouth.

Sam passed the slack of the hose over the foot of the bed and care-
hem! laying it so that no weight depended on the nozzle he with great
ne floe inserted it in the space lately occupied by the stem of the briar.

ht to
nything, Pete snored with redoubled force, and Sam backed with
coration
in his heart, and softly pulled the door to.

invenh
swift yet silent steps, Sam then darted to the bath-room and
lot!"
l on the tap. "Quick!" he whispered. "Quick, Jack! Up to bed
ve ma
shot!"

ut," muttered Jack, as they went up the stairs three at a time, "we
t turned the lights out."

he or
h, that don't matter!" replied Sam. "Leave the lights. We've got
too
t into bed before that beauty——"

floor.
a stopped suddenly and gazed at Jack strangely.

ice."
hat's the matter?" asked Jack.

atter!" growled Sam. "Why, can't you tell?"

witch,
o," murmured Jack. "Unless——"

ou've got it, mate," replied Sam. "There's something gone wrong
our little scheme. Listen!"

two stood silent on the stairs, straining their ears for the slightest
a wret
; but nothing broke the stillness but the ticking of a clock.

missors!" gasped Sam. "It beats me! Anyhow, I'm not going down
e. I'm for bed, quick. I don't like this. P'r'aps the blessed thing
a
ed out of his mouth after we left. I'm sure I turned on the tap all
,"

's—ca
here's something wrong, anyhow," agreed Jack, as they entered their
oom. "Why, he'd have been out and kicking up a rumpus before we'd
a the
d the first landing! P'r'aps it's running all over the floor. My stars,
'll be a mess if it is!"

top a
an't help that!" growled Sam. "Good-night! Lock the door."

less than three minutes Jack and Sam were in bed, and for some time
lay awake listening. But not a sound greeted their ears, and they
ually dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER 16.

Pete Laughs Last—A Letter From a Little Chum—Diabowlow—A
—Sam's Suspicions.

"YAH, yah, yah!"

It was a very quiet laugh that Pete gave after he had, with a half-opened eye, watched Sam walk backwards out of his room, but it was a mighty enjoyable one.

"Golly!" he murmured softly, as he removed the nozzle of the hose from his mouth and turned off the tap. "Just in time!" he added, as the rubber tubing stiffen with the pressure of water. "Should hab barf if I hadn't woke up at de proper moment. Yah, yah, yah! ting going to sleep like dat, but a funnier ting waking up. Golly! hab to change bed-rooms. Can't run de risk ob dis sort ob ting. surprise dose jokers one ob dese days. S'pose dey am wondering t' selves why dis child am not shouting for de lifeboat."

Pete guessed that his comrades would take all precautions, so he dragged the hose into the bath-room, and then returned to his room.

"No good trying to get eben wid dem to-night," he muttered, prodigious yawn. "Must leabe dat for anoder time."

The following morning he was later than usual in making an appearance, and Jack and Sam were already seated at the table.

"Top ob de morning, Sammy!" he cried, as he entered. "Top morning, Jack!"

"Sleep all right?" growled Sam, looking at Pete's innocent face suspiciously.

"Rader! Slept like a—like a dormouse, Sammy."

Jack and Sam exchanged a glance which plainly said "Mum's the word" and breakfast passed off without any reference on either side to the proceedings of the previous night.

"Don't tink much ob dis place for spending Christmas Day in," murmured Pete, after a prolonged silence. "Do you, Sammy?"

"No, I don't, mate. I don't see why we should, though. There's Lacey. You remember we promised her when we saw her at Brighton we would pay her a visit."

"Golly! De very ting, Sammy! Must hab children 'bout for Christmas. Grown-ups am no good all by demselbes at de festive time ob de year. ain't libely 'nuff. What am you looking so serious 'bout, Sammy?"

There was a twinkle in Sam's eye that escaped Pete's observation, and he began to feel uneasy.

"What's de matter, Sammy?"

"Nothing."

"But dere is. What hab you got dat long face 'bout for? Tink dere's a most lubly idea ob yours. Ob course we will go to see de little lady Barbara. Shall hab to get some presents. Best send dem on, first ob all. What's de name ob de place?"

Jack was about to speak, when Sam gave him a kick on the shin.

"Golly! What's de matter wid you two dis morning?" exclaimed "Here's Sammy wid a face like a boiled owl, and Jack screwing up his counting-house, like a bit ob injiarubber. Golly! Can't 'member de address. Where was it, Sammy?"

"Don't you know?" exclaimed Sam.

"Eh?"

"Don't you remember?"

"No!" groaned Pete, looking the picture of misery. "Hab forgot. One golly!" he muttered, seizing the sugar-castor and liberally besprinkling the salmon with it. "Dis am a drefful state ob affairs! Shall hab to

ies. Must find dat address somehow. Golly! What's de matter wid
 h? Pah!"

and Sam, who had been watching his absent-minded action, roared
 laughter.

a ghost of a smile showed on Pete's face; but if he was miserable,
 felt miserable, it did not prevent him from substituting his plate of
 for Sam's.

urely you're not going to eat that little lot?" exclaimed Sam, gazing
 in astonishment, and quite unaware that it was now his own plate
 was helping himself from.

an't afford to waste good fish, Sammy."

Golly! Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Sam, picking up his fork. "G-r-r-r—ah!
 ting. You beggar!" he spluttered.

ring t. ah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dere's someting fishy 'bout dat fish—
 ammy? But must be serious," he went on. "How shall we find out
 address?"

so he helped himself to a fresh supply of salmon, and ignored Pete's
 s room. ry. He had a letter of invitation from their Brighton friend in his
 ecered, t, and he grimly resolved to keep Pete waiting.

g an a. his little plan for getting his own back looked like falling through,
 t this juncture Jeames entered with a letter reposing on a silver

"Top
 k and Sam both held out their hands, but to their surprise the foot-
 ent fac. marched round the table to Pete.

issors!" gasped Sam. "Who's his correspondent?"

e looked at the little envelope rather suspiciously.

s the w. anks, old hoss!" he muttered, nearly swallowing a fish-bone.

to th. times retired, and with a great air of importance Pete opened his

n," mu. too-roo!" he yelled, as he scanned the dainty little sheet of notepaper.

e got it, boys!"

ot what?" inquired Sam.

There's de address! Isn't dis funny, now? De bery ting we wanted! Dis am
 r brighte. ter from Barbara. Listen to dis. 'Dear Pete,—Come and stay wid us
 or Chris. Christmas, an' bring Rory wid you an' Mr. Jack an' Mr. Sam.' Yah,
 de year. yah! Golly! Dat girl hab got de sense to tink ob Rory fust. Oh,
 ny?" "Mr. Jack an' Mr. Sam! Fancy gibing you two handles to your
 tion, as! Oh, g-o-l-l-y! She habn't put any address on her letter! Dere's
 ly child!"

te sudden change of Pete's jolly face from gay to grave was too much
 he gravity of Jack and Sam, and they laughed till the place shook.

Tink d. Oh!" gasped Sam at last. "Here you are—look! This came this
 ttle lad. ing from Mrs. Lacey, and she has not, like her daughter, omitted to
 first o. her address down."

So you had dat all de time, Sammy. Bery well. After brekfus dis
 shin. I shall tink out a form ob punishment. Can't hab dose sort ob tricks
 claimed ed on dis child."

ring up. Pete looked very fierce, but he was so mighty relieved and pleased with
 member. prospect of spending Christmas with his little chum that long before
 meal was over he had forgotten all about Sam's joke, and was chattering
 y like mad.

What sort ob a Christmas-box shall we get for Barbara? Must be
 eting bery special—eh? How would a motor-car do, or a gold watch—
 forgot. One ob dose watches dat strike de hours—a what-you-call-em—some-
 rinkl. like a gas-meter."

ab to. A what? Oh, a chronometer!" exclaimed Sam.

"Dat's it, Sammy!"

"You can't give a little girl of seven a thing like that," said Jack.

"Why not?" demanded Pete. "Dere's nutting to stop dis child."

"No, no, there's nothing to stop you being silly!" retorted Jack. "you can see that a gold watch is quite out of the question? I'm Mrs. Lacey would not like to hurt your feelings, but at the same time also sure that she wouldn't like her little girl to have jewellery of that sort."

"Nuff said!" cried Pete. "You'm right, Jack. "Let's put our heads together and tink ob someting else."

"Stop it!" growled Sam, as Pete clutched him round the neck and pressed his head against his own woolly pate.

"Sounds bery empty, dat noddle ob yours," observed Pete. "I want to try Jack. P'r'aps he's a bit more solid in de upper storey."

"Keep off!" cried Jack hastily. "I've thought of something."

"Out wid it, den!"

"A doll's-house."

"Eh?"

"You couldn't have anything better," declared Sam.

"How much do dey cost?"

"Oh, any price you like!"

"Sixpence?"

"Yes."

"Golly! Dat won't do!"

"Why not?"

"Must hab someting better dan dat."

"So you can!" exclaimed Jack. "You can pay six guineas if you like to be disposed of."

"Dat's right, den," replied Pete, "'cos dis child am not going to be sold ting for dat little girl—must be someting extra special. Shall I an' get it now?"

"There's plenty of time yet," said Sam. "Christmas won't be here for some days yet."

"Well, let's fill up de time by looking ober dis 'stablishment!" cried Pete. "It am all bery fine for you two," he went on; "you hab seen all de place. Dis child wants to know de geography ob him dwelling-house start wid de kitchen."

Pete opened his little journey of investigation by falling down the stairs.

"Hi, Sammy," he bawled, as he sat on the mat, "why don't you come down light on dese stairs?"

"Rats!" exclaimed Sam. "You've no business down here at all. Get up!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" laughed Pete, as Sam stumbled over him and fell into the kitchen. "What am you doing, making all dat noise? I'm s'prised at you! Can't you behabe like a respectable gentleman?"

"You silly owl!" growled Sam. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself before the cook!"

"Eh?"

"Cook!"

"Ah, dere you are! Good-morning, my dear!" exclaimed Pete as he entered the kitchen and stood smiling amiably at the astonished Sam.

"How do you do?" Pete held out his black paw and solemnly shook hands with Sam.

"Pleased to meet you, my dear! Dis am Jack, and dis one am Sam."

"You'll find dem all right."

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"awks-a-mussy!" gasped the woman. "I 'opes as I shall give hall
 action. If so be as I——,"
 "Dat's all right, my dear!" interrupted Pete. "What hab we got for
 er?"
 "oup."
 "I'm j'yes!"
 "same 'yes!"
 "ish."
 "I'yes!"
 "Roast chicken."
 "I'yes!"
 "Boiled mutton and caper-sauce."
 "Wh? Caper-sauce? What's dat?"
 The cook looked puzzled at this. Caper-sauce was caper-sauce to her, and
 she had never troubled her head what it was. She knew how to make it,
 there the matter ended.
 "I'm!" muttered Pete gravely. "Tink dat you had better leabe out dat
 lot. Sounds rader dangerous. Might get into dese boys' noddles.
 m quite libely 'nuff widout habing sauce ob dat kind. M'yes! Cut de
 rs. Anyting else?"
 "Fig-pudding and rum-sauce."
 "Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Rum-sauce. Dat won't do. Don't like so
 ob your sauce!"
 "Well, I never!" cried the cook indignantly.
 "Dat's all right, my dear! Dis child am only speaking metaphori-
 tously."
 The cook looked duly impressed at this, and if she was not quite clear as to
 meaning, at least it served the purpose of drawing her attention from
 saucy side of Pete's questioning.
 "A parcel for you, sir," said Jeames, entering the kitchen, and casting
 an inquisitive eye at Pete, who was now explaining to the cook the
 necessity of cooking three fowls instead of one.
 "Scissors!" exclaimed Sam, in a low voice, as he caught sight of a long,
 "low parcel. "Here, Jack!" he whispered. "We must get rid of this
 show!"
 "What is it?" asked Jack, eyeing the curiously shaped parcel. "A fishing-
 rod."
 "Fishing-rod be jiggered!" growled Sam. "No; it is that Diabolo game.
 s hide it somewhere!"
 "Yah, yah, yah! Come 'long, boys!" cried Pete, as he stole up behind
 and snatched the box away. "Yah, yah, yah! What am it dey say?
 plans ob mices and men aft gang agley? Dunno quite what it means,
 tink it somehow fits de case. Eh?"
 "It licks me," grumbled Sam, "how that great, heavy chap can creep
 ut as lightly as he does! I never heard him coming; did you?"
 "No; I didn't!" replied Jack. "But I reckon now he's got that set we
 as well see what he's going to do with it. He's gone into the billiard-
 m. Perhaps after all it's a good job. It'll save the cook."
 "Well," exclaimed Sam, when they entered, and found Pete regarding
 apparatus with puzzled gaze, "what are you going to do with that affair
 you've got it?"
 "Eh? Hab a game, ob course! Dis am a double set, an' we hab to frow
 spinning-spool from one to de oder an' catch it."
 "M'yes!" muttered Sam. "Catch it's right! Why, you can't even make
 pin, let alone throw it!"
 "Golly! Should tink dat would be bery easy!" exclaimed Pete, studying
 printed directions. "Just watch dis little lot!"

From a safe distance Jack and Sam looked on.

"De player stands facing de debil like so!" went on Pete, plac cone on the floor. "Golly! Where's de winding-up part come in funny! Must place de string like so, and den wid de right arm g like so, and gently raise de debil in de air, an wid a gentle motion revolbing. Hie! Woohoo! Warah!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't see anyting funny," mumbled Pete, rubbing his right which had come in violent contact with the edge of the billiard "Can't 'spect to get expert wid dis ting in two-free minutes! M anoder go!"

Pete managed to raise the cone, balanced on the string, about two from the ground. "Look, Sammy!" he bawled, wagging the sticks "Look, he'm spinning! Oh, golly!"

This time it was not his funny-bone that suffered. Somehow he tried to get the string fairly twisted round the spool, and an extra jerk had sent it flying into his face.

"Oh, golly!" he muttered, tenderly feeling his damaged nose. "Dis a bery rough sort ob game!"

Jack and Sam sat down and laughed with delight.

"Go on!" cried the latter. "You'll do it all right presently! seems," he whispered to Jack, "a sort of game where nobody player gets hurt. I like watching this! I—Ow!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "What is de matter, Sammy? debil knock your noddle?"

"What the thump did you want to fling the beastly thing at m for?" growled Sam.

"Golly! Neber tried to frow it at your noddle, Sammy. Was just to make it turn round. Pr'aps if dat silly noddle ob yours hadn't de road it would hab come back again, and dis child could hab it on de string. Gib me my debil!"

Sam kicked the cone over, and once more Pete got his string un and wagged his sticks.

"One—two—free!"

"Look out!" yelled Sam. "He's going to throw it! Ha, ha, ha!"

The cone flew up in the air, collided with the ceiling, and then on Pete's head.

Judging by the crack, it must have hurt, but Pete's skull is about thick as any ordinary man's, and he appeared not to feel anything.

"Getting on bery nicely now!" he murmured. "How's dat? goes!"

That spool went up with a vengeance! Up through the skylight, one pane of glass, and down through another.

Jack and Sam scrambled hastily out of the way as the broken glass down in a shower.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Dis am a funny sort ob game! 'Spectse a bit ob practice to get de knack ob it. You hab a go, Pr'aps you'm more graceful dan dis child! See if you can hand debil."

"Not me!" declared Sam. "I reckon you have done quite damage."

"You, Jack!"

Jack shook his head determinedly.

"No fear!"

"Strikes me, Jack, dat you am 'fraid! Golly! Why, even little

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girls can manage dis ting! How am it dat dis child can't? Shall
 e in? to read dose d'rections again."
 rm g. Perhaps you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, mate!" suggested
 otion Eh?"
 Better try chess, or some game requiring brains rather than skill!" said
 S. "Skill it is!" muttered Sam. "What's the matter now?"
 right Can't find dat debil!" muttered Pete, who was down on his hands and
 illiaries under the billiard-table.
 ! M. There was a very good reason why Pete could not find the missing spool,
 t two it was safe in Sam's pocket.
 sticks A gentleman to see Mr. Pete," announced Jeames, entering for the
 he h. Eh?" grumbled Pete, from beneath the table. "What's dat? Who
 extra That chap we met in the Park," exclaimed Sam, examining the card
 ight by Jeames. "Brunswick—Silas Brunswick!"
 "Di Golly!" exclaimed Pete, as he scrambled from beneath the table.
 What does he want?"
 I've shown the gentleman into the drawing-room," said Jeames, with
 ly! nose in the air.
 dy b Oh, golly! Hab you! 'Spose dis child had best see what de gentleman
 ats, den!" said Pete. "He'm a funny sort ob customer, but he seems to
 ny? a few ideas 'bout tings!"
 at m Stop a bit!" exclaimed Sam. "What does he want?"
 Dunno, Sammy!"
 But how did he find out our address?" growled Sam. "I can't make
 s just out!"
 dn't b Neber mind, Sammy! 'Specs he'm a bit ob a 'vestigator."
 hab Pete followed Jeames out of the billiard-room, and Sam promptly, and
 h a grin of satisfaction, cast the "debil" into the fire.
 ng un Reckon that's the proper place for things of that kind!" he growled.
 When Pete entered the palatial drawing-room, he found Brunswick, the
 rk orator, seated in an armchair, twirling his hat.
 ha!" "I've called," he stuttered.
 hen b "M'yes! You hab called?" observed Pete, with a note of interrogation in
 voice.
 out tr I have called," repeated Brunswick.
 ng. "M'yes, old hoss?"
 t? "To lay before you certain propositions."
 Pete regarded his visitor keenly. There was something about the man
 ight, at he did not like. Yet his speech was fair enough, and his ideas, if
 newhat impossible, sufficiently kindly to interest.
 a glas "What am de propapositions, old hoss?"
 Brunswick launched into a long discussion on the evils of sweating. "In
 Spectse East End of London," he cried, "there are men, women, and children
 go, Srking for a mere pittance! A mere pittance!" he repeated, bringing his
 hand down with a bang on the table. "I—I am going to alter all that!"
 Brunswick paused, and glared at Pete as if he had done him an injury.
 uite e "Dat's de 'maginary side ob de question, old hoss!" muttered Pete.
 "Yes; perhaps it is!"
 "But de practical side—where does dat come in?"
 "Well, you see, it's like this!" exclaimed Brunswick. "I'm a poor man,
 and I can't do much to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. But I can
 littlempathise with them. I can fight for them, and if my poor powers of

eloquence can raise pity in the hearts of the rich, then I have done little good. I have carried out part of my mission."

"H'm!" said Pete. "What would you do if you were rich?"

"Rich?"

"M'yes! 'Spose you had a tousand sobereigns!"

"I should give it all to the poor."

"But you'm not rich?"

"No; I am not. But for myself I do not want wealth!" cried Brunswick. "A crust of bread is my daily fare. I live only for the purpose of carrying out my convictions."

"Golly!" cried Pete. "Am dat all you hab for brekfus, dinner, supper?"

"Pretty well!" exclaimed Brunswick. "Since I have taken up the cause of the down-trodden classes, I have devoted myself entirely to that cause. Yes—to their cause!"

"H'm!" muttered Pete. "Seems to me dat you'm a bit ob a toun Nunno! A—a martyr! Dat's it! Must see into dis matter!"

"Will you?" exclaimed Brunswick, picking up his hat as Jack entered the room. "I shall be honoured—delighted to show you the dens of London—the places where they are grinding men to c machines. I will call and see you again—if I may," he went on, d a swift and unfriendly glance in the direction of Sam. "Good-day, men!"

"I can't help thinking that man's a wrong'un!" declared Sam. Brunswick had gone.

"Why, Sammy?"

"Don't know, exactly; but I'm not over taken with him!"

"What's de matter wid him?"

"I tell you, I don't know!"

"But it am not fair to say tings 'gainst a man if you don't know a 'bout him!"

"Oh, well, we'll leave it at that!"

"Nunno! You hab made an accusation 'gainst a man, an' you hab probe him guilty."

"I haven't made anything of the kind!" retorted Sam. "I said I like him, and that's neither an accusation or doing him any injustice."

"Dunno 'bout dat, Sammy!" muttered Pete, puffing away at his "If a man told you dat he didn't like your face, or your clothes, or ting or oder 'bout your impersonal appearance, you would get mighty wid him."

Sam laughed at Pete's method of reasoning, and skilfully changed subject.

"'Spose we go and buy that doll's-house!"

"Good idea, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Where's de shop?"

"I reckon we'll soon find one!" exclaimed Jack.

"Let's hab a look at de gardens on de way," said Pete, as they entered the Lane and entered the Park. "Dey am somewhere 'bout here, dey?"

"Yes," replied Jack; "over there! Kensington Gardens, I suppose mean?"

"Dat's it!" exclaimed Pete. "You 'member dat picture we saw ob What's-him-name? Dat funny little beggar—going under de bridge in lubly gardens!"

"I reckon he means Peter Pan," cried Sam.

"Dat's it, Sammy! Wonder if it am like dat?"

Half an hour's walk brought the comrades to the entrance of the gar

Pete amused himself in comparing the resemblance between the real
 ng and the picture.
 "Wish I could draw, Sammy!" he muttered. "Tink I should eber make
 artist? Must let my hair grow! P'raps dere's someting in habing long
 ir. Golly! Wonder if dat little chap beliebes in fairies!"
 A little boy was standing close by to the comrades, throwing pieces of
 Bread to the ducks.
 "Throw me a piece!" cried a voice from one of them.
 The youngster stared at the bird with round eyes.
 "Come on, stupid!" cried the duck.
 This was too much for the boy, and he turned and fled as fast as his little
 legs would carry him.
 "Ho, ho, ho!" roared Sam. "It's no good you trying to play the fairy."
 Pete looked very disappointed at his failure to interest the boy.
 "Shall hab to try a smaller voice next time. P'r'aps dat was a bit too
 uff."
 The comrades chuckled as they walked on, and Pete grinned delightedly
 they passed the boy, who was explaining to his nurse eagerly and with
 eat conviction his adventures down by the lake with the talking duck.
 "Go along with you!" they heard the nurse say. "Little boys mustn't
 all stories."
 "But it's true, nurse!" declared the boy. "It was that big one. Look,
 ere he is, over there!"
 From the Gardens the comrades wandered through Kensington until they
 me to a huge shop, with windows bedecked with festoons of holly-leaves
 and crammed with Christmas presents.
 "Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Dere's 'nuff tings in dis shop for eberybody
 London. Wonder if dey sell houses. Come 'long!"

CHAPTER 17.

Buying Some Christmas Presents.

WE want a house, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, as the three entered
 the emporium which advertised the fact that it could supply
 anything from a pin to a white elephant.
 "Certainly, sir!" replied the tall, black-coated shopwalker,
 rubbing his hands together. "Certainly! Kindly step this way."
 Now, Pete had never bought a doll's house in his life, and he followed the
 shopwalker through one department after another without suspicion that
 here could be anything wrong; but Sam winked at Jack as they were
 ushered into an office bearing a strong resemblance to that of Messrs.
 Carter & Barter.
 "Scissors!" he murmured. "Here's a joke!"
 "Eh?" exclaimed Pete.
 "Nothing," replied Sam. "Get on with it."
 "Dis am a funny sort ob place to keep houses for little girls," muttered
 Pete, rapping on the polished mahogany counter. "Shop!"
 A couple of clerks busily engaged in writing in huge ledgers looked up
 with shocked expressions, and the office-boy stuffed his handkerchief into
 ob his mouth.
 "Shop!" cried Pete. "Golly! Can't stop here all day!"
 "Pardon me," said one of the young men, rising from his chair, "but
 ur chief is engaged for a few moments. Would you mind waiting?"
 "Nunno, old hoss!" replied Pete. "S'long as he comes before Christmas."
 While they waited, Jack and Sam had a hard job to keep from laughing

outright and giving the game away; but they managed it all right presently an important-looking man came bustling up.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" he said, looking from one to the

"You want a house, I believe?"

"Dat's right, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete.

"What sort of a house do you want?"

"Eh?"

"What sort—a detached, semi-detached, town, or country?"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Didn't know dere were so many kin houses."

"We can suit you with whatever you require," replied the man, smile, "if you will state your requirements fully."

"Now, let's hab a look, old hoss! Dis child wants a house; not dose common tings, but a nice little house."

"Certainly, sir. I quite understand. But—er—well—er—is it a dwelling, you require—something out of the common?"

"Dunno, old hoss, 'bout dat. Just want a house—someting dat please a little girl."

The head clerk looked puzzled.

"I—I don't quite follow," he muttered.

"Golly! Seems to me dat you'm a bery funny sort ob salesman," Pete. "It am perfectly simple. Dis child wants a doll's house for a girl."

The clerks tittered, and the head man opened and shut his mouth fish out of water.

"You—you want the toy department!" he gasped at last, glaring grinning subordinates.

"Thought dere was someting wrong somewhere," said Pete, as they the estate department. "What did you want to do a silly ting like da Sammy? Dat's right—laf!"

Jack and Sam chuckled with delight as they followed Pete.

"See here," he cried presently, as he encountered another dignified black-coated individual, "dis child wants de toy-house department, hoss!"

"How dare you?" cried the stranger, wrenching himself free from detaining hand. "How dare you? Is this man mad?" he went appealing to Sam.

"What's de matter, old hoss?" exclaimed Pete. "Tought you'm a walker. Golly! Don't look like dat, or you'll bust someting!"

"I'm—I'm a gentleman!" spluttered the stranger.

"Golly! Dat's so—eh?" muttered Pete. "Can't stop now, but wish would put notices on gentlemen, so dat dis child could tell de difference between de species ob gent an' shopwalker. Don't seem to be any wa-telling, oderwise. Ah, dis is de place!"

"Look here," growled Sam, as they entered the toy department, "have to be more careful. This sort of behaviour will land us into trouble."

"Nunno, Sammy! You'm too mighty 'fraid ob upsiding oder people dat. Dis child neber troubles trouble, 'cos trouble neber troubles Eh?"

"Oh, get on with it!" replied Sam. "Let's settle the business in hand beat"

"Good-morning, my dear!" exclaimed Pete, as a girl assistant smilingly forward. "We free want a house. A doll's house, mind—not ob dose places you lib in eider town or country."

"I know. You want something to play with."

"Eh?"

Jack and Sam laughed at the serious expression on Pete's face.

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look here, my dear, dis child hab giben up doing tings ob dat kind. House—golly! call it de house dat Jack built—am 'tended for a little 'bout so high."

The girl laughed, and produced a house about the size of a cigar-box. How d'you like this?"

Don't tink much ob dat little lot," muttered Pete. "Hahn't you got ing a bit more developed?"

There, this, or this?" said the girl, pointing to some larger article. Nunno! How much am de biggest ob dose two?"

Three-and-sixpence."

Golly! Dat's where de mistake am. We free want someting much er dan a free-and-sixpenny house. Can't expect to get much ob a house dat amount ob money—eh? 'Bout five pounds—eh? Certainly! Walk way—step dis way," he went on, running across the show-room. "Come g, boys! Now we'm on de track ob dat house. Golly!"

Scissors!" exclaimed Sam. "I reckon that's a beauty!"

Dat'll do, my dear!" cried Pete, slapping five pounds down. "Wrap little lot up and send it along, wid our compliments. Now, where's de hic shop?"

What?" cried Jack. "The what?"

De punching-ball department."

Look here," cried Sam, in alarm, "we don't want a punch-ball!"

Eh?"

I said we don't want a punch—"

Nunno! P'raps you don't," mumbled Pete. "But den little chaps you hab got to hab dose tings dat dey don't like."

But, see here!" cried Sam. "You don't want—"

Golly! How do you know what dis child wants? Seems to me dat m a bit ob a tought-reader gone wrong. Hab anoder go."

But you can't fix it anywhere," said Jack.

Golly! Fix what?"

The punch-ball, of course."

Now, look, Jack, and you, too, Sammy, you'm bof mighty impetuous."

Sugared if I do!"

Don't disinterrupt dis child!" exclaimed Pete, stepping back, with a dly wave of his hand. "Hi, golly! What hab I done?"

A most unearthly squeal came forth as a result of that step backwards, and te leaped into the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack and Sam.

Why don't you look where you're putting those beetle-squashers of differs?" chuckled Jack. "You've about done this little beggar in!"

Nunno!" exclaimed Pete, grabbing the little indiarubber pig Jack had scued. "He'm all right. Just squedge him—like so—and he come back . . . yain. How much am dis little lot?"

Sixpence—a'penny."

Pete placed the pig in his pocket and walked off, leaving Sam to settle th the laughing girl.

"Here," exclaimed that worthy, as he saw Pete make off, "let's get after a haat beauty, or there'll be trouble! Come along!"

The pair hurried after their comrade, and found that he had already not-rechased a punch-ball.

"You beauty!" growled Sam. "What do you want that thing for?"

"Don't want it, Sammy."

"What?"

"Yah, yah, yah!"

"There's nothing to laugh at, so far as I can see."

"Nunno. But den, you see, you don't quite understand de posit affairs," said Pete. "Dat ball am not for dis child to play wid. Christmas-box for Bertie. Yah, yah, yah! Now let's hab some d Where shall we go?"

"I reckon we'd better get back to Park Lane," said Jack.

"What do you say, Sammy?"

"The same, mate."

"Den you'm bof wrong," declared Pete. "After de labour ob sho dis child can't wait. Golly! What's dis little lot?"

CHAPTER 13.

The Ups-and-Downs of Pete's Jokes.

"I SHOULD call it a lift," said Sam, as they followed Pete. "Wl the attendant?"

"Wonder how dis ting works?" he muttered. "Golly! going up! We don't want to go up, do we?"

"Stop it!" cried Sam, trying to prevent his comrade from pulling rope.

"Dat's a fine sort ob ting to say! You stop it!"

"You silly, thumping owl!" cried Sam. "What do you want to n with the thing for? You'll get us smashed up! Scissors! How more floors are there?"

The lift shot up, and the three did their best to stop it.

"Seems to me," observed Pete calmly, "dat dere's a bit ob a knack dese tings. Golly! Where are we? Dat's cleber ob you, Jack."

Quite by accident, Jack had succeeded in manipulating the rope corn and the lift ceased to ascend.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Sam.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "We shall hab to stop here till a comes. Yah, yah, yah!"

"Stop it!" cried Jack, gazing ruefully at the wall forming the sink the well. "How did I know the wretched thing would stop like that?"

"Most stupid ob it!" observed Pete. "S'pose you pull de rope a Sammy. P'r'aps we shall stop when it reaches de roof. Yah, yah, yete."

Jack and Sam eyed the rope controlling the lift in perplexity.

"I'm blest if I know what to do!" growled the latter. "Anyhow can't stop here all day. How did you stop it, Jack?"

"I don't know!"

"Persons using dis lift am not to interfere wid de working ob quoted Pete. "See de notice, Sammy?"

"You stupid, silly, thumping owl!" muttered Sam, eyeing the "What are we going to do?"

"Dunno, Sammy," said Pete, seating himself on the narrow seat pulling out his pipe. "Let's tink de matter ober calmly and wid due sideration for our noddles."

The humour of the situation was borne upon Jack and Sam, and burst out laughing.

T-r-r-r-ing!

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack. "There's the bell!"

"What a marvellous chap!" exclaimed Pete. "Are you dere?"

"Bring that lift down!" cried a voice from below.

"We'm stuck!" howled Pete.

he muttering of voices raised in excitement reached the comrades' ears.
 "Bring that lift down!" howled the same voice again.
 "r-r-r-ing!"
 "Bring that lift up!" cried another voice from above.
 "Yah, yah, yah!"
 "Ho, ho, ho!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 While the three were laughing, demands for the lift increased in number.
 "Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Listen to dat little lot! Seems to me dat 'm getting bery excited 'bout someting."
 "So I should think!" grumbled Sam. "As a joke, I reckon this has 'e far enough."
 "Am you dere?" bawled Pete, peering down between the floor of the lift and the wall. "Am you—"
 "Bring that lift down!"
 "Bring that lift up!"
 "Golly! Can't do bof!" exclaimed Pete. "Pull de rope, Sammy. 'm bound to be right, so it don't matter which way we go!"
 Sam pulled, and they shot down.
 "Hi! Hold my hand!" yelled Pete, as they flashed past the entrance.
 "Golly! We hab gone past it! Why don't you stop at de station, Sammy?"
 "Silly chump!" growled Sam, tugging at the rope again. "Scissors! 'e's going up!"
 The comrades caught a glimpse of angry faces as they ascended once more, and Sam smiled grimly as he managed to pull up at their previous stopping-place.
 "I reckon that's better," he murmured. "I'm getting the hang of the 'essed thing!"
 "Should say dat dere's a bit too much hanging 'bout 'bout dis little lot," bawled Pete, giving the rope a sly tug, as they slowly descended again.
 "Bery sorry, old hoss!" he added, as they passed. "See you by-and-by. Sink dat we had better get out, don't you, Sammy?"
 "That's what we're trying to do, aren't we?"
 "M'yes! But it don't appear dat you'm de best ob dribbers," observed Pete.
 "S'pose you do it like dis. Yah, yah, yah!"
 "Scissors!" gasped Sam. "The beggar knows how to work the thing, 'fter all!"
 "Dis am where we use de brain-box!" exclaimed Pete, as they gently descended. "Dere's no reason for us to get out at de fird or de forth floor, 'b we will proceed to de end ob our journey. All change here!" Without bump he brought the lift to a standstill at the ground floor. "Dat's de funny!" he cried, as they stepped out and passed out of the shop. "Eberybody dat was yowling for dat lift was upstairs!"
 "And a mighty good job too!" replied Sam. "I reckon we're well out of dat little lot. Let's get something to eat now. It's no good going back to Park Lane."
 "Nunno, Sammy! Let's hab a baby's head."
 "A what?" cried Jack.
 "Golly! A baby's head."
 "Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Sam, glancing at Jack's horrified face. "Don't you know what he means?"
 "Blessed if I do!"
 "Steak-and-kidney pudding."
 "Oh!"

"Yah, yah, yah! Caught you dat time. Let's go in here. nice."

The fragrant aroma was certainly justified, for in less than two minutes they were seated with three steaming puddings in front of them.

"Am it nice?" inquired Pete of a stout old party sitting at an adjacent table.

"Ugh!" grunted the man.

"Eh?"

"Ugh!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, heedless of Sam's elbow, which was being thrust into his ribs. "Nice day for de time ob year, old hoss!"

"You insolent beast!" growled the man.

Pete beamed pleasantly.

"Nice, cheerful sort ob old hoss dis. Sort ob a foghorn voice."

"Let him alone, for goodness' sake!" whispered Sam.

"Golly! Dis child don't want to interfere wid de old hoss. Sort ob de time ob day, dat's all. He'm rader angry 'bout someting or P'r'aps his missus hab been gibing him a good talking to; an'— What's de man yowling like dat for?"

"Waiter!" cried the object of Pete's attention. "Waiter!"

"Yessir! Bill, sir?"

"No! Bill, no!"

"Cheese, sir?"

"No, confound you!" cried the man, banging his fist down on the table.

"Right, sir!"

The waiter bustled off.

"Waiter!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" rumbled Pete, slipping something out of his pocket and deftly placing it on the seat.

"I won't come here again!" muttered the man, grabbing his hat. "But my bill, waiter!" he cried. "I can't wait here all day!" he went on, flinging himself back on his seat. "I—"

It would be difficult to say which caused the most astonishment—man's howl of fright or the cause of it. Jack and Sam nearly choked. They, at any rate, were familiar with the unearthly squeal that had caused every head to be turned in the fat man's direction.

"Great fat brute!" muttered one.

"Ought to be ashamed of himself!" said another. "Just as if he could look where he's sitting!"

The fat man was speechless and helpless, and the expression on his face was nearer that of tragedy than comicality.

"Anyting de matter, old hoss?" inquired Pete. "Shall I call de doct or de waiter?"

"I—I—I—" stammered the man. "I've sit on the cat, and—"

"P'r'aps it was only a kitten," suggested Pete.

The man glared at him; then, flinging some money on the table, he rose and without a glance to right or left, hurried away.

Pete stretched out his arm, and howls of laughter went up as the rest of the diners saw what he held up.

"It's an indiarubber pig!"

Pete winked solemnly and returned it to his pocket.

"Spec's dis little pig am going to prove rader useful," he muttered. "Pass de mustard, Sammy."

ere. S. I suppose you've quite made up your mind about going down to the
ntry for Christmas?" exclaimed Sam, as they turned out of the
two m. restaurant.

m. Ob course, Sammy!" cried Pete. "Dis child hab decided on de course
an adje action, an' don't see dere's any sort ob reason to change it. Eh?"

Neither do I!" retorted Sam. "But it's as well to be on the safe side
h you. Now, look here, if we're going to——"

We am!"
Don't interrupt! I say, if we're going to Mrs. Lacey's, we must lay
being the stock of new clothes and things."

Eh?" exclaimed Pete. "Golly! Was just wondering what we should
wid ourselves for de rest ob de afternoon! Golly! Yes; let's go an'
y socks and tings! Dat's a lubly idea, Sammy."

Sam glanced at Jack rather doubtfully. Pete was altogether too much
ten with the idea for his liking, and the expression of Jack's face showed
sort ob a same opinion.

g or "Sammy, got any money?" said Pete.

Yes," growled Sam.

How much?"

About twenty pounds."

Golly! Dat's not 'nuff! Why, shall want 'bout dat amount for de
cks! How much hab you, Jack?"

"About sixpence."

Eh?"

Sixpence," replied Jack, who invariably trusted to either Sam or Pete
ving some money on them.

"What a careless chap you am!" exclaimed Pete. "Fancy coming out
id sixpence! S'pose you got lost in de fog, or anyting like dat, wid only
is po xpence in your pocket!"

I don't see what difference that would make," replied Jack, laughing.

But what are you grumbling about? Sam has twenty pounds, and I bet
"B you've the best part of a hundred on you."

on, fill "Shouldn't bet, Jack! It am a bery foolish sort ob practice. Golly!
ere's a hat shop!"

ment— A hansom came rattling up as the three crossed the street, and Pete
r chok mly seized the horse's rein and brought him to a dead stop.

id can "Ober you go, Sammy! Dere's no hurry! Gee up!"

Before the astounded cabman could gather his wits together, Pete was
could side the hat shop, so we need not detail the driver's expressions of indig-
nation.

his f "Hats for free, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete.

This style of address rather flummuxed the shopman, and he reached
e doc mechanically for the first thing he could lay his hands on, and handed Pete
green, soft-felt hat with a silk bow at the back.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, eyeing the strange-looking affair with a doubtful
pression. "What's dis?"

"The very latest, sir."

he ro "M'yes! But habn't you someting a little earlier? Might suit Sammy's
r Jack's style ob beauty, but don't tink it goes wid dis child's complexion.
rest Golly! How do you put it on?"

The hatter gav a groan of anguish.

"Not that way, sir! Not that way! You will spoil the shape!"

"Spoil de what?" cried Pete, ramming the thing on his head. "Don't
utter see how you can damage what doesn't exist. 'Sides, can't make de bow come
n de right place."

The appearance of Pete in a hat about four sizes too small for him, one intended for the most particular of dandies, was too much for Jack, Sam, and they burst into peals of laughter.

The shopman, however, failed to see any fun at all.

"Don't! Don't!" he implored. "I shall have to charge you for that hat if you spoil it."

"See here, old hoss!" retorted Pete. "Dis child am not going to ting dat won't cover de whole ob dis child's noddle! 'Sides, de shape wrong!"

"No, no; it's not!" cried the man, as Pete tried to get the bowler hat on the side. "That's the latest fashion! The bowler is worn at the back!"

Pete looked about as grim as his jolly face possibly could.

"Beliebe de man am poking fun at us, Sammy! De idea ob wearin' a hat sideways backwards! Say, old hoss, do you wear de back part ob de unmentionables in de front? Nunno! Well, den let's hab some respect sort ob a hat. Someting suitable for de country."

With trembling fingers the hatter smoothed out the rejected bowler.

"What kind would you like? Bowler?"

"Eh?"

"Bowler?"

"Beliebe you'm—— Golly! Dis ain't de cricket season, old hoss!"

"Don't be a chump!" growled Sam. "You'll drive the man silly if you don't shut up. Have a cap!"

"Nunno, Sammy! Dis visit ob ours hab got to be conducted in de properest manner. Dis child wants a tile dat will fit de noddle on de occasion."

"Strikes me it will be the shopkeeper that'll get the fit if you much longer like this!" muttered Jack. "What sort of a hat do you want? Have a topper!"

"What's dis?" exclaimed Pete, picking up an opera-hat. "Golly! It's a funny sort ob a hat! Hasn't got a top to it! Got——"
Plong!

"Dat's rader curious!" he muttered, as he gazed blankly at the hat under his handling, had suddenly sprung up. "Rader a cleber sort ob an idea! Can dis do any more tricks, old hoss?"

During Pete's examination of the opera-hat Sam had held a whistling conversation with the hatter, and that worthy, secure in the knowledge of the five-pound-note Sam had handed him, smiled. Up to the value of five pounds, he did not mind if his customers bought hats or spoiled them.

"He, he! No, sir; that's an opera-hat!"

"Operashun hat, I should call it!" muttered Pete. "Tink dis would be ob any use in de country, Sammy?"

"I don't reckon so, mate."

"Still, it am rader a cleber sort ob tile!" said Pete, laying it down regretfully. "Should tink dat's a hat dat would please Barbara. Woudn't dat be dis little lot?"

The hatter handed Pete a bowler. "That's a nice thing, sir! It's of good quality. Look at the nap!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete, gazing round the shop. "Nap?"

"He, he, he! I——"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, as he surveyed himself in the glass. "Shall hab to get a hair-cut if dey habn't got a bigger hat dan dis!"

"I reckon you'll have to trim that woolly pate of yours with a chop!" cried Sam. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The brim of that hat gave way, and Pete looked at Sam with reproachful eyes.

Don't see anything to larf at!" he said, twisting the brim round his
 ck. "Dese hats am not strong 'nuff for dis child! Shall hab to wear a
 unet. Seems to me," he added, as he surveyed the wrecked headgear,
 at as a hat dis little lot am done for! Golly! Am you two going to wear
 se tings?"
 Sam nodded.
 Pete gave a prodigious sigh. "'Spose den dat dis child will have to do
 same! Hab you got a cap 'bout as big as Jack and Sammy's togeder?"
 hat's dis?"
 "Scissors!" gasped Sam, glaring at the shopman. "What did the silly
 iot want to give him that for? The beggar'll insist on having it for a
 ollar!"
 Sure enough, there was great content on Pete's black face, reflected in
 mirror.
 "Dis'll do!" cried Pete, as he removed the huge grey topper. "De bery
 ! Send dat little lot to Park Lane. Gib de man our address, Sammy,
 d come long! You hab wasted too much time already!"
 "What are you going to do now?" demanded Sam, as they left the shop,
 inus the half of a five-pound-note.
 "Socks next, Sammy. Saw a hole in de one on your left tootsie dis
 orning!"
 "I'm sure you didn't!" retorted Sam indignantly.
 "Don't tell stories, Sammy! Dat's a bad habit dat grows on one. Shall
 ab to gib you two-free lessons in de art ob trooffulness! Yah, yah, yah!
 ow d'you s'pose you could get dat sock on if you hadn't got a hole in him?"
 ah, yah, yah!"
 "Silly chump!" growled Sam. "Here, let's get back!"
 "Eh?"
 "Let's get home!"
 "What for? Golly! Why, we can't go visiting wid only our hats, Sammy.
 'm s'prised at you!"
 Sam began to regret that he had ever suggested a shopping expedition,
 nd he sighed as Pete stopped in front of a shop-window filled with hosiery
 nd ties.
 "What's half-hose, Sammy?" inquired Pete, pointing to a purple heap,
 icketed. "The Latest Shade."
 "Socks."
 "Eh?"
 "Socks!" snapped Sam.
 "Golly! Don't get angry, Sammy! But why do dey call dem half-hose if
 ey'm socks? Come 'long!"
 "More trouble!" muttered Jack, as they followed their comrade.
 "Free pairs ob half-hose socks!" demanded Pete, when he reached the
 ounter. "Dose purply ones!"
 The shop-assistant stifled a grin at Pete's peculiar demand.
 "Yessir! What price?"
 "Dunno, old hoss! Let's hab a look at dose in de window."
 "That's a lovely shade; quite the latest," declared the assistant, holding
 up a pair similar to those shown in the window. "How many pairs would
 he you like?"
 "Golly! You'm a bit impetuous, old hoss!" cried Pete. "We must gib
 hoplis matter careful consideration. What do you tink 'bout de colour scheme,
 Sammy?"
 Sam growled something unintelligible.
 "Eh?"

"Oh, all right!"

"Bery well! Put up 'bout free dozen ob purply half-hose sockes dis brown or blue! Can't stand dose brilliant colours. What's de ma Sammy?"

"I'm not going to have those things!" growled Sam. "I thought were ordering them for yourself."

"Nunno! Dis child am not going 'bout in anyting like dat! Yah, yah!"

Sam promptly countermanded the order for the purple socks, and, some considerable difficulty, the matter of fit was decided.

"What's the next thing, sir?" inquired the shopman.

"That's all, I think," said Sam hurriedly.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "What's de matter wid you, Sammy? only got tings for de ends ob us. Must see to de middle part. St you'm in such a mighty hurry, dis child will choose de rest ob de tings such as shirts, collars, an' so on. What size in collars do you take, Sam?"

"No, you don't!" retorted Sam, who of two evils believed in choosing the lesser. "Not me! If you're buying things for us, we'll stop. What Jack?"

"Rather!"

"What size collar do you wear?" inquired the assistant.

"Dunno! 'Bout dat! Free sizes bigger dan Sammy!"

"Mine's sixteen and a-half," said Sam.

"Den dis child's must be 'bout twenty-free and free-quarters!" inquired Pete. "De skinniness ob your neck am someting drefful, Sammy!"

The assistant came round the counter with a tape measure.

"Allow me!"

"Golly! Dat's a good idea!" said Pete, holding up his arm and sticking out his massive chest.

"Stupid!" growled Sam. "He doesn't want to measure your chest!"

"Golly! Forgot!" muttered Pete, bending down.

"Eighteen!" exclaimed the assistant, rolling up his measure. "That's the largest size we stock!"

"Only eighteen!" muttered Pete. "Golly! Dis child am going in decline! Must hab, an extra two-free meals ebery day. Believe dat de ob London am sapping de fat off dis child. Golly! Dat's rader a h pattern!"

The shirts displayed were striped. But there are stripes and stripes, Sam frowned as he mentally measured their width. "Over an inch!" muttered. "Scissors! What does he take us for?"

"Tink dere's someting bery striking 'bout dose shirts, don't you, Sam?" inquired Pete. "Let's hab a dozen each."

"No fear!" declared Sam. "I'm not going about like a clown!"

"Golly! Clowns don't wear shirts!"

"P'r'aps they don't," assented Sam. "But I'm mighty sure that if they did they wouldn't put on one of those!"

"But they don't wear——"

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Sam. "Have you plain white?"

The assistant promptly packed up the offending articles, and brought a pile of white shirts.

"M'yes!" grumbled Pete. "Dey look nice and clean; but wish dere a little pattern on dem."

"There'll soon be one after you've worn one for a few minutes," said Sam. "Yes, those'll do."

“Seems to me,” said Pete, “dat you’m doing all de ordering. Where does dis child come in? Nunno! We’m not finished yet.”

“Collars?”

“Dat’s it. Can’t we hab a bit ob colour on de collars, Sammy?”

“No.”

Pete sighed; but his eye brightened as he caught sight of a row of vivid purple-and-green things in underwear.

“Look, Sammy!”

“Scissors! Are you colour-blind?” inquired Sam.

“Nunno, Sammy! Dose am purply-and-green, wid a dash ob yellow. in’t dat right, old hoss?”

“That’s right, sir,” agreed the assistant. “Very nice they are, too.”

Argument ensued, but Jack and Sam prevailed, and the final choice was something which Pete described as dowdy, but was certainly not so startling.

“Now we want a tailor,” said Pete, after he had insisted on purchasing everything that attracted his eye, including three dressing-gowns.

“What in the world do you want those things for?” demanded Sam.

“What tings, Sammy?”

“Dressing-gowns. We shall never wear them.”

“How do you know, Sammy? You’m a bery cleber old hoss, but you tabn’t got de tinkin’ power ob dis child. S’pose dere was a fire in de night; what would you do?”

“Get out of it sharp, of course,” retorted Sam.

“Widout your clothes?”

“No, of course not!”

“But s’pose dat dere wasn’t time to put on your clothes?”

“What?” gasped Sam, beginning to see the drift of Pete’s remarks.

“Goodness! You surely haven’t bought those things in case of fire?”

“You’m guessed it, Sammy,” replied Pete. “Dere’s nutting like being ready for de unexpectedness. Now for de tailor.”

“There’s a very good place two doors off,” said the assistant, as the three went out. “Good-afternoon, gentlemen! Thank you! Turn to the right.”

CHAPTER 19.

A Purchase in Clothes.

“RECKON that the sooner we get this little shopping expedition over the better it will be for our peace of mind,” murmured Sam. “I wonder what his idea will be in fancy waistcoats.”

Sam had not long to wonder, for at that moment they reached the firm of tailors recommended by the hosier.

“Golly!” exclaimed Pete.

“My hat!” ejaculated Sam. “Who would ever wear a thing like that? Just look at it, Jack!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared Jack. “What is it?”

“A waistcoat,” replied Pete. “What a lubly colour! Reminds me ob a lot ob upspilt egg!”

“Hegactly!” muttered Sam. “It certainly talks. Talk about colours shouting—why, that’s a regular yellin’!”

“Now den, Sammy,” cried Pete, pushing him into the shop, “not so much ob dat punning business. Good-afternoon, old hoss!”

The proprietor of the shop, who happened to be there, came forward.

“Good-afternoon, gentlemen! What can I have the pleasure of—”

“We want free suits,” said Pete.

"Free!" ejaculated the tailor. "Ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid you've to the wrong place. I can't afford to give suits of clothes away. We—

"Golly!" cried Pete. "What's de matter wid de man? I said suits."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "S'pose you say 'three.'"

"Free!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Golly! I said free."

"Yes, I know!" exclaimed Sam. "But you mean three."

After some difficulty, matters were put straight, and something sober in pattern was chosen.

"I will now take your measurement," said the tailor. "Thank you."

Standing on tiptoe, the little man tried to run the tape round chest.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared that worthy. "You'm a bit short in de old hoss! Better let Sammy carry you round dis child."

Being a good-tempered sort, the tailor laughed at Pete's pleasantry.

"Ah, that's better!"

After a good deal of stretching, he managed to get that tape-measure round Pete's chest.

"Forty!" he cried, slipping the tape back from beneath Pete's arm.

"Forty!" cried Pete. "Golly! Dere must be some mistake. Dis am not so tin as all dat!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the tailor. "Thin! I like that! Why—

"May be all right for you, old hoss," interrupted Pete, "but dis don't cotton to de idea ob getting a sort ob skeleton. Just try dat bi tape again. Dis am a serious discobery."

Seeing that Pete looked very serious, the tailor measured him again.

"That's funny!" he muttered, as he brought the end of the tape

"I make it forty-two now!"

"Dat's a little better!" exclaimed Pete. "Sure you'm right now—eh!"

"Forty-four!" exclaimed the tailor. "Goodness!"

The tape fairly flew through his hands as Pete expanded his chest.

"What do you make it now?"

"Forty-eight!"

"M'yes! Dat's 'bout de normal state. You see, Lunnon's a very try sort ob place, and it makes me sigh such a lot, dat de buttons would fly like—like dat! Yah, yah, yah!"

"You silly owl!" growled Sam, as one of Pete's waistcoat-buttons off and caught him on the tip of the nose. "You—"

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat's nuthing, Sammy! Shall we hab all dese suits same?"

"All right," said Sam. "I don't mind the same pattern, so long as friend here doesn't make them all your size."

"Ta-ta, old hoss!" cried Pete, when they had all been measured clothes. "Send de bill to Sammy."

"Oh, any time will do for that!" exclaimed the tailor, after he had to the comrades' address. "There's no hurry."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Spec's you wouldn't say dat if I knew dat we'm in de habit ob trabelling 'bout, an' liable to forget t like bills."

"That's not exactly a true statement," said Jack. "But, all the sa you send the bill along with the goods. Why, it's quite dark!"

"Dere's nutting else to buy, is dere, Sammy?" inquired Pete, as entered the Park again

"I should say not!" replied Sam, with a laugh. "Why, you've bought enough to last us six months! Hallo! They're spouting again." The sound of the speakers' voices reached the comrades' ears as they crossed the frost-sprinkled grass.

"They must have something mighty important to say," declared Jack. "I'm bothered if I should care to stand up on a box for an hour on end. Hallo! Who's this?"

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" said a figure emerging from the mist. "It's pity that you did not come along before. I've been addressing a crowded meeting."

"Don't reckon we've lost much!" grumbled Sam, as he walked on with Jack, while his pet aversion, Brunswick, followed by Pete's side.

"It's getting near to Christmas now," said Brunswick. "What do you propose doing?"

"We'm going in de country, old hoss," said Pete.

"A-ha! You're lucky to be able to enjoy yourselves," replied the little be-whiskered man, glancing sharply up at Pete. "I—I am trying to organise a Christmas dinner for the poor, and—"

"Eh?"

Mention of anything of this kind always interested Pete, and he plied Brunswick with questions.

"How many am dere coming to dis dinner?"

"It depends on how much money we get."

"Whom's 'we'?"

"Well—er—you see, the committee has not been appointed yet," said Brunswick hastily. "But I am open to receive subscriptions."

"M'yes!" murmured Pete. "Must see into dis matter. Would be rader a good idea to gib a good big feed to 'bout a tousand people. Should feel dat we could enjoy our dinner all de better—eh?"

"Are you coming in?" asked Sam, as the latter and his queer friend came up to the gate.

"M'yes!" answered Pete absentmindedly. "Night-night, old hoss! Come round and see me in de morning 'bout dat feed."

CHAPTER 20.

A Strange Resemblance.

THESE was a peculiar expression in Brunswick's eyes as he shambled down Park Lane after his interview with Pete.

"I can manage the nigger, but I can't stand that chap Sam," he muttered to himself as he boarded a 'bus going East, and he was still muttering when he got off at the top of the Mile End Road. "One thing's certain," he cogitated—"those three are simply rolling in ooftish, and it'll be a queer thing if Silas can't get a bit of it. Silas, my boy," he went on muttering, and addressing himself, "you've got to set your brains to work. It ain't fair that they should live on the fat of the land, while you—"

Brunswick—or Silas Brunswick, to give him his full name—stopped abruptly and gazed with narrowed, speculative eyes at a figure approaching him.

His crafty mind had been at work all the way from Hyde Park. He had been turning this scheme and that scheme over, but nothing had come of it. And now chance—chance, that serves alike the good and the bad—was working in his favour.

"Sambo!" he muttered. A few seconds later Brunswick stepped in front

of the figure that had arrested his attention. "Wot cher, Sambo!" cried, gazing up into a face strangely like Pete's to the casual glances. "Down on yer luck?"

"Hallo, Mr. Brunswick!" replied the negro. "Haven't seen you a long time. Got a bit ob baccy? I ain't 'ad a smoke fer a couple of days."

"Come round to my show," murmured Silas, as he handed over a screw of paper. "I want to have a chow."

"Wot's de lay?" inquired Sambo, ramming the tobacco into a clay pipe.

"Coming?" demanded Brunswick shortly.

"Sure I'm coming!" replied the nigger, with a grin. "Dis child am broke."

A gleam of satisfaction shone for an instant in Brunswick's eyes as he noted the likeness to Pete and the similarity of speech, and he pondered deeply as he walked rapidly along by the side of his companion. Presently he turned down a narrow, dirty side-street, and producing a latchkey, he went into a dismal building known as a tenement.

Sambo had not asked any more questions since Brunswick had said "Coming?" and he followed him silently up the dark, creaking stairs.

Arrived at the third floor, Silas pushed open a door and motioned Sambo to enter.

"Now we can talk," he muttered, as he closed the door. "Sit down."

Sambo found a seat on an empty box, and grinned pleasantly. Brunswick eyed him in silence. That strange, speculative expression was still in his half-shut eyes.

Sambo shuffled his feet uneasily. As shown from the breadth of his shoulders, he was a physically strong man, but he was no match for Brunswick when it came to a question of brain power. It was the triumph of mind over matter; and Sambo's uneasiness was caused by a dim consciousness of being weighed in the balance.

"What's de lay?" he grumbled.

"I don't know—yet!" muttered Brunswick. "Soon—yes, soon! Are you on for a good thing?"

"Sure!" replied Sambo laconically. "Dis child am broke!" he added. "Hab you got a bit ob grub?"

Brunswick placed before his guest a chunk of dry bread and a small piece of cheese.

Sambo fell to without delay, and his strong, white teeth made light of the hard, week-old crust.

While he ate, Brunswick sat facing him, still thinking.

"Look here, Sambo!" he said, as the last morsel of bread disappeared. "I've got something good on, but it ain't ripe yet. I want you to be here every evening about ten."

Sambo picked up a few stray crumbs off the table. "Must lib some more," he muttered. "Tought ob taking a job as a stoker. Dis child am broke."

The picture of the big, strong man sitting there with bowed head was pathetic, but Brunswick had no eye for anything beyond his own little personal existence, and a sneer came to his thin lips.

"Here's half-a-crown!" he said. "That'll keep you going till to-morrow."

"What am dis child to do?" said Sambo, taking the coin eagerly.

"Nothing—at present!" replied Brunswick. "Come again to-morrow and there'll be another half-a-crown for you, and the next night, and the next, till I want you. Now go, and keep your mouth shut!"

Sambo opened his huge mouth to its fullest extent. "Yah, yah, yah!" he roared.

For an instant, Silas was startled. That laugh was so exactly like Pete's

at he forgot for the moment that it was not Pete himself. "Go!" he
 usual gla pped. "I want to think! Strange!" he muttered to himself, as Sambo
 n you t ent out. "Strange, that I should run across that black fellow! I thought
 of days had gone abroad months ago!"
 over a d Long after each occupant of that tenement had crawled to his miserable
 into a s d—long after Jack, Sam, and Pete, in their Park Lane mansion, had
 ing him self down to rest, and the solution of his problem remained to
 icture him in his dreams.

is child "Yah, yah, yah!"
 eyes a Brunswick sat up on his bed. The cold light of dawn filtered through the
 he pond erty window. He stared round the empty room.
 Presc "Ugh!"—he shivered. "I must have dreamt it."
 tchkey,

CHAPTER 21.

Pete Raises a False Alarm.

I 'M mighty sure that chap's a wrong'un!" muttered Sam, as he opened
 their front door, and cast a glance at the vanishing figure of Brunsw-
 wick. "Let's get some grub! I'm hungry and tired!"

"Dat's so, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Dis shopping business am
 ore tiring dan hunting raging lions. Oh-oo-ogh!"

Pete gave a prodigious yawn, and, flinging his coat off, followed Sam and
 ack into the dining-room.

"Golly! Dis am something like!" he cried, as he surveyed the cold roast
 ickens that had been prepared for dinner. "Dat cook knows her business."

Very little was said during the meal, and James moved silently about,
 tending and anticipating the comrades' wants.

"Dere you are, Rory!" exclaimed Pete at last, putting the remnants of
 chicken on a plate. "You chew up dose bones, while Sammy gets him teef
 into dis little lot."

"What's the matter?" inquired Sam, leaning back comfortably. "Got a
 ee in your bonnet?"

"Eh?"

"I said: Have you got a bee in your bonnet? It's Scotch!"

"Golly! Am you all right?" inquired Pete. "'Got a bee in your bonnet
 -it's Scotch! What's de meaning ob dat little lot?"

"Never mind that now!" exclaimed Sam, laughing. "What have I to
 et my teeth into?"

"Look here, you two!" went on Pete, shaking his finger gravely at Jack
 nd Sam. "Oh, it am all bery well for you two to larf, but dis am a most
 erious matter! Dat chap Brunswick——"

"Oh, Brunswick be sugared!" roared Sam. "I don't like that——"

"Now den, Sammy, silence for de speaker!" interrupted Pete. "We will
 ee Silas out ob de argument for de moment. De point am dis: you two
 am libing on de fat ob de land, while your brudders an' sisters am starving
 n de gutter."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam. "You've got it all right! But its news
 o me that we live on the fat of the land while——"

"Sammy!" roared Pete. "Dis child am speaking in a metaphorphical
 nanner, an'——"

"Well, cut the cackle, then, and come to the hosses!" exclaimed Sam.
 'I know what you're up to, 'cos I heard part of what that chap was
 elling you in the Park. I suppose you want to get up a feed of some sort?"

"You'm a greedy old hoss, Sammy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pete rose from his chair, and started towards his comrade with a of water in his hand.

"Sit—sit down!" cried Sam. "I'm only joking! I won't laugh more—honest Injun!"

"Dat's all right, den," said Pete, banging the jug down on the table. "Dere's a time for play, and dere's a time for de consideration ob serious subjects! What—"

"Ho, ho, ho! I— Oh, it's all right!" cried Jack, stifling his mirth. "Something tickled me—that's all! Get on with what you have to say."

"Bery well! No more ob dat silly cackling, den, or—"

"Get on with it!" cried Sam. "I'm tired! We shall go to bed if don't make haste!"

"Golly! Soon put a stop to dat idea!" retorted Pete, getting up and locking the door. "Now," he went on, pocketing the key, "you hab got to listen! You see, it am like dis! De committee hab not been organised yet, but dere's—"

"What committee?" demanded Sam, sitting up very straight.

"Golly! What a lot ob silly questions you do ask, Sammy!" cried Pete. "Still, we won't truble 'bout dat side ob de matter. De fact is, we hab got to gib a dinner to de sweaters."

Jack and Sam howled with laughter.

"Ho, ho, ha, ha, ha!"

"What de policeman am de matter wid you?" howled Pete.

"Oh!" gasped Sam at last. "You mean you want to give a dinner to sweated! Surely, you don't mean to give it to those who grind the people down?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, then," commenced Sam, "if—"

"Well, den," mocked Pete, "you know bery well what dis child mean. So dere's no need to go any furder into de question ob de meaning ob words when de substance ob de matter am understood. See?"

"All right!" declared Sam. "I think its a jolly good idea, but let's put it over in the morning."

After some argument, Pete consented to open the door, and they all went upstairs to bed.

Habits contracted in their life in the wilds are not easily thrown off, unless absolutely necessary, the comrades go to bed and rise early.

Pete flung open wide his bedroom casement windows, and stood for a few minutes gazing out over the silent park.

"Golly!" he murmured to himself after a while. "Most funny ting what all de noise has got to!"

Then he yawned prodigiously, and started to undress. A coat flew across the room; then a waistcoat; then, after a slight interval, a couple of thumps on the floor denoted the fact that Pete had taken his boots off. Then came the click of an electric switch; a creak as he clambered into bed, and, after a very short interval, the air began to vibrate with the familiar sign of Pete's slumber.

At first the noise was very gentle, but gradually it became louder and louder, till the very walls seemed to tremble.

"Groo-ach! Groo-ach! G-r-r-r!" Pete's forty horse-power snore was a full blast.

Presently a strange thing happened. The light from an electric street lamp flashed, for the fraction of a second, on some fast-moving object that darted through the open window into the room.

had a watcher been seated at that window, wide-awake and keen of sight, intruder might, so silent was its flight, have passed unseen.

Up and down, with ever increasing speed, the thing circled round the room, and every now and again, as it passed the light, a weird shadow danced on the walls and ceiling.

Pete slept on, blissfully unconscious, and still the thing circled round the room. Then, suddenly, a shrill, wailing cry pierced the deep slumbers of Pete's snore, which ceased on the instant, and that worthy leaped in bed as if he had been stung.

"Golly!" he muttered, as he stared round the room. "Where did dat noise come from? Ugh!"

Something soft and furry struck him fairly in the eye. With a yell that rattled a night policeman on duty half-way down Park Lane, Pete sprang out of bed and blundered across the room, fumbling wildly for the electric switch.

"Golly! Dis am most funny bit ob business! Ugh!" The light leaped up as he touched the switch, and revealed the cause of Pete's disturbance.

"Bats!" he muttered, pattering across the floor and tumbling into bed.

"Oh, golly! Here's more of dem! Hi, Jack! Sammy! Bring a gun!"

The brilliant light had only made matters worse, and half a dozen of the noxious nocturnal birds swept round the room.

One of them alighted on Pete's head, and he gave an awful yell.

"Golly! Can't hab dis!" he muttered, springing out of bed, with the intention of rushing out of the room. Then he recollected his attire and

panicked, and ducked his head as the little animals swirled round the room.

"Shall hab to dress or crawl under de bed! Golly! De bery ting!"

Pete had spied an umbrella standing in a corner by the window, and in a tick he was back in bed with the gamp held open over his head.

"Could put up wid dis for a time, now dose tings can't come patting child's noddle," he murmured.

For some little time Pete sat there patiently, but still the bats circled round and round, and presently his head began to nod.

Two minutes elapsed; then he uttered a most fearful yell.

"Woo-hoo! Fire! Murder! Thieves!"

.....

Sam, sleeping close by, awoke with a start, sat up in bed like a Jack-the-box, and peered across the room in the direction of Jack's bed.

"Jack!"

"Hallo! What's the matter?" muttered Jack. "Had a bad dream? What was that fearful row?"

"Don't know!" replied Sam, groping for the matches. "Listen!"

"It's Pete!" cried Jack, jumping out of bed and colliding with Sam, who came out at the same time.

"What the thump's the matter?" growled Sam, reeling back with the unexpected shock, and sitting down on the floor with a bump. "Scissors! Can't you find those matches?"

"I've got 'em!" cried Jack. "Here, let's buck up! He'll raise the place, if we don't look sharp!"

The pair scrambled into their clothes, and made for Pete's door.

"Ah! Wha— Oh!" exclaimed Sam, as he stared in utter bewilderment at Pete, sitting up in bed under the umbrella. "My stars! He's gone off

his head! You silly, thumping owl! What's the matter?"

Pete muttered something in reply.

"What's that?" cried Jack, as something flashed before his eyes.

"It's only a bat!" exclaimed Sam.

"Golly! Only a bat!" cried Pete. "Why, dere were thousands ob just now! De air was full ob dem!"

"Well, there aren't any here now," retorted Sam, shivering with cold. "Besides, you're not afraid of a bat, are you?"

"Nunno!" exclaimed Pete, shutting his umbrella, after taking a ca look round the room. "Nunno, Sammy! Only, tought dey would be in your room. Yah, yah, yah! Golly!—What's dis?"

"The fire-engine's come!" cried Jeames, in a trembling voice, as he in the open doorway. "Where is it?"

"You idiot!" growled Sam. "There's no fire! Who said there was?"

"Him!" cried Jeames, in his excitement, forgetting his position, heard him call 'Fire!' about two minutes ago, and telephoned to station. Here they come!"

Heavy tramping and the hubbub of many voices sounded from the sta Jack and Sam stared at one another in consternation.

Pete slid beneath the bedclothes. "Shut de window, Sammy!" mumbled. "Can't hab dose bats coming in again! 'Night! 'Night!"

To the amazement of a couple of firemen who stood panting on landing, Jack and Sam started laughing.

"It's all right, you fellows!" exclaimed Sam, as he came out and fronted them. "It's a silly mistake! There's no fire!"

"No fire?" exclaimed one of the burly men. "Well, I'm blest! That cost you a bit, mister! There's a fine, you know, for a false alarm!"

"Can't help it!" replied Sam. "Here, you chaps had better share between you!"

With profuse thanks the firemen retired, followed by Jeames, and the rades heard no more about the matter.

"It's cheap at the price," said Sam, and he jumped into bed. "I that beggar doesn't give us any more scares, though."

CHAPTER 22.

Pete's Strange Decision.

"FEEL bat-ter now!" inquired Sam the next morning, when returned from his walk with Rory.

"Golly! Never felt bad!" replied Pete. "What hab we for brekfus?"

"Eggs-and-bacon, for one thing," said Sam, scanning the well-laid tabl

"Haddock, for another," said Jack, lifting a dish-cover.

"Mushrooms," added Sam.

"Porridge," exclaimed Jack.

"Golly! Dat's something like!" cried Pete, seating himself. "Shall to take dat cook wid us when we go to South Africa, or any place like She'm a bery nice sort ob person. Which shall we hab first?"

Pete started with fish and finished with porridge; but, since he had hearty breakfast, and was content, it did not matter which should come first.

"'Bout dat dinner!" said Pete, as he finished, some ten minutes later Jack and Sam. "We shall hab to get some money!"

"How much shall you want?" inquired Sam.

"Dunno!"

"Well, work it out! It's no good going round to the bank unless know how much you want!"

Pete wrinkled his brows in deep thought. "We want to gib a big to a thousand," he murmured. "How much would dat work out at?"

Say five shillings a head," suggested Jack.

Call it ten, den," replied Pete. "How does dat work out, Sammy?"

Five hundred pounds," replied Sam promptly.

H'm! Dat's a lot! Tink we can spare all dat?"

I reckon so," declared Sam.

Tink we can manage anoder five hundred?"

Goodness! What for?"

Neber mind 'bout what for! Can we do it?"

Of course!"

Well, den, dat's a tousand altogeder."

But what do you want another five hundred pounds for?" objected Sam.

Neber mind just now, Sammy! Tell you dat later. Let's walk round e bank. Shall want some ob dat in gold."

he bank had only just opened its door when the comrades entered, and cashier rubbed his sleepy eyes as he examined the cheque handed to him Sam.

How would you like it?" he inquired respectfully, for the comrades were ng the bank's most wealthy customers.

Five in notes and five in gold," said Pete. "Half-sovereigns."

he cashier looked rather surprised at the demand for so much gold, but ded his copper shovel with such effect that in less than ten minutes a little row of bags, each containing fifty half-sovereigns, lay along the t! Tater.

Would you like me to send one of the bank's messengers with this?" he m!" nired, as he rapidly counted a bundle of notes.

Nunno, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, slipping the bags into his pockets.

at's all right! You take care of the notes, Sammy."

uite a musical chink, chink came from Pete as he stepped out of the "I bk.

Here!" said Sam. "Can't you stop that tinkling?"

ete trod as softly as he could, but every now and again the musical lk, chink caused glances of curiosity to be directed at him from passers-by.

Want to get someting in here," he said, as they passed a stationer's. na'n't be a tick!"—darting into the shop.

hen P ack and Sam did not attempt to follow.

b we side. "Some little wheeze he's got on," observed the latter, as they waited side. "I hope he keeps clear of that beauty Brunswick. What do you nk of him, Jack?"

d tabl Not much!" replied Jack briefly.

resently Pete came out of the shop, looking very mysterious.

What are you going to do now?" inquired Sam.

Back to Park Lane, Sammy. Must see dat chap Brunswick."

Shall Scissors!" exclaimed Sam. "You're not going to let him have any of e like s money, are you?"

Eh?"

e mad You heard what I said!"

ould M'yes!"

Well?"

ater t Dat's all right, Sammy! Don't you get frightened. Dis child am not ng to do anything silly. Just going to fix tings up for dat dinner."

That's all right!" murmured Sam. "It's not the poor I object to—it's rues!"

ness Mind dat chap don't hab you up for libel, Sammy."

big Don't care if he does!" exclaimed Sam. "Anyhow, we won't discuss the estion now. You'll find out for yourself what sort of a rotter he is."

When the three reached their house in Park Lane they found Brunswick already waiting for them.

Heedless of Sam's warning glance, Pete emptied his pockets of the gold, and was even careless enough to let one fall in such a way that a golden stream spread over the carpet.

"Golly!" he cried. "Can't afford to lose any ob dis little lot."

Brunswick's eyes glittered at the sight of the gold, and his hands trembled as he helped to replace some of the coins in the bag.

But none of that gold stuck to his fingers. It may not have happened because Sam's keen grey eyes were on the watch, or it may have happened because Silas was an honest man—when it paid him to be so!

"Now den, old hoss!" said Pete, as he placed the little bag on the table with the others. "Should like to hab a look at dose sweating-dens ob you."

"That's what I came about!" declared Brunswick. "We'll go now."

"Right!" cried Pete. "Nunno!" he added to Jack and Sam. "You better here an' mind de sobereigns."

CHAPTER 23.

Pete's Double.

"I'M about sick of waiting here!" grumbled Sam about twenty minutes after Pete had gone with Brunswick. "Let's have a game of billiards while we're waiting. That stuff can't run away!"

Jack readily agreed to the proposal—all the more willingly as he could keep an eye on the door of the sitting-room from that of the billiard room.

"Give me twenty-five in a hundred," said Sam.

"Right!"

About half-way across the scoring-board, Jack stopped as he was in the act of taking a difficult shot.

"Here he is!" he muttered, glancing over his shoulder as he heard the latchkey grate in the lock, and saw the front door open.

"Go on!" exclaimed Sam, as they heard footsteps cross the hall. "Come along in a minute, and then good-bye to finishing our game."

Jack took his shot and—missed!

"Bust!" he muttered. "I can't play to-day! Hallo! He's gone out again!"

"That's funny!" exclaimed Sam, throwing down his cue, and following Jack into the drawing-room. "Can't see him!" he added, as he peered through the window up and down the Lane. "Yes; there he goes, though he can't recognise the coat. By jingo, what's he in such a hurry about?"

"Sam!"

Sam swung round quickly. There was a peculiar significance in the tone of Jack's voice.

"Count!"

Sam looked at the row of bags containing the half-sovereigns.

"Two—four—six—eight—ten—twelve—fourteen—sixteen— Scissors!" he gasped. "There's four missing!"

"Whatever did he want to take them like that for?" grumbled Jack.

"Silly trick, I call it!" growled Sam. "Anybody would think he was a thief by the way he came and went, without a word to anybody. I'm blest!"

Jack rushed to the window and stared in astonishment.

"Pete!"

"Yes!" muttered Sam grimly. "It's Pete!"

his double!" exclaimed Jack, as Pete entered.

"What have you been up to?" demanded Sam, ramming the tobacco down the pipe.

"Hahn't been up to anything," exclaimed Pete, "'cept to lose olly old hoss, Brunswick."

"Best him!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes! Waited for him while he went into a house to see if dey 'low dis child to hab a look while dey were sweating, an' he neber back. Still, it don't matter! Met a chap dat will do de organising end out de invitations to dat dinner."

"But you came back here just now!" exclaimed Sam.

"You came back here just now!" Sam shouted.

"You?"

"I took a hand. "Don't fool about! You came in just now, and went gain."

"I gazed from Jack to Sam in bewilderment, and tapped his forehead. 't see de joke!" he muttered.

"'s not a joke!" cried Sam.

"Not a bit of it!" shouted Jack.

"Who! Jack, you'm getting bery excited 'bout someting or oder! I tell is child hab not been in dis house since he left it!"

"ats!" exclaimed Sam.

"When did you leave it last?" cried Jack.

"I stared at his comrades in hopeless amazement. It seemed impossible they could be joking. "Went out wid Brunswick," he muttered.

"Aven't you been here since?"

"Unn!"

"Well, how's this, then?" demanded Sam, pointing to the bags of gold.

"I looked, but, as he did not count them, failed to see anything wrong.

"Count them!" cried Jack.

"h?"

"Count them!" roared Sam.

"I slowly ticked off the bags, one by one. When he had finished, he d in silence from Jack to Sam.

"Come, Sam; you'm not playing a game," he muttered. "'Splain de e peereder!"

"Be jiggered if I can!" cried Sam, convinced that the deception did not with Pete.

"t must have been someone else!" cried Jack.

"But he was as black as this beauty," said Sam.

"And dressed the same!" exclaimed Jack. "It beats me!"

"Eh?"

"Look here," said Sam. "Listen, and make it out if you can."

Scissorsm related the whole business, and Pete listened intently.

"Dere's no doubt," he said, when Sam had finished, "dat dis child hab led Jack double."

"Can't be!" exclaimed Sam.

body. "What else am it, den?" demanded Pete.

"t's the solution to the mystery," said Jack.

"And I'll bet a bushel of sovereigns," growled Sam, "that that sneaky brute Brunswick knows something about it!"

"Golly!" cried Pete. "Dis am drefful, habing a double! Must stop to any more little tricks ob de oder Pete."

"What are you going to do?" said Sam, as Pete rammed his hat on his head.

"Going out to get a safe," declared Pete, looking very fierce. "Hab dese sort ob happenings. Dis child will wake up one ob dese monny and find he'm somebody else!"

"It licks me' absolutely!" said Sam, as Pete rushed out. "We leave this little lot, anyway, until he returns!"

CHAPTER 24.

Pete Proves Himself a Strong Customer.

"I WANT a safe, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, jumping from a horse and plunging into the show-rooms of a well-known firm of makers of that article constructed for the baffling of burglars and fire.

"What kind do you require?" inquired the manager. "A one?"

"Big 'nuff to take a tousand pounds."

"Well, it depends what sort of coinage you have your thousand in, the man, with a smile. "For instance, if it's in notes—well, quite a one would do."

"M'yes! Dat's so, old hoss."

"Here is a very good pattern," went on the manager. "Guaranteed to resist fire or thieves."

"Any good for doubles?"

Being quite unaware of the circumstances of the case, the man naturally looked somewhat astonished at Pete's strange query.

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, dat don't matter, old hoss! Forgot dat you'm in de dark. Much am dat little lot?"

"Twenty-five pounds."

"H'm!" muttered Pete, fishing in his pocket and bringing out a half-dozen of coppers. "Golly! Tought dat I hadn't got 'nuff for de damages."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," said the manager, handing over a one-pound note in change for three tens. "Where shall I send it to?"

"Eh?"

"Where shall I deliver it?"

"Park Lane, old hoss!"

"The address?"

"Dat don't matter!" exclaimed Pete. "I want dat safe at once. I wait for any delibery."

"But," exclaimed the manager, "I can't send it now. That thing is a couple of men to lift it!"

"Nunno! Dat's where you make a mistake," said Pete, grasping the massive iron safe corner-ways. "Dis little lot am coming wid dis right away!"

"Well, I'm blest!" muttered the chief of that establishment, as he shouldered the safe and walked out of the shop. "It's the first time a customer has ever taken a safe away himself! Goodness! That chap is pretty strong! I shouldn't like to upset him!"

This remark shows that that shopman knew very little of Pete,

ust w that he can be as gentle as a lamb with the weak. What he does
 hat h the strong and the wicked is another matter.
 e. "teaching his hansom, Pete deftly tipped his burden on to the seat and
 e. monbered in.

We "Golly!" he mused, as the horse started off. "Hope dis little lot don't
 apse. Dunno 'bout dat chap Brunswick," he muttered, after they had
 ered half the distance. "Seems to me dat dere's someting bery wrong
 de brain-box ob a man dat will spend all him time in scheming to get
 ney widout working for it, 'specially when de scheming takes de form
 robbing de poor. Funny ting how dat man took dis child in. Must be
 re careful in de by-and-by. Dere's no sense in letting a mean tief get de
 ob you. Shall hab to do a bit ob 'vestigating de next time a chap ob
 kidney comes along. Golly! Wish I could catch him and hab two-
 minutes' nice, quiet talk 'bout de mistake in him moral character!"
 ndging by the expression of his face, it would have proved rather a
 nful sort of interview for Brunswick if Pete could have laid hands on him
 that moment.

a h But Brunswick had gone to earth, and Pete spent the remainder of the
 of m stance in smoking furiously and turning matters over in his mind.
 fire.
 "A

CHAPTER 25.

Pete's Generous Offer.

l in, ite a
 rants) PETE'S cab rattled up to Park Lane, and Jack and Sam gazed out of
 the window with surprise as they saw what he lugged out of the
 vehicle.

"Scissors!" cried Sam. "Look what he's got! Fancy bringing
 t thing with him! Here, let's help him in with it."

By the time Jack and Sam had reached the hall door, however, Pete had
 d his cabman and shouldered his burden again.

"Catch, Sammy!" he bawled, as that worthy opened the door.

"Stop, you silly chunk of blacking!" yelled Sam, skipping back as Pete
 tended to let the safe drop.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Nearly turned dose auburn locks ob
 urses as white as driben snow dat time, Sammy—eh?"

"Hi!" yelled Jack, as Pete started to lower his safe on the drawing-room
 le. "You'll smash that thing to bits if you don't look out!"

"Here, put it down here!" exclaimed Sam. "That's all right."

"Golly!" cried Pete. "Why didn't you tink ob dis little lot before?
 all hab to make you two go widout baccy for two-free years to make up
 de loss. Golly! Four bags ob gold gone!"

"Well, it's not a bit of good howling about the matter now," said Sam.
 'pose you just pack this little lot away. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What am you laffing at?"

"Ho, ho, ho! How much did you pay for that safe?"

"Bout two-free pounds."

"I reckon you did!" cried Sam. "More like twenty!"

"M'yes!"

"What a waste of money! The thing's no good to us. I'm mighty
 tain we can't cart that around with us! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall stick to dis little lot till dat double am caught," declared Pete,
 tting the last of the bags in the safe, and slamming to the door. "He'm
 isky sort ob chap to hab running round. Mind he don't come 'long and

ete, l

borrow dat baccy-pouch ob yours, Sammy. Now den," he went on, slipping the key of the safe into his waistcoat-pocket, "let's hab a bit ob it. Den we will arrange 'bout dat dinner. You two will hab to make dat stolen money, dough. Can't do it on less dan a tousand altogeder."

While the three comrades are discussing the lunch and the plan for Christmas dinner, we will take a look into a certain room in the East End of London.

A curious scene presents itself. Brunswick is busily transforming his appearance, while his confederate and tool, Sambo, seated at the table, is ravenously despatching a meal.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Silas. "I knew we should fool you nigger. You little thought how soon those clothes were coming in for me, did you? Trust me for knowing how to conduct a little matter of this kind. Two hundred quid! He, he, he!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Sambo. "Golly! Mind you don't cut your froat!"

"Shut up, you fool!" snarled Brunswick, who had found laughing and shaving rather a difficult and painful task. "Take those clothes off and get out. I'll let you know when I shall want you for the next little job."

Sambo grinned pleasantly, and laid aside the garments that had served their purpose.

"When shall you want dis child again?" he muttered, as he thrust a handful of half-sovereigns into his trousers-pocket.

"Not so loud!" whispered Silas. "Fool! Why are you laughing? Your big mouth of yours will get you six months before you've done!"

"Golly!" gasped Sambo. "You do look mighty funny widout your whiskers!"

"Do I?" snapped Brunswick. "Well, just you turn that grin off and listen to me. Not a word about this, mind!"

"Nunno!"

For some minutes the little man held his mouth close to Sambo's ear and whispered eagerly.

"Understand?" he cried at last.

"Sure! Dis child hab got dat little lot fixed," muttered Sambo.

"Very well, then," said Silas. "Now get out until I want you. You can go anywhere near Park Lane. Leave that to me. Your part will be done later."

"Lifting safes about seems to have given you a mighty big appetite," said Sam, as Pete consumed a third helping of meat. "When you have finished filling that potato-trap of yours we'll listen to what you have to say about this precious dinner of yours."

"Ready now, Sammy!" cried Pete. "After dis child lost dat chap I met wid a parson. Golly! You don't seem bery 'prised 'bout de matter."

"Don't see anything very extraordinary about that," observed Jack.

"Nunno, p'raps not. But he'm going to fix up 'bout dat dinner."

"Scissors!" gasped Sam. "You don't lose any time."

"Nunno!"

"I suppose you're sure he was a parson—not an imitation one?"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Do you tink dis child can't tell de difference?"

"H'm!" muttered Sam. "What about our friend of the Park?"
 Brunswick?"

Yes; Silas Brunswick."

Don't see what dat has got to do wid it," murmured Pete. "P'r'aps de
 am a wrong 'un—p'r'aps not. Dere's nothing probed yet."

No!" cried Sam. "True, there's nothing proved; but I reckon it won't
 long before there is. Anyhow, we'll go and see this new friend of

Where does he live?" inquired Jack.

Dere's de address," replied Pete, pulling a little card from his pocket.

A turning off the Mile End Road," said Sam. "Well, he's right in the
 dle of it, anyway. I don't reckon you'll have much difficulty in finding
 hgh guests for your dinner."

arrived at the address given, Pete knocked at the door of a very modest
 house and inquired for the Rev. Martin-Rogers.

Am de old hoss at home, my dear?"

The fresh-coloured woman who opened the door smiled pleasantly.

I'll see," she replied.

A few minutes later the comrades were shown into the tiny sitting-room,
 Pete's new friend rose from a writing-table littered with sermon-paper
 greet them.

Dis am Jack," cried Pete, "an' dis Sammy."

Martin-Rogers laughed heartily as he shook hands. Sam returned the
 with interest. He was favourably impressed with the man's appear-

Be seated, gentlemen," said the Rev. Martin-Rogers. "Your comrade
 me he wants to give a Christmas dinner to the poor."

Dat's so, old hoss—we free."

Quite so. Well, I don't know. It's very unusual. Ha, ha, ha! Excuse
 but our friend—er—"

Pete," suggested Sam. "Call him Pete."

Golly!" cried that worthy. "Dere's a lot ob Pete 'bout dis matter.
 we get to de point. Can you find a thousand people dat would like to
 a Christmas dinner?"

A thousand?"

Yes, old hoss!"

Martin-Rogers glanced at Jack and Sam.

You're joking!" he cried.

Nunno!"

No, no, we're not!" exclaimed Jack. "It's just a fancy of Pete's; and,
 we have more money than we know what to do with, it seems a good

Well, of course, you know best!" replied the reverend gentleman. "It's
 often, though, that I find even rich people willing to stand so magnificent
 ast."

Golly!" cried Pete. "Sammy will hab to go widout him 'baccy for
 de mat-free-weeks to make up for de extra expense, dat's all!"

Well, my friends," exclaimed Martin-Rogers, "I shall be heartily
 sed to assist in er—er—arranging matters."

Tanks, old hoss! You will engage de hall, get de dinner, and send out
 nvitations, eh?"

Martin-Rogers laughed heartily. "Yes; I'll do all that!" he cried.

Dat's— What's dat, Sammy?"

You seem to be doing mighty little yourself!" said Sam.

"Oh, don't you worry about me!" exclaimed Martin-Rogers. "It will be a great delight. As I say, it's not often— Well, I find it hard to get even a few pounds together."

"Shall bring you a thousand pounds to-morrow morning," said Pete, lighting his pipe. "What?"

Jack and Sam roared with laughter as they saw the astonished expression on their host's face.

"You mustn't be surprised at anything this chap does!" exclaimed Sam. "You'll get the money all right; though, by the way, Pete, you haven't explained what you mean to do with those half-sovereigns."

"Dose am going to be placed in separate envelopes for dessert! Order dose envelopes dis morning. Should like each envelope to hab de name of de guest on it, and 'wid de compliments ob Jack, Sam, and Pete' writt underneaf. Eh?"

Martin-Rogers seemed incapable of replying. He stood up and silently shook hands.

"That's a decent sort of chap, that!" declared Sam, when, a few minutes later, they left the unpretentious little residence. "It was a bit of luck dropping across him."

"M'yes!" muttered Pete. "Pears to me he preaches what he does."

"Scissors!" cried Sam. "The idea's all right, but you've got the cut before the horse. Suppose we have a look round. Who knows but we may drop across friend Brunswick."

But, although the three comrades spent the rest of the day wandering round the neighbourhood, they saw nothing of Silas.

CHAPTER 25.

Pete Has a Premonition.

"HOPE dat double ob mine hab not walked off wid de safe!" exclaimed Pete, when late that evening they turned into Park Lane.

"Don't reckon he'd do that!" replied Sam. "He's mighty likely to be in your appearance, but I should say he's a bit of a marvel if he got your strength as well. Don't be in such a mighty hurry!"

"Dis child hab got a promotion!" gasped Pete, striding ahead.

"A what?"

"Perambulator, or something like it!" muttered Pete. "Can't keep my memory cistern working right!"

"Oh," exclaimed Jack, "premonition, he means!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hope dat safe's safe!" muttered Pete. "Come 'long!"

"I reckon he don't want that double to take another rise out of his pocket," murmured Sam. "It's not the money he's worrying about, I'll warrant. Here we are!"

When Sam opened the front door Pete rushed past him into the room.

"It's all right, boys!" he bawled. "It am quite intact."

"No more than I expected!" retorted Sam. "It's a pity you get so much alarmed about things which there's no cause to be frightened about!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Dere's nutting frightened 'bout dis child!

Where's dat key?"

"What key?" inquired Jack.

"De key ob de safe, ob course!"

"I haven't got it!"

"Hab you, Sammy?"

"No; of course not!"

"But somebody's got it!" mumbled Pete, thrusting his hands into all his pockets.

"I reckon that somebody's a silly coon, then!" retorted Sam.

"Eh?"

"You!" cried Sam. "You had the key!"

"Of course!" said Jack. "You put it in your waistcoat-pocket."

"Golly!" moaned Pete. "It am not dere now!"

"Then you've lost it!"

"Can't hab done!"

"Don't be silly!" ejaculated Sam. "It don't matter if you have! You can easily send round for another in the morning! What's the good of doing that?"

Pete was down on his hands and knees, intently scrutinising the door of the safe.

"Come here, Sammy!" he muttered. "Come an' see if dis hab been opened."

"It couldn't have been!" declared Sam. "If anyone's found that key, they wouldn't know to whom it belonged. Chuck it, for goodness' sake, and let's get some supper!"

Pete shook his head gravely. "It's a drefful ting to tink," he murmured, "dat de money dat's in dat safe may not be dere!"

"You're getting mixed, mate," cried Jack.

"Must try an' open dat ting!" muttered Pete. "Golly! Wish I had dat axe ob mine here! Must try dis little lot."

"This" happened to be the poker, but when Pete attacked the lock with it it ceased to bear any resemblance to that useful article.

"Golly!" he cried, flinging the twisted, contorted thing back into the grate. "Fetch me a hammer or something! Must find out what's in dat safe before going to bed. Jeames!" he howled, rushing to the top of the stairs leading to the basement. "Jeames!"

Jeames was having a nice little supper in the kitchen, with the door shut; but it was no good pretending not to hear Pete's voice once he started on the top note.

"Jeames!"

Jeames dropped his fork and made a dash for the door.

"Yes, sir!"

"Bring me a chopper!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Chopper!" howled Pete. "If you habn't got a chopper, bring a flat-iron or a hammer! Anyting!"

Jeames came stumbling up the stairs with a hammer.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Sam, as he looked at it. "You'll break that safe all right with that little lot!"

Pete gazed at the hammer in disgust.

It was a diminutive affair, intended for driving in tin-tacks.

"Golly!" he muttered. "Dis am de sort ob ting dey kill flies wid!"

Jeames retreated to the kitchen, and Pete returned disconsolate to the drawing-room.

"Dis am awful!" he muttered, thrusting his hands into his pockets. "Woohoo! Golly! I hab got it!"

"Thought you had all the time!" cried Sam. "All this fuss about nothing!"

Pete lost no time in opening the safe, and he gave a sigh of relief as he saw that all was just as he had left it.

"Now, for goodness' sake let's have some supper!" said Sam.

"Certainly, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete. "Could do wid a bit ob cheese and two-free onions after dat little lot."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "Fancy a denizen of Park Lane having cheese and onions for supper!"

"Don't you use such language, Sammy," exclaimed Pete. "Where's dat Jeames?"

CHAPTER 26,

Pete's True Charity.

"PICKLED onions and cheese!" ordered Pete, when the footman entered the room. "Yah, yah, yah! What's de matter wid de man?"

"I didn't quite catch what you said," muttered Jeames.

"Golly! You'm mighty hard ob hearing, old hoss! Let's pull out de stop. Pickled onions an' cheese!" roared Pete, in a voice that could have been heard half a mile.

Jeames understood, and did not stop to argue the point.

"Let Rory in!" shouted Pete, as he disappeared.

"I reckon you've upset that chap's dignity," said Sam.

"How's dat, Sammy?"

"Ordering cheese and onions."

"Golly! Don't see anyting wrong 'bout dat! Dey'm bery nice wid pepper an' vinegar."

"Yes; I know they are," agreed Sam, with a yawn. "But they're hardly the thing for Park Lane."

"Golly!" grumbled Pete. "Am getting a bit tired ob leading dis sort ob life! After we hab visited de little lady, let's go out to de wilds again."

"I'm willing," cried Jack. "After all, there's nothing like it."

"Where's dat chap got to?" exclaimed Pete, rising from his chair. "Must hab dose on— Hi! Golly! Why don't you look where you'm coming to?"

"It wasn't my fault!" cried Jeames, who had collided with Pete, greatly to the discomfort of both, just as he was entering.

"Well, neber mind! We won't discuss dat question," observed Pete calmly, ignoring the fact that the unfortunate Jeames was reeking with the spilt, unfragrant liquid. "Put dem on de table, an' we'll hab supper."

During supper the comrades discussed the absorbing topic of the great dinner.

"Tell you what, Sammy," cried Pete. "When we hab settled dat little lot, we must get a motor-car."

"What for?" demanded Sam.

"Golly! Don't be so dense!" replied Pete. "What do people hab motor-cars for as a rule?"

"Yes; but we're going to Mrs. Lacey's," objected Jack.

"Dat's quite right, Jack. But dere's no reason why we should not go in a car. Spec's she's got a chicken-house or something or oder where we could put it. But we can see 'bout dat motor later. 'Night! 'Night!"

That night and the following days passed quite peacefully. It may have been that Pete was on his good behaviour, or, on the other hand, it may have been that he was too busily employed to get into mischief. In any case, we will leave it at that. The business of the dinner was satisfactorily settled with Martin-Rogers, and in 'the meantime nothing was seen or heard of Brunswick. So we will follow the comrades on one bright December morning.

"We want a motor-car, old hoss," said Pete, as they entered the well-appointed premises of a famous dealer in cars of all descriptions.

"For touring or racing?" inquired a gentleman attired in a beautiful frock-coat, more suited to a drapery stores than a motor-car depot.

"A bit ob bof, old hoss."

"H'm! About what price?"

"Eh?"

"What figure?"

"Oh, something nice—graceful, you know!" drawled Pete, who had been studying the journals devoted to motor-cars.

"This is a very fine car, sir. Latest pattern—four-cylinder. Splendid hill-climber."

"M'yes! Dat's not a bad-looking ting dat!" observed Pete, surveying a magnificent car upholstered in red. "What do you tink 'bout it, boys?"

"I reckon it's as good as any other," observed Sam.

"S'pose we hab dat one, den. Gib de old hoss his money, Sammy."

The manager of that depot tried to look as unconcerned as possible when Sam calmly counted out the required amount.

"Then you'll see to all formalities for us?" observed Sam, as he pocketed the receipt.

"Certainly, sir; certainly! The car shall be sent round to you early this evening."

"Dere's no fear ob us habing a railway accident," cried Pete as they left.

"Reckon not, mate," replied Sam. "It's a smash of a different sort we'll be having if we have one at all."

"Dere's not going to be any upspilling dis journey," observed Pete. "Dis child will do de dribing."

"H'm!" muttered Jack. "Is that any guarantee?"

"Nunno! Accidents will happen to de most careful ob dribers," said Pete calmly, "but unless we hab an upset, we shall get along safely. S'pose we get back now an' make arrangements."

"Scissors!" exclaimed Sam. "What are you up to now? It's not time for lunch!"

"It am rader early, certainly," replied Pete, entering a coffee-house.

"But, you see," he added, seating himself at one of the tables, partitioned off with high divisions, "we hab got a lot to do, so we must crowd tings up a bit."

During the meal the three chatted unrestrainedly.

Neither of them had been aware of a thin-visaged little man that had been at various intervals dogging their steps during the last few days, and neither of them were aware that a stranger followed them into that restaurant and slid silently into the next compartment.

The robbery of the gold had faded from their memory for the time.

and Brunswick, upon whom their suspicions had been fixed, chuckled silently as he heard Pete holding forth on an interesting matter.

Bar the three comrades, the waitress, and himself, the place was empty, and, after giving his order in a cracked voice, Brunswick buried himself in a newspaper and became—all ears. He felt secure from recognition, since he had cut off his straggling whiskers.

The fates were kind to him, for during the ensuing half-hour he learnt much, including the address of Mrs. Lacey and her wealth, and his shifty eyes glittered as his crafty brain set to its favourite task of scheming, and before Pete called for the bill his plan for another coup was matured, and he settled for his meagre meal and glided out.

How those plans bore fruit will be seen later.

"We leabe Lunnon to-night, Sammy," observed Pete a few minutes after the listener's departure. "Can't afford to keep dat machine lying idle. So come 'long, an' help discharge de cook and do de packing-up."

"A fine lot of packing you'll do!" retorted Sam.

"Yah, yah, yah! Habing spent all dis time in training you two to carry out dis child's ideas, I don't see de necessity to do more dan watch de proceedings. Shall you tell de cook we'm going, or leabe her to find out when we'm gone? Shall hab to sing: 'Good-bye, Dolly, I must leabe you.' P'r'aps de lady will take de hint. Yah, yah, yah! You'm looking serious, Sammy," he added, as they left the restaurant.

When they reached Park Lane, Jeames handed Sam a telegram.

"Golly! What's dat?" exclaimed Pete.

"Don't you be so mighty inquisitive!" observed Sam, as he tore open the buff envelope. "Scissors! Listen! 'Shall expect you to-night.—Lacey.'"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, seizing Jack round the waist and waltzing him round the hall. "Dat little lady must be a bit ob a tought-reader. Wonder how she guessed dat we proposed scooting to-night. Funny!"

"Mighty funny!" growled Sam, looking at Pete's smiling face suspiciously. "I should not be surprised if you knew something about this wire. It's too much of a coincidence to be purely an accident."

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm guessed it! Go up one, Sammy. You see, dis child tought it 'bout time we made a mobe, so sent off a telegraft last night. Come 'long and do de packing."

By early evening all arrangements for quitting their mansion were completed, and their new car stood throbbing gently before the door.

"By-by, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, shaking Jeames by the hand. "Got eberyting, Sammy?"

"Yes; all square," replied Sam, as he seated himself beside Jack. "Fire away!"

Whirr-r-r!

Pete pulled the lever, and the car swung round and settled into a steady, purring sound.

Down Park Lane, right through the City, he drove at a steady pace.

"This is not the way!" exclaimed Sam.

"Nunno! Dat's so, Sammy!"

"Well, then, what are you doing?"

"Dribing dis car."

"Yes; I know. But where are you going?"

"To de feast, Sammy. Should just like to hab a look and see dat eberyting am going on all right. Must see dat dose people don't ober-eat demselves!"

"I reckon it won't hurt them if they do," observed Jack. "Hallo! We've passed Aldgate Pump."

"Squeedge dat horn!" said Pete, as he guided their car through the crowded streets. "Golly! Where's de turning?"

"Over there!" exclaimed Sam. "That's it!" he added, as he held his hand out from the right side.

"Yes; I can see the hall from here," said Jack.

Without a sound, the car stopped at the entrance to a hall built of corrugated iron.

"We can leabe dis little lot to take care ob itself," muttered Pete, as he alighted. "Mind de step, Sammy. Nunno! You stop where you am, Rory."

"We don't want to show ourselves," growled Sam, as they approached the swing baize-covered doors.

"Can't change into disembodied bodies, Sammy," replied Pete. "Shall hab to make ourselves as small as possible. Wonder if dat Rogers am here."

In compliance with the comrades' wishes, nothing had been said concerning the giver of the feast to the people invited; consequently, they entered without any notice being taken of them.

"Shoo!" muttered Pete, as they stood near the door. "We'm incog. Shoo!"

"Scissors!" said Sam, in a low voice. "Chuck that tone of mystery, or you'll defeat your own ends. Here's Rogers!"

The Rev. Martin-Rogers came up, smiling. "I'm glad you gave us a look in," he cried. "Our friends will——"

"Shoo!"

"What's the matter?" he inquired, turning to Sam.

"Oh, nothing! Only we just came to have a look, that's all. We're off to the country to-night, and don't want to attract any attention."

"Eberybody seems to be bery jolly," muttered Pete, gazing about him.

The hall was a buzz of anticipatory excitement, and from the further end came delightful and appetising odours of viands.

In the kitchen there, partitioned off from the main building, were a small army of cooks, hot and tired, but working with that good will that walks abroad in the festive season.

There, in that kitchen, were turkeys roasting and spitting and spluttering. There were huge joints of juicy sirloins of beef, shedding their deep, rich gravy on the fine fat potatoes beneath them.

Boiling, baking, roasting!

All the good things that make Christmas-time the happy, jolly time it is were there, being as carefully watched and tended as if to be laid before a king.

Bubbling away on a special stove at the end of the row of cookers was a huge cauldron, and if one had been curious enough to raise the lid, one would have distinguished, through the fragrant steam, a gigantic plum-pudding.

The crown of the feast!

Pete's Christmas passed into a saying, and the thousand guests were never tired of telling of their happy time.

"Well," exclaimed Sam, at last, "we've got a long way to go, and——"

"Golly!" cried Pete. "Dat's so! Good-night, old hoss!"

The three shook hands, and departed as silently as they had come.

"Dunno what you tink 'bout it," said Pete, as he grasped the steering-wheel and started the engine, "but de smell ob dose turkeys and tings was mighty good, an'—an'——"

"I know what you're going to say," interrupted Sam. "You're hungry again. Well, let's wait till we get out of London. We can easily get something to eat on the way."

"Strikes me," muttered Pete, as the car gathered speed, "dat a bit ob steak in the mouf am worf all de beef in de oven. Eh?"

"That's so!" laughed Sam. "But we've no time to lose. We sha'n't get there before midnight as it is."

"M'yes!" said Pete doubtfully.

Half an hour passed, and from the outer circle of the great city they came into practically open country.

Pete increased the speed, and the road unwound itself like a white ribbon, and seemed to be swallowed up by the bonnet of the car as they swept onward.

"Tink dat's where we pull up," observed Pete, as he saw the flicker of lights ahead. "M'yes, dat's so!"

Neither Jack nor Sam offered any protest. They had made good time since leaving the Mile End Road, and the keen country air had put an edge on their appetites, and the light shining through the close-drawn curtains of red covering the windows of the inn promised good-cheer and warmth.

Rory, too, seemed quite of the opinion that it was time the inner dog was refreshed, and he kept close to Pete's heel.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" exclaimed a rosy-faced man as they entered the cosy little bar-parlour. "It's a nippy night!"

"It am all dat, old hoss!" replied Pete, throwing open his heavy coat, and rubbing his hands together. "What hab you got to eat?"

"It's rather late," observed the landlord, "but I'll see if the missus has anything hot left from supper," he added, as he hustled out of the room.

"Strikes me there's worse things than keeping a country inn," observed Sam, as he glanced round at the old oak walls and furniture, mellow to the point of blackness with age. "Fancy turning out of this into the cold! Ugh!"

"Must take de warm wid de cold, Sammy. Can't hab you grumbling 'bout a little bit ob frost."

"I sha'n't feel the worse for a nice hot——"

"No need to finish dat remark, Jack," cried Pete, as the landlord entered, carrying a large tray crowded with plates, in the middle of which stood a tureen emitting a fragrant steam. "Golly! Dis am just de sort ob supper for free hungry men! Do be careful, old hoss!"

"Oh, I sha'n't drop it!" cried the landlord. "It's a bit of luck our having this stew ready. It's not often we have callers at this time of night about these parts. Going far?"

"Two-free miles," muttered Pete, eyeing the stew eagerly.

While the comrades ate, the landlord chatted, but he did more than his fair share of the talking.

Jack, Sam, and Pete were too busy to do anything but listen.

"Feel a different sort ob a man," declared Pete, as he carefully scooped up the last of the stew. "Got anyting else, old hoss?"

"Nothing hot. A nice bit of Stilton?"

"Golly! What could be nicer? Whistle up dat cheese, sharp!"

"It hasn't got to that stage," exclaimed the landlord, laughing. "How's that?"

"First-class!" cried Sam, seizing a knife and cutting a generous portion.

"Tanks, Sammy!" said Pete, calmly appropriating Sam's plate. "Eh?"

"Greedy beggar!" growled Sam. "Here!"

Jack chuckled heartily as he, too, followed Pete's example.

"An' de last shall be first," roared Pete.

"Cheese it!" growled Sam, unconscious of the awful pun.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete.

"What's the matter?" mumbled Sam. "Oh," he exclaimed, as he looked round at the laughing faces of his comrades and the landlord's, "is that all? Well, I'm mighty certain it don't take much to make you laugh."

"All de better, Sammy," cried Pete. "Dis am Christmas-time, an' we hab got to make merry."

"Reckon you do that at any time," replied Sam. "We'd better settle our bill and get on. How much?"

"Four shillings," replied the landlord.

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete.

"It's the lowest I can charge," replied the landlord.

"Yah, yah, yah! De boot's on de oder leg, old hoss. You'm not charging 'nuff! Golly! Why, Sammy hab eaten 'bout free shillings' worf ob cheese, let alone what Jack and Rory hab put away."

"Leaving out yourself," exclaimed Sam. "You——"

"Golly! Dis child hab only had two-free snacks," declared Pete.

"Nunno! Gib de change to de missus for a new bonnet. Dis am one ob dose 'casions when a certain ting am worf in money exactly what it am worf to de recëiber ob de article."

With this none too lucid explanation, Pete dived into his great coat, and hustled Jack and Sam out of the inn.

"All aboard?" he yelled. "Bring de oder leg wid you, Sammy!"

CHAPTER 27.

An Obstacle in the Road, and How Pete Got Rid of It.

"SCISSORS!" exclaimed Sam, as the milestones kept popping up, showing white against the black, dense hedges bordering the road.

"We're travelling!"

"We are," agreed Jack, snuggling up in the corner seat.

"There is one thing, though, that beauty can drive, if he can't—Hollo!"

The harsh grating of the powerful brakes jerked them forward, and Rory, who was sound asleep, sprang up growling.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Sam.

"Dunno, Sammy," replied Pete, peering forward. "Seems to me dere's someting in de road."

"Sure, and there is!" cried Jack. "What a fool the man must be, though, to stick right in the middle of the road like that!"

The blurred dark mass resolved itself into another car, standing motionless right in the middle of the road.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, starting his engine, and gliding gently forward. "Shall hab to move dis little lot, or turn back to Lunnon and come round anoder way!"

"Yes," exclaimed Sam, as he got out, "I can see ourselves going back a hundred miles or so just because some silly idiot tries to mend his car to the utter disregard of anyone else!"

"Anything de matter, old hoss?" said Pete, as they walked up to the motionless car. "Golly! Dere's a pair ob legs!"

"What? Who's that?" demanded a voice from beneath the motor.

"Jack, Sam, and Pete, old hoss," replied Pete.

There was a muffled explanation, and the owner of the broken-down car struggled from his prone position and rose to his feet. He glanced at Pete insolently.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Mind your own business!"

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm a funny sort ob old hoss," declared Pete, grinning at the stranger's scowling face. "Tought p'r'aps we might help you?"

"Ugh!" growled the man, looking at Jack and Sam. "I don't want help from a nigger! Some people may like a black man for a chauffeur, but I'm of a different opinion!"

"Pardon me," exclaimed Sam; "but if you're referring to this gentleman, you're making a mistake. This is our chum, and——"

"Gentleman!" ejaculated the man, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously.

Pete roared with laughter. Contempt of that kind never hurt his feelings, though it has often proved rather a painful thing for the offender.

"How dare you laugh like that?" shouted the stranger. "Perhaps you are not aware that I own this land——"

"Do you own de road, old hoss?" interrupted Pete.

"I am a J.P."

"M'yes!" muttered Pete. "J.P.! What's dat stand for—jolly pig?"

"I'll have you locked up!"

"Yah, yah, yah! J.P., you'm a funny old hoss! But I can't stand here larfing at you all night; we'm in a hurry. Take dis car ob yours out ob our road."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," retorted the man, making a menacing stride towards Pete. "Have a care, fellow, or it will be the worse for you!"

"I consider your behaviour that of either a madman or a fool!" exclaimed Sam. "We offered you help, and you have the effrontery to treat us in this manner!"

"Who are you?" demanded the man.

"Sam!"

"Sam what? Some jumped-up gold-miner?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sam could not be angry. The man's attitude was too funny for indignation.

"S'pose we shall hab to move dis ting ourselves!" exclaimed Pete. "When you'm finished cackling, Sammy, p'r'aps you'll put your shoulder to de wheel!"

"You leave that car alone," declared the self-styled J.P. "I suppose you think because you're three to one that you can do as you like?"

"Shut up, old hoss!" said Pete gently. "You make me tired. Go and lie down somewhere out ob our sight!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind! I defy you to move my car!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "If de car won't move ob its own accord, it hab got to be pushed!"

"See here," cried Sam, as the angry man swung a heavy spanner in his hand, "neither Jack nor myself are going to interfere in this matter,

though I warn you that you will get as good as you give if you're fool enough to strike Pete with that thing!"

"I shall please myself about that!" snarled the man.

"Surely he must have been drinking?" muttered Jack. "Anyhow, for absolute piggishness, I never met his equal!"

"Nor I," agreed Sam. "We shall get to Cheltenham some time to-morrow morning if this idiot keeps this up much longer!"

"Seems to me," said Pete, lighting his pipe, and calmly disregarding that threatening spanner, "dat you'm de sort ob man dat wants up-ending in de ditch. M'yes! Shall hab to tip dis little lot ober on top ob you!"

"Leave that car alone!" hooted the man, working himself up into a passion.

"Scissors!" exclaimed Sam. "He looks as if he'll knock Pete on the head. He's no chicken, and— My stars!"

The infuriated man had swung his spanner up, and brought it down—not on Pete's head, as he intended to do, but fair into that worthy's black palm.

In an instant that piece of cold steel had changed ownership.

"You'm a bery naughty old hoss!" cried Pete, seizing the man's clenched fist above the wrist. "Now, you naughty boy, will you behabe or will you hab some more?"

This consisted of some raps on the knuckles with the spanner, and Mr. J.P. wriggled and squirmed with pain and wrath.

"Re-re-releasé me, you brute!" he spluttered, aiming a blow with his free hand at Pete's grinning face.

"Yah, yah, yah! Caught dat little lot on de noddle, old hoss. Hab anoder go. Free shies a penny! Golly! What's de man prancing about like dat for?"

Jack and Sam roared with laughter at the weird sight, though, as a matter of fact, the J.P. was doing his level best to kick.

"Must put on a little more pressure," said Pete, as he caught one on the shin. "Can't hab dis child's legs treated like dat. Golly! Dat one hurt!"

"Woo-oo! Let-go—leggo!"

"M'yes! You'm right, old hoss. It am a bery painful sort ob business; but den you see you started it, and now you'm in such a raging temper I'm almost 'fraid to let you go!"

"I'll—I'll—oo-oh!"

"Dat's a pretty little song!" cried Pete. "Try a top note. M'yes! Dat's not so bad as might be. But we'm getting tired ob de entertainment, old hoss. Tink ob what a lot ob weeks in prison you would gib yourself if you only knew what a wicked boy you are. Ta-ta!"

With a quick movement Pete dragged the struggling man towards him, and, seizing him by the waist, heaved him into the air, and flung him bodily over the thick-set hedge. Bump!

"Now, den," cried Pete, "feel quite nice and pleasant, after dat little chat? Would serve de silly old hoss right if we tipped his car sideways into de ditch, but s'pose dis meets de case. Heave oh!"

While the furious man on the other side of the hedge strove frantically to force his way through the close-set, prickly branches, the comrades shifted his car to one side, and with a playful "toot-toot," started off again, followed by a howl of fury.

"Can't seem to get de best ob speeds out ob dis little lot!" he muttered presently, after a short silence. "Golly! What's dat?"

Jack and Sam looked over the back of their car.

"It's a motor!" cried the latter. "And if I'm not mistaken, I recognise our friend J.P.'s sweet warble!"

"Golly! What's de man want?" exclaimed Pete, craning his neck round, and nearly sending their car into the ditch. "Why, he's got a loadful!"

"He's coming to give you a thrashing," laughed Sam. "Better put on speed and give him the slip!"

"Nunno, Sammy! Can't run away from dat little lot. Hi! Golly!"

There were four young men in the car, and the driver, who was certainly J.P., cut right across the comrades' motor, and caught the bonnet with a bang.

"You stop dere!" shouted Pete, as the car righted itself with a thud, and he swung round after it.

The only answer he received was a vicious cut across the cheek with a cane, but as the car dashed round the bend he seized the back. The driver had to swerve to avoid an obstacle, and this, added to Pete's weight, caused the motor-car to lift on two wheels, then over it went into the ditch with an awful crash.

Pete came off the best, because the rail to which he was clinging was torn away, and he sat on the grass at the side of the lane with the piece of broken car in his hands.

J.P. was pitched clean over the hedge, and he lay on the other side, howling in a manner that gave the impression he was hurt. The other three were somewhere in the ditch, but they were completely hidden by the evil-smelling fumes and wreaths of petrol that arose from the motor-car.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, as a head appeared. "It's dat bounder J.P. right 'nuff. J.P., my dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete, waving his piece of broken car, "I'm mighty glad to meet you again!"

"You dastardly scoundrel, you!" howled the furious man, leaping about in his impotent fury.

"Yah, yah, yah! Here comes anoder one! Ain't he yowling, too! Shouldn't wonder if dat man hab hurt himself. It sounds just like it!"

This seemed highly probable, for no sane man would have leapt about and yelled like he was doing unless he had been considerably hurt.

"Get out of the way!" roared the man. "I'll give that nigger a lesson he'll remember to his dying day!"

"Stop a bit, Fred," said J.P. "Here come the other chaps. Now we'll pay these three out for their treatment to me!"

As he spoke a cart dashed up, while a dozen or more men leapt out.

"What's up, Burton?" demanded one. "Had a spill?"

"Spill, be hanged, Hart! It's that nigger who has sent us into the ditch!"

"By George, he has made a pretty mess of your motor-car!"

"Tink it will want a little new paint, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"I think you will want a new coffin by the time we have done with you!" retorted J.P.

"Feel like fighting, den? Dis child is always ready for a little ob dat,

and you'll find Jack and Sam de same road fixed. Tink we free can tackle dat little lot, boys?"

"We can try," answered Jack, pulling off his coat and flinging it into the car.

"Yah, yah, yah! Here come de oder two muddy ones! Don't dey look mighty pretty! It's lucky you ain't hurt yourselves, old hosses, isn't it? Should take my face home and put it in a blue-bag if I was you, Freddy. You'm a bit too puffy for pure beauty!"

"Let's give them what they deserve, boys!" cried J.P.

"Take that, you insolent blackguard!" roared Hart, striking at Jack with his stick.

But the blow fell on Pete's broad shoulders, for he sprang in front of his comrade.

"Put dat stick down, Hart!" cried Pete, in a voice that startled Jack.

He knew his comrade's prodigious strength, and feared what might be the result of a blow delivered in passion. Pete seldom lost his temper, but it was not proof against seeing a comrade struck; and although he spoke quite calmly, Jack did not mistake the gleam in his eyes.

"Be careful, Pete," he said.

"Dat's what I want to be, Jack boy," he answered. "Let him put dat stick down and his fists up, 'cos I'm going to strike him, but it shall only be wid my open hand. Now, den, you dere, come on!"

"And so I will!" roared Hart, dropping his stick, and going in with a rush.

Pete kept his word. He only struck with his open hand. It was a blow on the top of Hart's head, and the bully went down like a stunned ox.

A murmur ran round the rest of the gang. They hesitated to attack a man who could strike such a blow as that with his open hand. Jack and Sam stepped to Pete's side, leaving the car to take care of itself. But J.P.'s fierce temper overcame his discretion, and, shouting to his comrades to come on, he made a rush at Sam.

It was an error of judgment, although perhaps not such a serious one as if he had attacked Pete.

This was the signal for a general rush; then the comrades let themselves go. It is bad to have long odds against you, but if those odds are very long, as they were on the present occasion, it is sometimes an advantage, always supposing the enemy is not armed. They hampered one another by their very number, and as the comrades made fierce rushes amongst them they scattered.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, letting out right and left. "Regular ninepin work, dis! Reminds you ob fighting wolves, boys! Let dem hab it hot and strong!"

They got it, too. The comrades knew how to use their fists, and the blows they delivered were such that there was no withstanding.

Pete only struck when he was sure of his blow, and no man who stood up to him needed a second one. He took good care to give no upper-cuts, for one of his blows beneath the jaw would probably have proved fatal.

The comrades were fighting in self-defence, and with the fixed determination to gain the day. Victory to their opponents could be scarcely better than disgrace. Thus, they fought in a half-hearted manner, and all fought shy of Pete.

He was quick to see this, and to take advantage of it. For a moment

the enemy drew back; then Pete rushed in, while his comrades closely backed him up.

J.P. went down with a blow between the eyes, and got trodden on. Two or three others who got within reach of Pete's fists shared a similar fate, and the fight was over.

"Suppose we call dat de first round," said Pete, winking at Jack. "Lend me your pouch, Sammy. Oh, it's all right. I seem to hab it here. 'Spect I forgot to return it de last time I borrowed it."

"I'm inclined to think that's my pouch," said Jack.

"Is dat so? I believe you are right, Jack, 'cos dis is Sammy's in de oder pocket. Bery sad to hab such a bad memory. Get up, Hart. Don't you feel hearty? Dat's meant for a joke, Sammy. Now, den, for de next round. We will fight altogeder, or I'll take six or eight ob you, whicheber you please."

"You fiend!" cried J.P., struggling to his feet. "You black demon!"

"Well, ain't dat de proper colour for a demon to be? Unless you prefer a red one."

"I'll make you pay for this!"

"Well, stand up, old hoss, and I'll mighty soon pay you! Yah, yah, yah! I tink his cargo hab shifted. His face looks all lopsided. Looks as if he was chewing a chunk ob gum-stick in one cheek. You'm damaged your eye, too, J.P. But neber mind, old hoss! Dat damage will get right a mighty lot quicker dan your motor-car will!"

"I'll give you in custody for this, you black blackguard!"

"Yah, yah, yah! When am you going to start about dat job? But ain't you coming on wid dis fight? It was just getting exciting, and it seems a pity to stop a fight when it's getting dat way."

"We are not going to fight any more!" growled one of them.

"Golly! You must not gib in like dat," said Pete, pulling at his pipe. "Why, you'm only just beginning! See here, boys, we free are too many for dem. It don't gib dem a chance. Now, Sammy, I'll bet you a dollar I prevent dem getting into deir cart."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'll take you."

"You and Jack must not interfere."

"All right."

"If two-free get in, dat don't count. Dey am all got to get in."

"That's the bet. We shall see some fun now," murmured Sam.

"You leave those horses alone!" roared Freddy, as Pete coolly commenced to unharness them.

"I ain't hurting your horses," answered Pete. "Dey might take fright when we start fighting again; and I don't want dat."

"If you don't leave them alone, it will be the worse for you."

"Can't help dat. I ain't going to lose my bet wid Sammy."

"I will pay your bet, you stupid brute!"

"Nunno! It ain't only for de sake ob de money. It's de honour ob de ting I hab got to consider. If I don't stop you getting into your cart, Sammy will naturally tink I am frightened ob you; and dat would be misleading de poor man. Would you like to double your bet, Sammy?"

"Yes!"

"Make it five pounds?"

"Yes!"

CHAPTER 28.

Kidnapping a Bobby, and a Breakdown.

"GOLLY! De man seems mighty certain!" cried Pete, turning up his sleeves. "You ain't going to help dem, Sammy?"

"Of course not, you silly owl! You have got to stop them getting in that cart."

"Dat's de bet. Stop dem for five minutes."

"Oh, no, you beauty! Nothing was mentioned about time; but I don't mind making the limit five hours."

"Seems a mighty long time to keep on. Still, dey am bound to get as tired as me. Now den, start away, old hosses!"

First of all, they tried arguments. Pete sat on the front step of the cart and listened in silence, while he smoked his pipe.

"You ain't coming on dis little lot!" was all he said, after they had been arguing for five minutes or more.

"You've no right to stop us."

"I ain't arguing 'bout dat. De bet is dat you don't all get up in five hours."

Some of them commenced to clamber up behind, but Pete made a rush round and dragged one of them down by his leg. Then he clambered on the top, and pitched one of them who had gained that position into the hedge. There is little doubt he would also have served the others the same way had they not scrambled down.

"Tink I'm getting on all right, Sammy?" inquired Pete, sitting down again.

"Capitally! But you can't stop there for five hours."

"When I start stopping, Sammy, dere's no telling how long I can keep on doing it. Tink I'll use dis whip; it will save a lot ob trouble. Yah, yah, yah! Caught you dat time, didn't I, J.P.? Try anoder one ob de same sort."

"You black beast!" snarled J.P. "If you don't come down we'll stone you!"

"Shall smash pieces off de coach and chuck dem at you if you do!" retorted Pete.

Either this threat, or the fact that there were not any loose stones in the lane, decided Burton on not making the attempt.

Sam got tired of waiting, and suggested the bet should be cancelled; but Pete would not hear of it. He said he was perfectly comfortable; and, indeed, he looked it as he sat there smoking his pipe, and occasionally catching any one of the party who ventured too close a crack with the whip.

"See here, boys," exclaimed Pete at last, "I'm getting mighty hungry! Shall hab to defend dis cart in a different manner for de next half-hour or so. Clear away, you beauties, else I shall lash you—like so, and so!"

"Hellup! Steady!" yelled Sam. "You hit me that time."

"Did I, Sammy? Strange ting dat."

"Well, I don't know that it was particularly strange, seeing the way you were dashing about, but I vow it was mighty painful."

"You should keep out ob my way, Sammy, and not be so mighty silly as to get so close when you see I'm going to lash about. Now, I'm just going to alter de position ob de cart."

Pete seized the shafts and quickly cleared the party, who appeared to be contemplating an attack, by running the cart into their midst.

"Murder!" howled J.P., hopping about on one foot. "The silly scoundrel has run over my toe! By thunder! He has smashed the cart on top of my motor-car now!"

"Just look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete, as the wheels of the cart ran into the ditch; then it toppled over sideways, to fall with an ominous crash on the already badly wrecked motor-car. "Ain't it a surprising ting dat de cart should hab dropped on de bery spot where de car was?"

"You raving maniac!" howled Freddy.

"I dunno 'bout being a maniac," said Pete, "but it seems to me you'm doing de raving part ob de business. But buzz off! I'm too hungry to stop to listen to you now."

"You black scoundrel!" roared Freddy. "I'll put you in prison for this, you see if I don't! You have damaged my cart."

"Dat ain't at all unpossible."

"And look what the villain has done to my motor-car!" yelled Burton, J.P.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dat motor-car makes me laugh each time I look at it. Should say de best ting you could do wid a car like dat would be to sell it for scrap-iron. You'm got dis to consider, J.P. De damage done to your old car ain't noting like so serious to you as de loss ob time you hab imposed on we free twice dis evening. Now, clear off, 'cos miserable cowards like you make me feel ill."

"I shall not clear off, you insolent blackguard!"

"Won't you, old hoss? Den you'll get de mightiest frashing you hab eber had in your life!"—lashing at him with the whip in a manner that quickly made him obey Pete's order and clear off.

"I don't feel like watching that cart any longer, Sammy."

"Then jump in, and we will drive off."

"I want your names and addresses," said Freddy.

"Jack, Sam, and Pete, England."

"Well, I'm going to follow you up and give you into custody."

"All right, old hoss! You keep just behind the car. You'd best lead your horses in case dey run away. I dunno how many bobbies you'm going to get to take us in custody, but you'll need two-free. Jump in, Jack and Sammy!"

But they had not covered many yards before a voice called to them to halt, and a constable stepped out of the darkness.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "It will be a mighty funny ting if one constable can take us free to prison."

"I should advise him not to try the experiment," answered Jack. "Besides, it seems to me that if anyone ought to go to prison, it's that idiot J.P. Look at that beggar pitching his yarn to that bobbie."

"Now, what's this I hear about you?" demanded Robert, marching up and looking as important as he knew how. "Mind, anything you say I may use in evidence against you."

"Ain't dis mighty awful?" exclaimed Pete. "I refuse to answer your question, bobby."

"Oh, you do, do you? And why do you refuse to answer my question?"

"Because I dunno de answer. You see, dere's no telling what you may

hab been hearing 'bout, same as dere ain't no telling weder you'm simple enough to believe it. But I should say, from de expression ob your countenance, dat you were."

"Never you mind about that."

"I don't old hoss. It's for you to mind."

"These gentlemen state that you have assaulted them, smashed up their motor-car, and turned their cart into the ditch."

"Sounds a pretty big order, don't it, old hoss? How many were on de cart, Freddy?"

"Twelve, you black vagabond!"

"And four in de motor-car makes eighteen."

"Sixteen!" corrected the constable. "Can't you count?"

"Yes, old hoss. Still, we will say dere was sixteen. Now den, bobby, how do you suppose free men am going to assault sixteen?"

I don't know."

"Oh, you don't know, don't you? Dat's one ob de tings you don't know, but dere's a good many more on de top ob dem. Now, you had better be careful, bobby, because I may use anything you say in evidence against you."

"Now, I don't want any of your nigger's fooling! Do you deny that you assaulted them?"

"What, de sixteen ob dem?"

"Well, some of the sixteen."

"How many ob de sixteen do you accuse us wid assaulting?"

"How should I know?"

"Dere's no telling how a man like you should know anyting, 'cos it's mighty certain you'd neber be able to learn it! You buzz off home, 'cos we ain't got de slightest need for a man who believes free fellows could assault sixteen, and——"

"We assaulted 'em first," came a voice from J.P.

"What the thunder did you want to tell him that for?" cried Freddy fiercely.

"I never spoke a word," declared Burton, who never guessed the voice was due to Pete's ventriloquism.

"Why, I heard you!" said the constable.

"You——"

"Are a fatheaded idiot!"

"Now, take care what you are calling the police."

"Let's punch 'e bobby's head!" came a voice from Freddy. "Smash into him like we did 'e nigger!"

"Say, Robert," exclaimed Pete, in his natural voice, "seems to me dey am a lot ob escaped maniacs. Jump up quick, before dey murder you. Hi, golly! Look at dat one wid de knife!"

"Murder!" yelled the constable, making a rush for the car.

"Turn on de speed, Sammy!" cried Pete, seizing the constable by the wrist.

And as Sam started the car the constable was swung from his feet, for Pete had also got a grip on the side.

"It's all right, Bobby!" cried Pete. "Don't be frightened. We'm escaping nicely. Yah, yah, yah! De man reminds me ob a pendulum. See him swinging to and fro!"

"Bust it! Pull me in!"

"I dunno 'bout dat, old hoss. But seems to me you'm a mighty lot more likely to pull me out. Catch hold ob my tail, Jack. It would be a drefful horrid ting if I was to fall on dis bobby an' squash him. An' tink what a loss it would be to de police force! I'll try to pull you up; only mind you don't catch your legs in de wheel, 'cos it might hurt dem. Now, we come up! Dere you are! As right as rain. Sit down, and make yourself at home. Tink you'd like a little drop ob whisky?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do," answered Robert, working his arm about, to make sure it was not dislocated.

"Den try one ob dese cigars. Dey are Jack's, and he always smokes good cigars. I know dat, 'cos I sample dem from time to time, just to make sure he ain't smoking anyting dat would disagree wid his constitution. We'm got some cold pie here. I know bobbies like dat. We ain't got a cook."

"You must not mind Pete's chaff," said Jack, laughing. "Now, I'll tell you how the row began, and you can judge if we were in the wrong. That fellow driving the motor-car stopped us further up the road, and tried to brain Pete, and then came after us and tried to run us down. As he would not stop, my friend Pete clung to the back of the car and toppled it over into the ditch. Then the cart drove up, and we had a free fight. Ha, ha, ha! Took the lot of them! Next, Pete ran the cart on top of the car, and there's the jolliest smash-up you ever saw. We are travelling to Cheltenham or somewhere near it. We should have reached our destination hours ago if it hadn't been for those roughs."

"Now, see here, Bobby!" cried Pete. "You gib us de directions to Cheltenham, den buzz off, and put dat sobereign in your pocket."

The constable gave the required information, and willingly obeyed Pete's order concerning the sovereign; and, having given them the necessary directions, was about to take his leave, when a high-pitched voice appeared to come from Rory, who at a sign from Pete rose on his hind legs and moved his jaws—one of the many clever tricks Pete had taught him.

"Shake hands before you go, stupid!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped the constable, mopping his brow. "I've got a clever dog at home, but he can't talk."

"Dat's because you ain't taught him," declared Pete. "Can easy do dese little tings if you know de way. Only got to keep your mouf shut—like so—and frow your voice—so."

The constable jumped in the air as the sound of snapping and snarling came from behind him.

"Bust it!" yelled the astonished man, as he looked around and saw—nothing. "Bust it! I've dropped that quid!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Fancy a bobby losing a tip. Can't you find it, old hoss?"

"No," grumbled the policeman, who was down on his hands and knees grubbing about in the dirt.

"Soon alter dat!" cried Pete. "Find it, Rory!"

Among other accomplishments, Rory had been taught to pick up coins with his mouth, and in obedience to Pete's command he leaped over the side of the car and circled rapidly round with his nose close to the ground.

The policeman stopped his search and gazed at Rory in utter bewilderment as he ran hither and thither.

All of a sudden Rory broke off at a tangent and made straight for the bobby.

The man scrambled to his feet.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "You hab been kneeling on dat sobereign all de time. Gib de gentleman him money, Rory, dere's a good dog, and come along!"

Rory dropped the warm, moist coin into the constable's hand, and jumped back over the side of the tonneau.

"Good-night, gentlemen, and many thanks to you!" shouted the delighted man.

"Good-night, old hoss! Yah, yah, yah! Should like to hear dat man teaching his dog to talk!" exclaimed Pete, as they drove off. "Now we sha'n't be long! All de same, dat bobby was a decent sort ob old hoss!"

Mile after mile followed in quick succession.

"Seems to me," cried Pete, after an hour's run, "we ought to be somewhere near our destination."

"We shall see a signpost presently, I dare say," replied Sam. "For goodness sake don't get lost!"

"Dere's one!" exclaimed Pete at last. "Whoa!"

"You can't read it from here," declared Sam, as they came to a stop.

"Dat's so, Sammy," said Pete, dismounting. "Must get a bit closer," he added, peering up at the weather-beaten wooden arms. "Golly! Should say dis little lot could do wid a coat ob paint. Up we go!"

"Scissor!" gasped Sam, as the rotten old post creaked under Pete's weight as he clambered up. "Why don't you have a lamp off the front? You would save——"

Creak! Crash!

"Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack and Sam, as, with a fearful crash, the post went tottering to the ground, and Pete rolled into the ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha! Which is the way?" inquired Sam, as Pete scrambled out of his resting-place.

"Dere's a silly sort ob question to ask!" muttered that worthy, gazing at the fallen signpost. "Golly! Here's a bit ob information. S'pose we take dis along wid us? Cheltenham!" he cried, as he held the battered slip of wood in the light of one of the head-lights. "Golly! Can't make out de distance. But dat don't matter."

"I don't see what good that is, mate!" cried Jack. "You've got the sign, but how the policeman do you know which way it was pointing? There's four roads here, and, knocking out the way we've come, that leaves us three to choose from. I reckon we'd best take the one on the right, and chance it!"

"Nunno!" murmured Pete, bending over the fallen post. "Dis am where de nose ob de 'tective comes here. Just fit dis little lot togeder like so," he went on, suiting the action to the word. "M'yes! Dat's de side. Now, all we'm got to do am to raise dis little lot to de same d'rection it had before his backbone gabe way, and dere you are!"

After some little difficulty, Pete succeeded in fitting the broken post temporarily together.

"Good!" exclaimed Sam. "That's the road—the one on the left!"

"Where dere's a cleber man dere's a way!" exclaimed Pete, letting the signpost drop. "Now we sha'n't be long. Hang on to dose eyebrows ob yours, Sammy. We'm going to trabel now!"

Pete pulled over the lever, the car gave a jerk, and then stopped.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, jumping out, and running to the front of the car and winding the crank.

In response to his vigorous turning, the engine gave a feeble revolution or so and then stopped.

"Dat's funny!"

"Is it?" growled Sam. "If you ask me, it's just the reverse of being funny. What have you done to the thing?"

"Nothing!" exclaimed Pete. "Can't make dis little lot out at all. Wish dat J.P. was somewhere 'bout. Could send him underneaf to do a bit ob examining!"

"Here, let's have a turn!" exclaimed Sam.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, as Sam wrenched the handle round. "Don't seem to be much music 'bout dis little lot!"

"Rats!" growled Sam. "What have you done to the blessed thing? It was all right just now."

"Something gone wrong wid him infernals, I s'pose," muttered Pete, removing the bonnet and examining the machinery. "Get dat noddle ob yours out ob de light, Jack!"

"There's nothing wrong there!" exclaimed Sam, after they had gone over the various parts.

"Sparkling plug all right, Jack?" cried Pete.

"Yes."

"Well, den," said Pete, "it's de—— Let me see, it's de——"

"Petrol!" yelled Sam, pointing to a dark stain on the road beneath the car.

"Well, I'm blest!" cried Jack.

"Golly! It hab all runned away!" exclaimed Pete. "Fancy dat now!"

"The thumping thing leaks!" cried Sam, pointing to a corner of the tank. "What are we going to do?"

"Dunno!" groaned Pete, sitting down on the frosty roadside. "Seems to me dat we hab eider got to leabe dis car to itself an' walk, or take turns at habing a ride while de oders push it along."

"Yes, I can see you pushing!" exclaimed Sam.

"Eh? Dis child will take first turn at de wheel."

"No, you don't, you beauty!" growled Sam. "You've landed us in this mess, so you'd better think of something."

After some discussion, they came to the decision that there was nothing to be done but to push the thing along until they reached Cheltenham.

Jack and Sam towed in front by means of a rope removed from one of their boxes, while Pete pushed behind.

Things were not so bad at first, and they got along at a fair pace. But after they had covered half a mile Pete got tired of the monotony.

"Pull up, boys!" he bawled, gradually reducing his pressure from behind.

"We'm getting along bery nicely."

Sam grunted something in reply, and trudged along in silence.

"The thumping thing seems to drag above a bit!" he muttered, after a while. "How are you going, Jack?"

"Strong!" exclaimed Jack, the perspiration running down his face. "The blessed thing does pull a bit, though!"

They plodded on again in silence.

"See here!" cried Sam, stopping suddenly. "I've had enough of pulling! I'm going to have a turn at the back for a change. What——"

Sam broke off suddenly, and rushed back. "You beauty!" he growled. "I thought I heard a gentle snore. Here, Jack!"

Together the pair looked over the side of the car. There, comfortably sleeping, lay Pete.

CHAPTER 29.

Mrs. Lacy Looks After Pete.

THE comical side of the question appealed to the comrades' keen sense of humour, and they laughed heartily.

"Wha—— What's de time?" mumbled Pete, opening one eye.

"Golly! De car's stopped!"

"Yes, it has, and it's not going on again till you get out!" replied Sam.

"Look at dat now!" exclaimed Pete. "Just becos' dis child has two-free winks you two turn lazy. Neber saw such a pair as you two for being 'fraid ob a little gentle exercise. Shall hab to show you how to pull dis little lot 'long, s'pose."

"Right!" exclaimed Sam, opening the door of the tonneau. "Come along, Jack! Sit down. Pete's going to do some work."

"Eh?"

"I thought you said you were going to show us how it should be done!"

"M'yes! But theoretically, Sammy. All cleber men work tings out like dat. De same way as dey do wid socialism. Funny ting, dat socialism."

"Look here!" cried Jack. "This is neither the time nor the place to discuss a question of that kind. Get up!"

"What for?" demanded Pete. "Can't do anyfing! Dere's a hole in de tank, an' dere's an end ob de matter. So we must make de best ob a bad job, an' reconcile ourselves to our fate. Eh?"

"Wish you would keep your fate out of my chest!" grumbled Sam, as Pete stretched himself full-length on the back seat. "Here, you silly owl, that's my head! Sit up! Here's a bobby coming."

"Hi, old hoss!" cried Pete, starting up and shouting to a mounted policeman who had ridden up. "Can we borrow dat hoss ob yours? We'm stranded from home, and all our petrol hab runned away!"

"Where do you want to get to?" inquired the constable, scanning the comrades closely.

"Just beyond Cheltenham," cried Sam.

"Do you know where you are now?"

"Not exactly! About ten miles away from Cheltenham, I suppose."

"More like twenty!" said the policeman, grinning. "Can you ride— horseback?"

"Yah, yah, yah! Ask us if we can breeve, old hoss."

"Well, why don't you go to the inn and hire three nags? There's a garage there where you can leave your car for repairs."

"Eh?"

"What?" cried Sam. "Inn? Where?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" rumbled the constable. "Didn't you know? Well, to be

sure! I did think it funny, too, that three gents should be sitting in a motor-car that won't go, an' close by the Wheatsheaf, too!"

"Golly!" cried Pete, wide-awake in an instant. "Yah, yah, yah! Just fancy us free doing a silly ting like dat! Hope dey'm not gone to bed at dat inn. Tanks, old hoss!" He broke off, plunging his hand into his pocket. "Nunno! No tanks! Dis am Christmas-time, an'— Well, dat don't matter! De main ting am to get dose horses. Gee up, Jack and Sammy!"

The three put their backs into it with a will, and in less than five minutes the broken-down car whirled round a sharp bend into the yard facing the inn.

By dint of 'persuasion and gold—considerably more of the latter—Sam managed to hire their mounts.

"Best leabe Rory wid de car," said Pete, while Jack was taking careful notes of their direction. "Can't trust him in dis country. Spec's he would be off after a hare before we hab covered half a mile.

"Can I hab a bowl ob water, old hoss, and some biscuits?" he inquired of a sleepy-eyed ostler.

These requirements were speedily forthcoming, for Pete took the precaution of tipping the man first, and when the car was backed into the shed a bed was made for Rory with a rug.

"See you in de morning," cried Pete. "Don't get rumabaging 'bout after cats. Just behave like a respectable dog, an' go to sleep."

Clad as they were in motor coats, the three made a funny spectacle as they rode out of that yard, but this made little difference to their spirits. They were nearing the end of their journey, and Pete laughed and joked the whole way.

"It can't be far now!" exclaimed Jack, after they had covered about ten miles. "Phew, it's hot! There's the mill! Mrs. Lacey's place is somewhere to the left."

"Tally-oh!" shouted Pete, as he caught the gleam of lights through the bare branches of the trees. "Golly! It's a sort ob baronial mansion!"

Without dismounting from his horse, Jack pulled the old-fashioned bell, and, in obedience to its sonorous clang, a manservant came running to the gate.

"The mistress expects you," he said, as the three rode in.

"Golly! What about de gee-gees?" exclaimed Pete, as he dismounted.

"They'll be all right, sir! We expected you to arrive by train, but there's plenty of stable room. Beg pardon? What—the Wheatsheaf? I know, sir. I'll send 'em over in the morning. Thank'ee, sir!"

"Why, where is Rory?" cried Mrs. Lacey, as they mounted the broad flight of steps leading to the entrance-hall. "He's not—he's not hurt, is he?"

"Nunno, my dear!" replied Pete. "He'm all right! We hab had a most 'strordinary journey."

"Well, I'm so glad you've got here at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey. "Barbara will be delighted."

"Dat so, my dear?" said Pete, shaking hands and looking round.

"Oh, it's no good doing that!" said the little lady, laughing. "She's been in bed hours ago! I can't have my little girl spoiling her health sitting up for an unpunctual man like you. Take those great, heavy coats off, and let's have a chat. Have you been to Brighton since the summer? What have you been doing?"

"Yah, yah, yah!" chuckled Pete, his face beaming with the cordial greeting from their old landlady. "You'm not bery different to what you used to be in de old days."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey. "Don't talk like that! You make me feel quite old!"

"That's about all, then," said Sam, "for, whatever you may feel in that way, your appearance certainly belies you!"

"Quite gallant!" replied Mrs. Lacey, with a mock bow. "Let's sit round the fire for half an hour, and you can tell me all about your adventures. What's the matter, Pete? Oh, I know! How stupid of me? You're hungry!"

Jack and Sam roared with laughter at Pete's comical expression of ill-suppressed joy.

"Did you ever know him to be anything else but ready for a meal?" declared Sam.

"Oh, very well, then!" said Mrs. Lacey, smiling at Pete. "You two are not hungry, I suppose, so Pete and I will have supper together."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dat's one in de peeper for you, Sammy! Yah, yah, yah! Dat's de way, my dear! Dose two hab been leading dis pore child a most drefful time since we left you."

"Oh, well! You won't be hard on them this time, Pete. Come, we'll have supper, and talk afterwards."

"Seems to me dere's already been a lot ob dat, my dear," muttered Pete, as he seated himself at the daintily-laid table.

"What's that you said?" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey.

"Nutting, my dear. Shall I carbe?"

"Yes; do, please!"

It was the first of many happy evenings the comrades spent under that hospitable roof, and they were all as jolly and free as when they lodged in the modest little lodging-house. Supper over, Sam related their experiences during their stay in London.

"What a dreadful person that landlady must have been!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey. "I shouldn't think you'll ever put your trust in Number 13 again. But you—there, you must be tired out! You'd like to go to bed now?"

Bidding their hostess good-night, the three comrades were shown to their rooms by a sedate and well-fed-looking butler, and in less than a quarter of an hour Jack, Sam, and Pete were enjoying the sleep of the weary.

CHAPTER 29.

In the Dead of Night.

"FOOL!" snarled Brunswick, glaring at his companion. "You led me a nice dance round the docks to find you, and now I get you down here you turn chicken-hearted."

Silas Brunswick bent forward and rapped his knuckles on the dirty table between them. "I tell you," he whispered, "I've got it all settled. I know the ground to an inch, and if you're spotted you've only to give that laugh, and they'll think it's that chap Pete playing some joke."

"Golly!" muttered Sambo, shaking his woolly head, that was so like Pete's in outward appearance. "Don't like dis sort ob game at all! Why don't you do it yourself? You'm so certain 'bout de plan ob de place!"

Immediately after overhearing the comrades' conversation in the coffee-house, Silas had gone in search of Sambo.

He argued that since no particular effort had been taken to track the thief at Park Lane that they were fair game, and a chance remark concerning the value of the jewels in the little safe at Mrs. Lacey's house had set his cupidity aflame, and in Sambo he reckoned to find a willing slave.

"Why don't I do it myself?" sneered Brunswick. "Do you suppose I should have brought you all this way if I could have managed it?"

This species of argument appealed, as it was intended it should do, to the cunning but ignorant mind of Sambo, and he raised his head and glanced at Silas quickly. "What's de reason, den?"

"Simple enough, my boy!" exclaimed the little man. "You're strong—I'm weak! You just step in and collar the boodle bodily. You can easily lift the whole bag of tricks—safe and all—carry it round here or to a quiet spot, and we can break it open without fear of interruption. See?"

Brunswick produced a bright steel jemmy and a bunch of skeleton keys.

"What's de plan, den?" muttered Sambo. "Dis' child hab got to carry dat safe away, but what about gettin' in?"

"Easy as pie!"

"Dunno so much 'bout dat," muttered Sambo, who, having had several square meals of late as a reward for his previous robbery, was inclined to be less amenable to Brunswick's reasoning. "S'pose dis child am caught?"

"Rubbish!"

"Dunno."

"Look here," cried Brunswick, "you remember that little affair in Moseley Street—eh? Ha, ha! I thought you would remember. Well, the police are anxious to find the man who did the deed."

Sambo glanced round fearfully, his eyes showing bloodshot with terror.

For an instant Silas's heart thumped against his ribs painfully. Had he raised a fire that he could not quell?

But he controlled his desire to rise from his chair and rush from the room, and gradually the great black hand relaxed its convulsive grip, and Sambo spoke.

"Dis child am ready—ready now!" he repeated.

In that moment Silas realised to the full his power over the black man, and it was with the sneer of conscious power in his voice that, after a long pause, he answered:

"You'll wait till I tell you, Sambo. Our safety depends on choosing the right moment. No!" he added, as Sambo reached for his glass, half full of cheap and fiery spirit. "No more till we're safe back in London with— with what we've come for."

For an hour or more they sat in silence. Each was busy with his own thoughts.

Once or twice Sambo shuffled uneasily, but nothing broke the silence in the dirty little bar-parlour but the subdued hum of occasional conversation between an assembly of village loafers gathered in the public bar.

Brunswick had given themselves out as tramping to London, and as he had paid for their accommodation in advance, they sat there unquestioned.

Perhaps the taciturn, gigantic negro had something to do with this.

At last the sounds of closing hour caused Silas to break his monotonous reverie, and as he leaned forward to knock the ashes from his clay the door opened, and the landlord looked in.

"Going to bed," he said, in a thick voice.

"Right, gov'nor!" answered Brunswick, rising to his feet. "Coming, Sambo?"

With a surly grunt, the landlord left them at the foot of the stairs, and they stumbled noisily up to the room allotted to casuals.

"Another hour yet," muttered Silas, peering at his watch by the flickering light of the guttering candle. "You, Sambo, had better go to sleep. I'll wake you."

Sambo grunted, and flung himself on the rickety bed.

The waiting had quite overcome his natural gaiety, and he was in a dangerous mood.

"It's worth risking," muttered Silas, as he watched his sleeping partner. "There's a fortune there for me once he has done the work!"

An hour, two hours, passed, and Brunswick's face became livid and white with the strain.

"It's about time," he muttered. "Wake up!"

Sambo merely grunted, and rolled over.

"Wake up!" repeated Silas, shaking him violently. "Wake——"

Sambo suddenly sat up, glaring. Silas shrank back, appalled.

"It's all right!" he cried, in a low voice. "Don't make a noise! We must get out of here without waking anyone!"

Sleep cleared from Sambo's eyes, and he grinned as he watched Brunswick tiptoe across the room. Then, as he remembered what his mission was to be, he became glum and morose.

Creak—creak!

Silas cautiously tried the door, but, with a muttered objurgation, abandoned the attempt, and stood silent and bit his nails.

"Out with that candle!" he whispered. "We must try the window." Sambo's black hand crushed the light out, and Silas peered cautiously through the glass. "It's risky," he muttered, "but it's the best. Open the window!"

Sambo, with infinite care, slid back the rusty bolt, and a cold gust of wind fanned their anxious faces.

Brunswick hauled himself up lightly on to the sill and looked below.

"A drop of twelve feet. Ugh!"

"Can easily do dat," muttered Sambo, his eyes gleaming in the dim light. "Dis child go fust an' show."

The time for action had come, and Sambo, if he could not plan, could do things that lay straight before him and only needed courage.

He shouldered Silas out of the way, and despite his bulk, landed on the hard ground with scarce a sound.

"Come 'long!" he whispered, looking up at Brunswick. "You're 'fr— U-ggh!"

Silas detected the ring of contempt in the other's voice, and pushed himself off.

He landed full on the negro's chest. But the latter withstood the shock, and steadied the smaller man as he staggered and nearly fell.

"Why didn't you get out of my way?" whispered Silas, as they crept to

the shadowed side of the house. "Never mind now. Follow me, and keep a sharp look-out!"

From the open space in front of the inn they darted to the wooded side of the road, and silent as shadows covered the half-mile or so from their destination.

So silent indeed was Sambo's progress, that more than once Silas glanced back over his shoulder to see if he was still there.

Silas Brunswick was small and agile, but he had not the natural gift of his black confederate.

"Here we are!" whispered Silas, stopping suddenly and pointing through a gap in the hedge. "I've been all over the ground this afternoon, and it's all plain sailing. Let's have a look at you. Good! You're Pete to the life! Play your cards as I tell you, and we win easy. Now, listen, and while you're listening put these on."

Silas drew from his coat-pocket a pair of goloshes, and Sambo bent down to unlace his heavy boots.

"No noise, no tracks—on this hard ground," muttered Silas. "Now——"

He whispered rapidly in Sambo's ear, and as he talked, Sambo emphasised each point with a grunt.

The plan was simplicity itself, and was daring enough to meet with success; and, further, it had the pleasing side to Brunswick that he took no active part in it. It was a case of the cat, the monkey, and the chestnuts.

"Understand?"

"Yes," muttered Sambo. "You gib de whistle if somebody comes while dis child am climbing de ivy."

"Of course!" whispered Silas. "Now, here's the wire rope. You'll find a noose fixed at the end of it. Adjust it carefully. It's a running noose, and, having been on ships, you ought to be able to manage that all right. Lower away gently, and then I'll show you how to get the thing open, and then for the sparklers!"

Sambo wound the thin coil of steel wire round his waist, and, worming his way through the hedge, flitted across to the corner of the house he had to climb.

Silas had learnt the position of the coveted safe by the crude but effective method of pumping an under-gardener who had during the afternoon called at the inn, and all that was now needed was a bit of luck.

"He's half-way up!" he murmured presently, gnawing his nails. "Ah! Good luck! They must have forgotten to push the bolt. He's in!"

CHAPTER 31.

Pete's Pardon.

"G-R-R-OACH!"

Pete's bed-room was immediately over that which constituted the dressing-room, in a corner of which stood the small safe Mrs.

Lacey kept the family jewels in, and to this fact is due the strange cause that brought an uncalculated, unexpected actor on the scene in progress in that dressing-room.

It happened that at the moment Silas uttered his ejaculation of triumph

that Sambo stole silently into the room, his foot caught in a loose tendril of ivy that had its only means of attachment to the wall by clinging to the plaster in the arch of the window above.

Quite unaware that anything untoward had taken place, Sambo shook his foot gently free and swiftly set to work.

But that gentle shake had, as it were, caused the pendulum of chance to swing round. A tiny fragment of mortar dropped on to the top of the open sash, balanced there for a fraction of a second, and then fell inside the room with a faint tinkle on to the looking-glass.

"Groo— Golly! What was dat?"

A sound, even, as we know, a profound sleeper under all ordinary circumstances, Pete was not proof against that peculiar, unusual noise.

He struck a match, and looked round with blinking eyes.

In the room below Sambo adjusted the wire rope. He felt secure. In the open, from the clump of trees facing the two windows, Silas watched, and saw the glimmer of light. But no signal did he give. His accomplice in crime should carry the whole burden without one single advantage.

Silas drew back a little. His throat grew tight with the mere thought of danger, and his tongue curled round his thin, dry lips.

"Ah!"

The light had gone out!

Silas shrank back still further. Then his eyes, glued to the window whence had shone that fugitive glimmer of light, caught the faint outline of a head and shoulders.

The shelter of those trees knew Silas no more, and only the crackle of twigs betrayed his base retreat.

And so Brunswick, mean, contemptible rogue, passes out of our story. We need follow him no further, nor fear that he escape his due, for, as there is a Providence that watches over the just man, so there is a fate that ever inevitably awaits the evildoer.

The tiny piece of mortar had fulfilled its mission.

Pete had seen it laying on his dressing-table, and its presence there demanded explanation.

"Funny ting, dat!" he murmured. "Somebody frowing stones!"

This conclusion was not a satisfactory one, and, seizing the heavy dressing-table, Pete lifted it aside and raised the lower sash.

He looked down and out.

"Nobody dere!" he muttered. "Specs— Golly!"

A faint scraping sound had caught his ear, and, with keen scrutiny, his eyes travelled over the garden below to a perpendicular point of view.

Suddenly a dark mass projected from the wall below.

Pete popped his head in on the instant. "Golly!" he muttered again, grabbing his clothes. "Dere's someting fishy 'bout dis little lot! Must see into dis! Can't get at dat room, dough," he mused. "Should hab to wake de little lady. Nunno! Dat won't do. Might be a false alarm. No harm in 'vestigating."

With incredible swiftness, Pete stripped the sheets from his bed and knotted them together.

While doing so, he took an occasional survey from his window. But all was quiet. No sound; no movement.

"Tink dis should do de trick," he murmured, passing his improvised rope rapidly through his hands and testing each knot. "No need to break dis valuable neck. Now, den, just lower dis little lot like so, and tie de oder end to de bedpost. M'yes! Dat'll do bery nicely."

The distance between the bottom of Pete's bed-room window and the one below was not far, and the knotted sheets swung clear of the lower window.

"Can reach de sill wid my feet," muttered Pete. "No need to tell whoeber it is dat I'm coming. Golly! Dis am de trapeze act widout de net," he added to himself, as he grasped the sheets and swung off.

Beyond a faint creak as the linen stretched under the strain, he slid silently down. Down till his feet, legs, body passed the top of the window, and then, as his hand reached the extremity of the rope, his stockinged feet touched the sill.

If Sambo had had his face turned to the window as Pete landed, one cannot—dare not—conjecture what would have occurred.

No thought of danger had crossed Pete's mind until he reached the window-sill. Then he realised that he could have been flung to earth like a faggot of wood.

As he peered into the room he could see nothing, but he heard! First the sound of heavy breathing, then a low grunt as of a man lifting a heavy weight.

Pete sat on the edge of the window, with his legs dangling inwards, and as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he saw before him a screen. Then he saw lying on the floor a length of wire.

With infinite caution he slipped to the ground, and crouched down close to the wall.

The wire lying on the floor quivered and shook.

A cautious tread drew nearer; the sound of heavy breathing grew louder.

Sambo now stood so close to Pete that he bent right over him as he gently lowered the small but fearfully heavy mass of iron to the window-sill.

Relieved of his burden, he drew himself erect, and—a strangled gasp broke from his mouth. His eyes glowed with terror.

As he had risen so had Pete, and before the sigh of relief had left Sambo's mouth it was checked.

"Not a word!" hissed Pete.

As the terror of the unexpected shock passed away, Pete felt his antagonist's muscles tauten.

"Nunno!" growled Pete beneath his breath. "Dat won't come off wid dis child. Must see if dis double can stand a bit ob pressure."

Sambo struggled—or, rather, tried to struggle—but it was useless. Pete had him fairly pinned.

"De worst ob it am," he muttered, "I hab caught de burglar, but don't know what to do wid him. Must get him out ob dis widout kicking up a fuss. Dere's no sense in doing dat now de safe am safe Golly! Dis am a repetition ob de Park Lane business, 'cept dat dere's de double doubled. See here, you double," he went on, "I am going to let you hab a bref ob fresh air, but you'm got to keep your mouf shut."

It was some seconds before Sambo could get his breath, and his broad chest heaved spasmodically.

“Answer dese questions quick and short,” whispered Pete. “How did you get in dis house?”

“Climbed de iby.”

“M’yes! What for?”

“De safe.”

“Am you alone?”

“Nunno!”

“Golly! Who else?”

“Brunswick—Silas.”

“H’m! Where am he?”

“Outside.”

“Where?”

“Ober dere, waiting in de shadow ob de trees.”

“Sure, old hoss?”

“Yes, unless he’s sloped.”

“Which am more dan likely,” observed Pete. “Now, why did you come here to steal?”

“No money,” muttered Sambo.

“H’m! What ’bout dose bags dat you got away wid at Park Lane?”

“Silas had de lot.”

“All ob it?”

“’Cept two-free pounds.”

“Got any money now?”

“Ninepence.”

“Dat all?”

“Yes.”

Pete gazed at his double in silence.

“S’pose you’m speaking de troof, old hoss? But you’m a bit ob a fool. Why do you allow dat chap Silas to collar all de money, and why do you take all de risk?”

“Him got a hold on dis child.”

“What’s dat?”

“Freatens to gib me away to de police.”

“What for?”

“’Cos dere was a bit ob a scrimmage, and somebody got hurt, and—

and——”

“M’yes?”

“De police want to fix de blame on to dis child.”

“S’pose you’m responsible?”

“Dunno,” muttered Sambo. “Dis child hit seberal, and Silas said he would hab me locked up.”

The honesty of this reply to the climax of his cross-examination pleased Pete. It was clear to him that the man he had captured was more fool than rogue.

“You’m a black man wid a speckled heart, old hoss. Now, see here,” he went on, “you’m to follow dis child down to de ground, and den you’m going to hab a frashing, and den you hab got to leabe de country!”

“Habn’t got any money!” muttered Sambo.

“Neber you mind ’bout de money till you hab earned it or digged it

out ob de earth," replied Pete calmly, releasing his hold, and dropping the steel wire attached to the safe out of the window. "Come 'long!"

Sambo obeyed, and when he touched ground he pointed out to Pete the spot where Silas had stood. Needless to say, they did not find him.

"H'm! Gone!" observed Pete. "How 'bout dat frashing? Golly! Don't hold your fists in dat silly fashion, 'cos you'll get knocked down eb'ry time."

"Don't care if I do," muttered Sambo. "Seems to me dat it don't matter much one way or de oder. Dis child am not going to fight."

"Golly!" gasped Pete. "You'm not 'fraid?"

"Nunno!"

There was a sadness in Sambo's voice that spoke of better things.

"Strikes me, old hoss," declared Pete, "dat circumstances hab got a grip ober you dat you hab got to break. Now, den, let's hab a little talk. Since you won't take de frashing, you shall take dis!" Pete pressed a crinkly piece of paper into Sambo's hand. "And to-morrow morning," he continued, "you will take de first train to de docks, and go back to your home. Try and lead such a life dat you won't feel 'shamed to put up your fists and fight. 'Nuff said!"

Pete extended his hand, and the two that Fate had thrown so strangely together gripped in silence, and without a word Sambo walked away.

Pete may be blamed for allowing a thief—at least, in intention, if not in act—to escape; nay, even help him to do so. But Pete is Pete, and he has his own way of doing things.

As soon as Sam had disappeared, Pete clambered up the ivy again, and pulled in the wire rope.

"Must take dis little lot wid me," he muttered. "Wonder where dis ting stood?"

A match silently flared up, and it did not take long to discover the exact spot occupied, previous to its removal, by the safe, still resting on the window-sill.

It was the work of a moment to replace it as it had been before.

"H'm! Dis am a bit stiff," muttered Pete, as he stood outside the window again. "Shall hab to put a bit ob beef into dis little lot."

However, difficult as was the task, he hauled himself up steadily hand over hand, and reaching his bed-room, pulled in the sheets.

"M'yes! Dis will want a bit ob 'splaining," he muttered, as he undid his knots and endeavoured to smooth out the wrinkles. "Can't help it, dough. Can't iron dem out, so shall hab to chance it. Hope dat chap will get on all right," he murmured, as he made himself as comfortable as possible and closed his eyes. "Golly! Dis has been a day ob 'sprises!"

CHAPTER 32.

Rory Causes a Disturbance. :

BANG, bang, bang!

Pete turned over.

"What am dat?" he muttered. "Anoder burglar?"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Hallo!" he bawled, sitting up in bed. "Who's dat?"

"Me!"

"Golly!" muttered Pete. "Dat's a funny sort ob name. Who's 'me'?"

"Me—Barbara!"

"Oh, golly!" shouted Pete, in affected surprise. "Just fancy dat now! I neber recognised de voice."

A ripple of childish laughter came from without his door.

"Oh, Pete, how can you? I want to thank you for your lovely present."

"Golly!" muttered Pete. "Bery silly ob dose shop-people to send dat doll's house off before de time. Shall hab to talk to de manager 'bout dat little lot. Can't 'spec' dat little girls can behabe demselves if dey get deir Christmas presents before de time. Boo—r-r-r! Sha'n't be long, my dear!"

In about five minutes Pete had completed his morning toilet, and he descended to the breakfast-room.

So far as happiness and merriment were concerned, the morning meal was simply a repetition of the one the night before, except that it was possibly somewhat more rollicking, for Barbara insisted on feeding Pete with scraps of bread-and-jam.

"Tink dat am about de last, my dear," he protested. "S'pose we take a walk to de Wheatsheaf an' fetch Rory an' dat motor-car along?"

"Where's the Wheatsheaf?" exclaimed Barbara.

"Golly! 'Fraid I can't tell you dat, my dear, 'cept dat it am two-free miles from dis house. Still," he added, as the number of miles brought a shade of disappointment to the child's face, "Spec's dat if we run all de way we can do it in two-free minutes."

"Gracious!" cried Mrs. Lacey. "Surely you haven't forgotten what a long time it took you to get here last night? I'll order the pony and trap for you."

"Dat's a bery good idea, my dear!" cried Pete. "Shall be able to hitch de pony on to de car if dey habn't mended it yet."

"Sorry for that pony!" muttered Sam, as Pete walked out of the room, with Barbara hanging on to his arm. "I reckon that he'd have a mighty rough time of it if he had to drag that leaky thing along!"

However, as it happened, the necessity for bringing that motor home by any but its own power did not arise, for when Pete and his little companion drove up they found that the tank of the car had been repaired, and was ready to start.

"S'pose we put de pony in de car?" suggested Pete. "Yah, yah, yah! Dat makes you laugh, don't it?"

Even the sour-visaged man-of-all-work attached to the Wheatsheaf allowed a grim smile to involuntarily play about the corners of his mouth.

Greatly to Barbara's delight, Pete, with his usual desire to bring about the greatest pleasure for the one, regardless of his own particular desires, so contrived affairs that Barbara's unexpressed wish was fulfilled, and the sturdy little pony was relegated to the care of one of the boys to bring along afterwards.

"Spec's dat you would like a run—eh, Rory?" cried Pete. "'Sides; it am not good for dogs ob your breed to be molly-coddled. Eh?"

"What's molly-coddle?" inquired Barbara, as Pete gave a warning toot with his horn.

"Eh?"

"What's molly-coddle mean?"

Pete was puzzled to explain, but he put on a learned air.

"Molly am a girl's name, my dear, an' coddle means to wrap up in something warm—cotton-wool, f'instance. What am you larfing at?"

"Fancy wrapping Rory up in cotton-wool!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, seizing the opportunity to escape from a more detailed explanation. "Don't 'spect dat dog would be best pleased. Golly! Hi! Come here!"

As luck would have it, a hare darted across the road, and at the risk of his life Rory flashed by in front of the car and crashed through the hedge after his prey.

A hare was a hare to Rory, and he had no recognition of the Game Preserve laws. But somebody else had, and an angry voice bellowed forth as Pete jammed on his brakes and brought the motor to a standstill.

"Call that dog of yours off!"

Barbara shrank back as a very excited-looking man rode up.

"M'yes, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, gazing at the man. "It's a bery fine ting to say 'Call dat dog ob yours off,' but it am easier said dan done, considering dat he'm 'bout two-free hundred yards off by dis time."

"That don't matter!"

"Sorry, old hoss, but it do matter! Dat simple little fact makes all de difference."

Pete gazed calmly up at the horseman alongside the motor-car, and his gaze said very plainly what he thought. But the ignorant are foolish, and the man took Pete for something quite different to what he was.

"I'll have that dog killed!" he roared.

"M'yes!" muttered Pete. "P'r'aps you will. But how'm you going to get on after de killing part?"

"Don't talk like that!" cried the man, spurring his horse.

"Golly! Don't gib way to your crossness on de gee-gee!" exclaimed Pete. "Dat's a bery poor sort ob argument. S'pose we talk de matter ober."

Under different circumstances Pete would have driven on; but there were two reasons why he did not. First, that the head gamekeeper—for such he appeared to be—had planted his mount right across the front of the car; and, secondly, it was extremely probable that Rory would come back to the same spot after his chase.

This latter would never do, as the angry man on horseback looked capable of carrying out his threat in some way or another.

"Who are you, anyway?" roared the gamekeeper.

"Nobody bery particular, old hoss!" replied Pete. "Just taking a little drible, dat's all."

"Well, why don't you keep your dog off private property?"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dat's a funny sort ob remark. Golly! why don't you keep dose hares ob yours in deir proper place? Dey hab no business in de road!"

"What!" roared the man. "You dare to talk to me in that fashion!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Don't tink dere's any desire for fashion in de matter. It's simply dat when dere's a hare an' a dog dere's bound to be a chase. An' if I were you, old hoss, I should go an' chase de pair ob dem!"

The gamekeeper made a motion as if to bring his riding-crop down on Pete's face.

"Golly!" muttered Pete, as the whip whistled through the air. "Am you 'tall frightened, my dear?" he added, turning to Barbara. "Cos——"

"He's a wicked, naughty man!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes big with childish surprise and anger. "How dared he to strike you?"

"He didn't, my dear," murmured Pete. "Just you stop dere, an' look at de trees an' tings. Golly!" he went on, as Rory came frisking up, having found the hare too much for him. "In you get! Be——"

Pete never completed his sentence, for as he spoke the gamekeeper dismounted from his horse and made a savage attempt to kick Rory.

In the wink of an eye, Pete was out of that car, and had seized his man by the collar.

"You silly old hoss!" he cried, smiling at Barbara, who was looking rather frightened. "You must learn manners. See!"

He shook the burly man till his teeth fairly rattled.

"Dat's for being a bit ob a fool!" he muttered; "an' dis am for trying to be a brute!"

A kick followed the conclusion of Pete's remark, and the man went floundering into the hedge.

"Oh, don't hurt him!" cried Barbara.

"Nunno, my dear!" replied Pete. "Dis am only a little bit ob fun, just to see who'm in de right an' who'm in de—— Golly! Here's your mudder!"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey, who just arrived on the scene in time to see the final act. "What ever's the matter?"

"Just a little difference ob opinion, dat's all!" exclaimed Pete. "What's de matter wid you?" he added, turning round. "Golly! Dat man seems bery unpleased 'bout someting!"

The gamekeeper, who had recovered from his shock, strode up to Pete with uplifted arm.

"I'll teach you to speak to my——"

"Mitchell, I'm surprised at you!" interrupted Mrs. Lacey. "This is one of my guests! What is all the fuss about?"

Pete explained the matter.

"Yes, mother. He couldn't help it!" cried Barbara. "Rory ran after the hare, and that man tried to whip Pete!"

Mrs. Lacey smiled at her little daughter's indignation.

"Am he your gamekeeper?" muttered Pete.

"Yes. I only engaged him a week ago."

"Golly! Dat's a pity. Wish dat dis hadn't occurred."

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" replied the little lady. "He should know better than to take such an attitude over a pure accident. I'll have a talk to him after you're gone on."

"Golly!" whispered Pete. "You'm not going to gib him de sack?"

"No," replied Mrs. Lacey, with a smile. "You drive on. That'll be all right. He's new to his duties."

It may be that not the least pleasant of Pete's experiences that are stored away in his memory is of that drive home he took with his little companion. And if he expressed his pleasure by creating an inordinate amount of noise with his hooter as they swept up to the door of Barbara's home, it will also be counted to his credit that his boisterousness was quite in keeping with the spirit of the child.

CHAPTER 33.

J. P. Makes Himself a Nuisance.

"LOOK at de snow!" exclaimed Pete, the afternoon of the same day. "Golly, it's a good job we got dat motor-car here before dis little lot came down!"

"Isn't it lovely?" cried Barbara, standing on tip-toe and gazing over the white landscape. "Oh, you must make a snow-man!"

"Dunno 'bout dat, my dear," muttered Pete. "'Specs your mudder will say snow. Yah, yah, yah! Dat's a pun, Jack."

"Ice see," exclaimed Jack, strolling over to the window. "Scissors, it's coming down and no mistake!"

"M'yes, Sam! Snow, you snow, hab de habit ob falling."

"What are you talking about? I'm going to find mother," cried Barbara, skipping out of the room.

"Come 'long, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "We'll start de building operations while she'm gone to try and convince dat mudder ob hers dat snow don't melt and gib little girls colds."

A few minutes later the three comrades strolled out of the house.

There had been a fairly heavy fall, and the few scattered flakes that came softly down betokened the end of the storm.

"Golly!" cried Pete, scooping up a handful of snow. "Dis little lot am mighty cold. Feel, Sammy! Yah, yah, yah!"

Pete dropped a generous portion down Sam's neck.

"Woo-oo! G-r-r-r!"

"Yah, yah, yah! De man am trying to stand on him noddle!"

"You silly owl!" growled Sam, scooping out the fast-melting snow from his collar-band. "Ho, ho! Good shot, Jack!"

Pete had opened his mouth to laugh at Sam, but retribution came from an unsuspected quarter, and a particularly fine snowball launched from Jack's hand filled his capacious mouth.

"Walah!" yelled Pete, clapping his hand to his jaw and swallowing a good lump of the semi-frozen mass. "Somebody's got to hab dis little lot back! Woohah! Golly! Dat's not fair!"

Another missile, this time from Sam, lodged behind his ear and turned his woolly pate white.

"Oh, isn't it?" yelled Sam, rapidly kneading a supply of ammunition. "Come on, Jack! We'll give this beauty what-for! How's that? Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack and Sam had got a fair start and they kept it.

For some time the battle raged in silence. Jack and Sam pelted their chum for all they were worth.

"We mustn't give him a chance," growled Sam, "or the beggar'll be all over us. Look out!"

Finding it impossible to get a chance to make a sufficient supply of snowballs, Pete came charging down on them. Jack promptly dropped to his hands and knees, and Pete floundered over his prostrate form into some snow-laden bushes.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Sam. "That's one for his nob! Ho, ho, ho! Scissors; we'll have to do a quiet grease!"

"No, no!" cried Jack. "Here's somebody to protect us."

"Artful beggar!" muttered Sam, as Barbara came running out of the house, and Jack promptly took her hand. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come over dis side wid me," cried Pete, as he scrambled out of the bushes, and shook the snow off. "Am going to pelt dose two 'till dey beg pardon. Come 'long!"

"No, I won't!" exclaimed Barbara. "You promised to build me a snow-man—you know you did."

"So I did," muttered Pete; "but dose two hab been knocking dis child about. Don't tink dat I can build dat snow-man dis afternoon. Shall hab to tink dis ober," he continued, shaking his head.

"Oh, do, Pete!" exclaimed the little girl. "I shall be very cross with you if—"

"Boo-oo!" howled Pete, sitintg down in the snow and pretending to cry. "Boo-oo!"

Barbara began to look rather alarmed.

"We'll soon stop that," cried Sam, gathering up some snow. "Let's all pelt him!"

"Nunno! Dis child hab had 'nuff, ob dat sort ob game," yelled Pete. "Bring some snow 'long, and we'll make dat snow-man."

Peace was declared, and they all set to work.

Barbara danced round with delight as the figure grew in size.

"I must fetch mother," she cried, scampering off. "Don't let him melt away!"

"Specs we shall hab to keep breaving on him to keep him temperature down den," muttered Pete, stealthily making a good hard ball of snow. "Take dat, Sammy!"

But Sam was not to be caught napping, and he promptly ducked as the snowball came whizzing at his head.

Splosh!

That ball had been delivered with considerable force, and although it missed its intended victim it found another.

Unnoticed by the comrades a man had been walking towards the house, but they were speedily made aware of his proximity when Pete's missile caught him on the nose.

"Scissors!" gasped Sam.

"Bery sorry, old hoss!" shouted Pete, as the stranger approached wiping his face with his handkerchief. "Bery sorry. You see dat—Golly! It's dat funny chap, J.P."

"What do you mean by assaulting me in this fashion?" howled the angry man, glaring at Pete's smiling face.

"Neber meant to do dat in any sort ob a fashion," replied Pete. "S'pose we hab a duel to settle de difference ob opinion—eh?"

"Pah!" sneered J. P. "I don't fight duels with people like you. I should like to know what you're doing here?"

"Would you, old hoss? What for?"

"I shall warn Mrs. Lacey about you!" shouted Burton. "I'm surprised that she allows such vagabonds as you to enter her grounds."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "What a funny old hoss you am. What do you tink 'bout it, Jack and Sammy?"

"The man's mad," replied Sam—"stark, staring mad! Absolutely!"

"Dunno 'bout dat, Sammy!" exclaimed Pete, putting his head on one side and surveying J. P. critically. "Should say dat you in wrong dere. Don't tink him more dan say—a little bit off de top!"

"I'll—I'll have you locked up!" spluttered J. P.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dat's what you said last night, when you made dis child remobe you. Dat's what you said when we carried off your bobby. P'ra'ps your words will come true some day in de sweet hy-and-by. Dere's no telling what may happen when a silly old hoss like you keeps on repeating a nastursion. You remind me ob anoder stupid old hoss we came across long time ago. Still, dat don't

matter. Best get on wid de locking-up part. Run away now and get de prison and two-free hundred bobbies. We'm busy."

"Overgrown kids!" growled J. P. strutting away.

"Yah, yah, yah!" cried Pete. "Dere's some old hosses fancy demselves mighty big dat ought to be tied to dere mudder's apron strings. Run away an' buy some sweets. Golly, he'm going up to de house!"

"Let him!" growled Sam. "The fellow sickens me. Don't take any notice of him."

"Look here," cried J. P., turning and retracing his steps, "I've had enough of your impertinence. What do you mean by it? What do you mean by it?"

"Come 'long, boys!" shouted Pete, taking Sam's advice, and ignoring the infuriated man. "De old snow-hoss's nose am melting away. Must repair de rabages ob time."

Burton shouted and raved, but the three took not the least bit of notice of him, and at last he marched off again.

CHAPTER 34.

J. P. is Carried Out—Hide and Seek—A Terrible Shock.

"SEE here!" exclaimed Sam, after they had completed the snow-man to their own satisfaction. "I'm going to see what Barbara's up to! She's a mighty long time!"

"Bery well, den," agreed Pete, stamping the snow off his boots. "Specs we shall run up 'gainst dat funny old J. Pagani, but can't help dat I s'pose."

"Reckon I can hear him," growled Sam, as they entered the hall and stood scraping the snow off their boots. "Scissors! What's he up to? Hallo, here's Barbara! What's the matter?"

"Golly, she's crying!" whispered Pete. "Has dat man been saying anything cross to you, my dear?"

"N-o-o—no!" whispered Barbara. "But I'm so frightened. He's in the library with mother, and he shut the door in my face."

"H'm!" muttered Pete. "What do you two tink 'bout dis little lot? 'Pears to me that we've no right to interfere in dis matter."

Jack and Sam looked perplexed.

"I don't know, I'm sure," murmured the latter. "Judging by the noise he is making, though, I reckon he's not speaking to a lady exactly as he should do."

"Can't expect de impossible," exclaimed Pete. "Don't you be frightened, my dear," he added, patting the little girl's curly head. "We free will see what a little diplomatics will do."

Pete carried out his idea of diplomacy by marching straight into the library.

"Golly, my dear!" he cried, looking straight past J. P. "We'm waiting for you to see dat old snow-man."

Mrs. Lacey, who was seated at her desk with some legal-looking documents in front of her, smiled faintly.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, "but I have some business to settle first. Sit down. I'll join you in a few moments."

"Really, Mrs. Lacey," snorted Burton J. P., planting himself in the middle of the room, with his feet wide apart, "I protest against the intrusion of this person here and his two—er—companions. You don't know them as I do, or——"

"Really, Mr. Burton," said Mrs. Lacey sweetly. "You must pardon me if I fail to agree with you. I think the choice remains with me, since this happens to be my house. As for your last assertion, I beg to inform you that these three gentlemen are very well known to me, and, indeed, I find that they improve on acquaintance. Shall we conclude our business?"

"No!" roared J.P. "I absolutely refuse to discuss my private affairs before strangers! I shall go to law about the matter!"

A troubled expression came over Mrs. Lacey's face.

"Dat's a treat!" murmured Pete. "What's de ugly man mean by it? Shall I frow him out, Sammy?"

"S-s-sh!" whispered Sam. "Wait a bit. Let's see how we stand. Can I be of any assistance to you?" he added aloud, addressing Mrs. Lacey.

Burton made a stride forward as Mrs. Lacey handed Sam a large sheet of parchment. "I—I want to come to some amicable arrangement," she said nervously. "You see, we have some slight difference of opinion concerning one of the boundary fences dividing my land from this gentleman's, and—well, I don't want to have all the worry and the expense of going to law."

"I shall fight the matter out!" declared J.P., staring savagely at Sam's calm face.

"Better do dat outside, den, old hoss," suggested Pete.

Burton looked all his vile temper prompted him to say.

"Can you understand the position, Sam?" inquired Mrs. Lacey, after a short silence.

"Well," said Sam slowly, "if I were you I should very politely but firmly tell this—this man"—Sam could not bring himself to say gentleman—"to do his worst or his best. Your position is quite clear in the matter, and all action must come from the other party."

"You really think so?"

"I'm sure!"

Mrs. Lacey sighed with relief.

"Barbara," she said, "ring the bell, will you, please? Good-afternoon, Mr. Burton!"

J.P. glared at the comrades defiantly.

"I won't go!" he shouted. "I re—"

The rest of what he had to say was never uttered, for Pete clapped his black paw over the man's mouth, and seizing him with the other hand by the scruff of his neck, he lifted him from the ground as if he had been a rabbit and carried him, kicking and struggling, out of the library, past the astonished butler and out of the front door.

"'Nuff said! Quick, march!"

J.P., purple and practically speechless, went.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey, when Pete returned from his little expedition. "You don't waste words!"

"Nunno, my dear!" replied Pete. "Dat's de sort ob animal dat only understands de force ob force. Argument am lost. Now for dat snow-man. You can see de gentleman from de door. Come 'long!"

They all followed Pete.

"Scissors!" gasped Sam, when they stood on the steps. "It's gone!"

"M'yes!" muttered Pete, the smile vanishing from his face. "Somebody's broken him up. Golly! Must fetch dat man back."

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey, guessing whom he referred to. "It's not worth it."

"What a mean, low-down trick!" growled Sam. "Still, as you say, we'll let it go at that. It's no good, Pete. You know very well what a cur he is."

"I shall give orders that he's never to be admitted here again!" declared Mrs. Lacey. "What a horrid creature!"

"Sort ob creepy-crawly ting wid a voice ob a human," murmured Pete. "Come 'long, my dear, we'll hab a game at someting else. Build dat pore old hoss ob a snow-man up again to-morrow. Let's hab a game at hide-and-seek. Eh? Tought so. Funny how I gussed right first time. You hide first."

Nothing loth, Barbara darted off and up the broad oaken staircase.

"Yah, yah, yah!" chuckled Pete, as he watched the little figure disappear. "Shall hab a job to find dat little lady. She'm not much bigger dan a fair-sized mouse."

"Co-o—e-e!"

"S'pose dat's de signal dat all am ready?"

"Yes," laughed Mrs. Lacey. "You've let yourself in for a fine time! This place is like a rabbit-warren for nooks and corners, and Barbara knows them all."

"We'll hab a go, at any rate, my dear. If we free can't run de mouse to earth, shall hab to put Rory on her track."

"All right, I'll leave you to it. I expect she's made for the picture-gallery."

"Now, den!" cried Pete, as he ran upstairs. "Dat's not playing de game, you know, gibing your own daughter away like dat. Golly! Dis am a funny sort ob place! Hallo, dere!"

"You don't expect her to give herself away, do you?" exclaimed Sam; and he and Jack, entering into the spirit of the fun, searched high and low. "The little monkey came in here, right enough," he added. "See, there's the marks of her feet!"

For the next five or ten minutes the three spent their time in feeling behind curtains and poking here and there.

"Co-o—e-e!" cried Pete.

"That's mighty funny!" muttered Jack. "Where can she have got to?"

"Dunno," replied Pete, gazing up and down the long room.

"See here," cried Sam, "I don't half like this! Why, we've been searching over a quarter of an hour! Surely she wouldn't climb out of the window?"

"No fear of that," replied Jack. "Besides, it's too high up for her to reach."

"Well, one more look, and then I'm going to find her mother," declared Sam. "Out of the way! Let's see if we can follow those tracks of hers."

From the entrance on the landing, Sam traced the faint impression of the girl's footsteps half the length of the gallery; then, after some difficulty, he followed the trail to a small alcove.

"This is mighty funny!" he muttered. "See those tracks?"

"M'yes!" exclaimed Pete, peering closely at the floor. "Dey come dis way, an—an—"

"Stop!" cried Jack.

The three gazed at one another in dismay. The room seemed strangely silent, and they involuntarily lowered their voices.

"Don't want to frighten dat little lady," muttered Pete. "Golly! Wish I hadn't tought ob dis silly game! Hi! Golly! What's all dis?"

Pete had been leaning against the oak-panelled wall of the little alcove, and to the amazement of Jack and Sam he suddenly staggered backwards. The wall had apparently given way. As he felt himself going, Pete flung out his arm, and Sam seized it.

"Scissors!" he gasped, his tanned face going pale. "This accounts

for the disappearance of those tracks: Good Heavens! Where does this lead to?"

Jack struck a match, and the three gazed anxiously through the opening in the wall.

"A secret panel," muttered Sam. "Let's have that light."

"Out of the way, Sammy," murmured Pete, in a strange, husky voice. "I can see her. Dere am no passage. She hab fallen. Tank goodness it am not bery deep!"

Pete lay full-length on the floor and stretched his arms down the hole. His fingers touched something, and his heart bounded with joy as he felt a faint movement.

The next instant he rose to his feet. A little form, dusky and still, lay in his arms and a little white face lay upturned to his.

"Heavens!" groaned Sam. "Is she—is she——"

"Nunno!" said Pete softly. "Get some water. Frightened, dat's all. Don't tink she'm hurt. Mustn't let her mudder see. Quick!"

With swift yet silent tread Jack flew to his room, and returned with a glass of water.

With trembling, yet with hands tender and gentle as a woman's, Pete dabbed the water on the little white forehead.

Jack and Sam watched with strained glance.

"Hooroo!" whispered Pete. "She's coming to!"

"How funny!" cried Barbara, sitting up and looking around with wide-opened eyes. "I was hiding and——"

"Dat's all right, my dear," cried Pete. "You fell frough a nasty hole in de wall. Let's go down. Feel better? Shall I carry you?"

"No; let's go on——"

"Nunno, my dear. You'm coming to your mudder now."

"Why, what's the matter with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey, as she met them in the hall. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost, Sam and—— Why, where have you been, Barbara? Just look at your clothes!"

Pete explained what had occurred in such a way that Mrs. Lacey showed none of the terrible alarm they themselves had felt, but it is perhaps needless to add that that moving panel moves no longer, for Pete screwed it up that same day.

"Specs dat you won't open dat ugly mouf ob yours and swallow little girls any more," he growled, as he gave his screwdriver a final twist.

The next few days passed in one continued round of merry-making. Plum-puddings had to be stirred, holly to be hung; and as the day, which is more than any other ticked off with memories of man's years, approached, Pete grew more irrepressible than ever.

At last the day itself—Christmas Day—dawned, and from breakfast to eventide whole-hearted fun held sway.

In the evening from the neighbouring country houses came parties of twos and threes, and when they all assembled in the great drawing-room, Pete, at first the object of polite curiosity, became the centre of attraction.

None there could guess from his smiling, jolly face that it could set in lines of grim determination; and it was not until long after, when they were seated round the familiar camp-fire, that Jack and Sam were told of Silas Brunswick's attempted burglary.

Laughter sprang from every mouth and eyes brightened with pleasure when Rory was brought in and did his tricks.

Before supper, during supper, and after supper the place rang with joyous sounds of merriment.

Jack and Sam contributed their share to the general fund of entertain-

ment, and many were the suggestions that it was time they settled down.

"Nunno, my dear!" observed Pete to a stately dowager. "Nunno! Dat sort ob life am all bery fine for dose dat are born to it, but we free hab roamed de world over, and 'spec's we shall continue to do so to de end ob de chapter."

At last the crowd thinned; party after party departed; merry voices grew distant and finally died away.

"This has indeed been a happy Christmas!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacey, as they stood in the deserted room. "And I hope that wherever, to what far regions, your wanderings may lead you, you will return here again and again."

As Jack, Sam, and Pete passed down the long corridor they heard Barbara's voice: ". . . and take care of Jack, Sam, and Pete, and Rory, and make me a dear girl."

"Good-night!" whispered Sam.

And now, for a time, we take leave of the three comrades. Of their further adventures there is still much to be told. And, with the hope that you reciprocate the feeling, it shall be, not "Good-bye," but "Au revoir!"

THE END.

(Long complete tales of Jack, Sam, and Pete appear every week in The "MARVEL," price 1d., and readers of this book are invited to send criticisms of "Pete's Christmas" to the Editor. All letters should be addressed "Editor, 'MARVEL,' 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.")

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