

NEW AND ORIGINAL NOVEL OF JACK, SAM & PETE, By S. CLARKE HOOK.

# PETE, MONEY-LENDER



# 3<sup>d</sup>

No. 76.—"THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY.



**SOUND, HEALTHY READING FOR  
OLD AND YOUNG.**

---

**TUESDAY—**

**ANSWERS.—1d.**

*The Great Home Paper.*

**THE BOYS' FRIEND.—1d.**

**16 LARGE PAGES.**

*Splendid Serials and Long, Complete Tales by Star Authors.*

**THE MAGNET LIBRARY.— $\frac{1}{2}$ d.**

*A Long, Complete School Tale, ATTRACTIVE to all,  
and a Grand Story of Army Life.*

**WEDNESDAY—**

**THE MARVEL LIBRARY.—1d.**

*Two Long, Complete Stories, including a fine  
JACK, SAM, AND PETE Adventure Tale every week.*

**THURSDAY—**

**THE GEM LIBRARY.—1d.**

*One Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
and "Britain at Bay," a splendid War Story.*

**THE BOYS' HERALD.—1d.**

*Every Boy's and Young Man's Story and Hobby Paper.*

**FRIDAY—**

**THE PENNY PICTORIAL.—1d.**

*The Best Illustrated Magazine for the Home.*

**THE UNION JACK LIBRARY.—1d.**

*A 40,000-word Powerful Long, Complete Tale of **SEXTON  
BLAKE, DETECTIVE**, in Every Issue. For Readers of  
all Ages.*

**SATURDAY—**

**THE PLUCK LIBRARY.—1d**

*Long, Complete Adventure Stories.*

**THE BOYS' REALM.—1d.**

*The Athletic Weekly Paper for Readers of All Ages.*

**SOLD BY ALL NEWSAGENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.**



# PETE, MONEYLENDER.

*A Tale of JACK, SAM, and PETE.*

By S. Clarke Hook.

## CHAPTER 1.

### *Pete’s Search—In the Ruffians’ Den—A Fight for Life.*

THE streets in the East End of London were practically deserted; but there was little cause for wonder at this, because it was nearly midnight, and because there was a dense fog, rendered more dense by a drizzling rain.

Why Pete the negro was wandering alone along those miry streets on such a night, and at such an hour, was only known to himself, but judging by the manner in which he tried to peer through the fog at the houses he passed, it was evident that he was searching for something.

Presently the sound of footsteps behind him caused him to stop until the pedestrian overtook him. The stranger was a thin, sparely-built man, with a fair, clean-shaven face, and of far more respectable appearance than might have been imagined of a man dwelling in that quarter, for Pete had wandered into an extremely rough neighbourhood.

“Am I going right for Bedford Square, old hoss?” inquired Pete.

“Well, not exactly,” answered the stranger; “but I dare say I can put you in the right road. How is it you are about here so late?”

“Well, I want to take a house—at least, an office.”

“Funny thing that! I am just the very man to find you what you want!

I’m Spicer, the house-agent. I dare say you have heard my name?”

“Can’t say dat I hab, old hoss.”

“What might your name be?”

“Pete.”

“Well, Pete, I could find you what you want, provided you could pay the rent in advance.”

“M’yes! Could do dat all right, old hoss.”

“It so happens that I have the very thing on my books, and we could settle the matter right off the reel, provided you can give a deposit to-night.”

“Can pay a year’s rent in advance if de office suits me.”

“I think it will. It is the sort of place to suit any man; and I could let it to you for fifty pounds for the year, all ready furnished.”

“Must be two rooms.”

“There are three rooms, handsomely furnished.”

“Think you could show dem to me to-night? I want to settle de matter, and I would hand you de fifty pounds in gold.”

“Well, it is certainly rather late, but as the house is on my way home I will manage it for you. Horrible night, isn’t it?”

“M’yes! And it ain’t so warm as it might be.”



"Been house-hunting all day?"

"De best part ob it, and de worst ob it is dat I ain't succeeded in finding a house, dough I hab succeeded in losing myself."

"Perhaps it is all for de best, because, you see, you have found me, and there isn't a man in London who could be of more service to you as regards finding a suitable place. Now, this is de very place. I have de key in my pocket. There you are. Go upstairs, and I will follow, after locking de door."

"Spect I shall come to de furniture later on!" growled Pete, ascending some carpetless stairs.

"We have had de oilcloth up to clean de place down," said Spicer, lighting a lamp in de passage.

"And it wasn't before it needed it, old hoss," answered Pete, glancing at de grimy stairs, which creaked at every tread. "How much higher do you 'spect me to go?"

"Top floor."

"Most need a balloon or some ob dose tings to get up here. I dunno dat my clients will care for dis little journey ebery time dey want to see me."

"Well, see de top rooms first, 'cos they are de best furnished," said Spicer, showing Pete into a large attic, whose furniture consisted of a table and a few stools, and one or two empty spirit bottles.

"I tell you what it is, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, gazing round de filthy place, "if dis room is furnished better dan de oders, de oders must be furnished mighty badly! I ain't taking de offices at any price. You see, dey wouldn't suit de style ob business I hab got to carry out."

"No, I didn't suppose dat they would," answered Spicer calmly. "You see, my object in getting you here was to relieve you of all your superfluous cash. Having done dat, and taken your watch and chain—— I hope it's gold?"

"M'yes! And dat watch cost a lot ob money."

"How much have you got on you?"

"'Bout a hundred pounds in gold, and free or four hundred pounds in notes."

"Well, I have a revolver here, as you see, and I aim very straight."

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete, pulling out his pipe and coolly filling it.

"De river flows beneath dat window. There's a lot of bodies found in dat river. No one knows you have come here."

"Nunno! Jack and Sammy only know dat I hab gone out for a special purpose."

"Then don't you see dat you will have to hand over your money?"

"Looks almost like it, don't it? I was just tinkin dat I might possibly make a fight for it. You see, I hab de idea dat you would rader not try to put a bullet frough me, 'cos it would make a noise, and 'cos you might get your little neck stretched for de job."

"You are about right, my worthy nigger!" exclaimed Spicer, keeping his revolver levelled at Pete's head. "I don't want to kill you; and, indeed, there is no necessity to do so. You have no weapon?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, I have, and, therefore, it stands to reason dat it would be utter madness for you to resist. Apart from dat, I have four men outside. I will bring them in to show you. This way, Burger! You come first, because I feel sure de nigger will like your personal appearance."

An awful-looking ruffian entered de room. He stood over six feet, was proportionately broad, and he had a face dat no man could possibly have



trusted. His sandy hair was cropped almost as close as his beard. He looked as though he needed a shave—and hanging.

Spicer eyed Pete closely, to see what effect Burger's appearance would have on him.

Pete remained seated on the stool, and striking a match, lighted the pipe which he had been slowly filling. The effect on him was simply nil. He was treating the matter in a most businesslike manner.

The fact is, Pete had got the idea that he was a business man, and having determined to put the idea to the test, he had commenced even before he had got suitable offices.

"You see, old hoss," he observed, "I don't much care for fighting, 'specially when a man has got a revolver levelled at me, and de odds are four to one, 'cos I 'spect dose oder blackguards will sort ob chip in. All de same, dis seems a case dat requires treating in a business manner, and so I shall decide to fight de little lot ob you."

"Just go and knock the silly brute senseless, Burger!" said Spicer. "I don't want to shoot him."

"Sure he's got no weapons?"

"Quite! I believe he has three or four hundred pounds in his possession."

"That's good enough for me!" cried Burger, rushing at Pete, who sat on his chair with the calmness of a matador until the bull is almost on him; then, like the matador, Pete darted aside, and Burger went sprawling over the chair, smashing it to splinters.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "You ain't improving de beautiful furniture ob dis office, old hoss! Knocked your nose on de floor, too, hab you? I'm mighty sorry for you. Yah, yah, yah! I dunno when I felt so sorry for any man, 'cos I'm 'most afraid you will get hurt more yet."

"Why, you black beast, I'll wipe the floor with your body!" roared the ruffian, struggling to his feet.

"Seems to me you'm wiping your nose wid de floor. Still, you may do better next time. Here we go! Nunno! You ain't doing a bit better."

Pete landed a blow between his assailant's eyes, and before he had recovered from it, rushed in, caught him round the body, and hurled him headlong at Spicer.

The pair went to the floor with a loud crash, and, springing forward, Pete wrested the revolver from Spicer's grasp and hurled it through the window.

"Now den, old hosses, come on!" exclaimed Pete. "I mean to treat de matter in a businesslike manner, so dat if you will all kindly come at once I shall be obliged. Thank you! Take dat little lot for de start. I don't need a receipt for it; nor for dat one, eider!"

Pete's blows were terrific. He gradually backed into a corner of the room, where the ceiling did not slope, and here he made such a fierce resistance that no man dared come within reach of his arms.

Finding the gang drew back, Pete advanced on them. Then a terrific battle ensued.

The gang, as Spicer urged them on, appeared to be ashamed to show their cowardice, and they kept making rushes. But woe betide the man who got within reach of Pete's brawny fist!

Twice Burger, who was the biggest amongst them, went down, and the blows were so heavy that he reeled as he got up again.

Spicer took particular care to keep out of harm's way. He urged the others on.

"Perdition! Are you afraid of one man?" he cried. "Brain the brute! Go on, Burger! You are good for any two men!"



So he might have been for most two men, but he was not nearly good enough for Pete, who went for the strongest man, and Burger had to bear the brunt of it.

They tried to get behind Pete, but he was ten times more active than any man in the room, and the way he knocked them about so impressed Spicer that he ordered a retreat—an order the miscreants were only too glad to obey.

“You demon!” cried Spicer. “There are twenty more men in this building, and every one of them I will bring against you!”

“Golly! Den I’ll pay you for de start!” cried Pete, springing forward as a lion leaps upon its foe.

So swift was his movement that he appeared to go across the room with one bound, and he was upon them just as the foremost of the gang were rushing down the stairs.

He hurled himself upon them, and down they went in a struggling heap.

“Yah, yah, yah!” roared Pete. “I don’t think you’m as brave as you might be. One moment, old hosses. As a businesslike man, I’m going to pay you in full.”

As he spoke he wrenched out a baluster. It was not a very thick one, but the yelling gang found it quite thick enough. For Pete was very strong, and he was hitting hard. He tried to get in a blow for every man, and he only retreated when he saw men coming from the lower rooms. How many there were he did not know, nor did he wait to look, but as a couple of revolver-shots were fired at him he came to the conclusion that it would be quite impossible for him to get past the gang, and so he retreated to the upper room, and hurled the lamp through the window.

Now he flung up the sash and looked out. He could see the lights of some barges moored on the river, and by the blurred light of a street lamp he saw the water flowing past. There was a pathway between the water and the house, but Pete determined to try and clear it.

Climbing on the window-sill, he waited till he heard the gang rush into the room, and then he dived head-first down the height. A few moments later he plunged into the water, turning so quickly that he did not touch the bottom. To Pete the rest was easy. He struck out until he reached a part where he was able to land, and then he made his way towards Bedford Square, where he and his comrades Jack and Sam were stopping.

Letting himself in with his latchkey, he crept to bed, missing his landlady, of whom he stood in some dread.

Mrs. Murkins was the lady’s name. She kept a boarding establishment and a husband, who smoked his pipe all day long, and slipped out each night when knives and boots had to be cleaned. He had never done any work in his life that he could possibly avoid; but he was remarkably kind to his wife, perhaps for the reason that she was not the sort of lady a man would care to treat unkindly.

Sometimes she sent him on little errands, and once she sent him to the landlord to pay the rent; but only once, because he had the misfortune to be robbed on the way. The thief was never caught; and James Murkins, Esquire—as he always had his letters addressed—was never sent to pay the landlord or anyone else again.

Mr. Slomer was the only other boarder at the present time. He was a stout, middle-aged gentleman, with a short temper.

At the present moment Mr. Slomer was seated in an easy-chair by the fire, reading the “Times.” Pete was seated on a chair next to him, reading the “Mercury.”

“Ain’t it mighty awful what untroofs dese papers tell,” observed Pete.



knocking the ashes out of his pipe on the heel of his boot, then giving them a puff to disperse them.

"Hang you, fellow!" roared Slomer, leaping to his feet. "You have blown all your ashes into my eyes. Oh, you clumsy villain! I'll have you turned out of the place. Hang you! How dare you! Oh, hang you!"

This was a favourite expression of the irate gentleman. Pete had not been there many days, but Slomer had hanged him scores of times already.

"Gone in your peepers, old hoss?" exclaimed Pete. "Look at dat, now!"

"Look at it, be hanged! How can I look at an ounce of tobacco-ash in my eyes?"

"I dunno, old hoss; but I don't tink dere was so much as dat; and I blame you for not shutting your eyes when you saw it coming. De properest ting for you to do when you get anyting in your eye, is to rub de oder one, and dat will fetch it out."

"You stupid villain! It is in both eyes."

"In dat case I should rub first one eye for five minutes or so, and den gib de oder one a good rub. If dat don't fetch it out, I tink I would advise you to leabe it in, and don't take any notice ob it. Treat it wid de silent contempt dat it deserves. Try a good smoke, dere's nuffin like tobacco for de eyesight. You will find it much better dan bottled stout, which is too fattening for a man ob your habit."

Jack thought the conversation was getting rather too personal, so he tried to turn it into another channel. Slomer sat down, muttering fierce things, and taking up the "Times," which was the only paper he would deign to read, he endeavoured to forget that he had got some tobacco-ash in his eyes.

"But what makes you say the papers tell untruths, Pete?" inquired Jack, trying to look serious.

"Here's a case reported ob a poor man sent to prison for robbing a money-lender," continued Pete, placing the libelled paper on his knees while he filled his pipe from Sam's pouch, which he had just dexterously abstracted from that worthy's pocket. "Now, on de face ob it, dat's a wrong sentence, 'cos you can't rob a moneylender. Dey are unrobable. Dere's more money made in moneylending dan in any oder profession on de face ob de earth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So dere is. What are you guffawing at, Jack?"

"Well, you want to have a good lot of experience."

"No you don't. Any idiot could lend money. Slomer could lend money— if he had any to lend. De biggest ass on de face ob de earth can do dat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you would not keep guffawing, Jack," growled Pete, lighting a match. Then he was carried away with his subject again, and, allowing his right hand to drop to his side, he said:

"All you'm got to do is to take an office, and den you advertise, and you get plenty ob—"

"Wowhow!" yelled Slomer, leaping to his feet again, while flames leapt round him. The fact is, Pete's match had fired his paper, and that paper blazed up into Slomer's face in a manner that startled him.

"Why, you stupid, unfortunate old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "What am you trying to do now? Must tink he's a Sphinx, and imperturbable to fire, else he's insured himself against fire, and dressed himself in inflammable flannelette. Golly! Look at de mighty mess you are making wid de black ashes."

"You careless villain! Why——"

"Look at dat, now. De man starts blaming me 'cos he sets himself

alight. 'Spect he's a director ob de Cremation Company, Unlimited, and wants to get cremated on de cheap. I do wish you would stop laughing, Jack and Sammy. Here comes Mrs. Murkins, and I know she won't like dis mess."

Mrs. Murkins was a middle-aged woman, and, in spite of all the work she got through, inclined to be stout. She tossed her head when she saw all the black ashes on her carpet.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "Here am I slaving from morning to night, and people trying to make all the mess in the place that they possibly can."

"I dunno what's de matter wid de man, my dear," observed Pete. "All ob a sudden he leaps into de air, and yowls at de top ob his voice, and flames come all ober him. I tink he must hab been drinking too much bottled stout, and he's caught spontaneous combustion."

"You insolent vagabond, you know that you set fire to my paper!"

"Why, I neber touched it."

"Yes you did, you careless black beast! The match you struck set fire to it."

"Well, dat's funny, too. I certainly neber noticed de match. But dere's a penny to buy anoder paper."

"Ruffian, this paper cost threepence!"

"Well, just gib de man anoder twopence, Jack; but I must say I tink such a valuable paper as dat ought to be insured. Good-morning, my dear!"

"And what about the mess you have made on my carpet?" cried Mrs. Murkins."

"You feed your husband up for a fortnight or so, my dear, and den tell him to sweep it up; only, be sure de poor man does not kill himself wid cberwork."

"I cannot understand the woman having a blackguardly nigger in her house!" snarled Slomer, as Mrs. Murkins went out of the room and slammed the door by way of expressing her indignation.

"Now, as I was saying when Slomer interrupted me wid his nonsense, I am perfectly convinced dat no one can rob a monyelender," continued Pete, treating Slomer's last remark with silent contempt. "I am going to prove my nasturtium by starting business as a moneylender. I hab been looking out for an office, but I ain't been quite as successful as I should hab liked. Howeber, dat is only a matter ob time. I am going to gib all de profits to de poor."

"Poor, wretched creatures!" exclaimed Jack.

"Golly! Here comes Murkins wid a dustpan. It's de first time I hab eber seen him do any work."

Murkins was an active-looking man. Those who did not know his nature really believed he was most energetic, because he moved about so quickly. On the present occasion he flung the dustpan and brush to the floor, wrenched off his coat, and then seated himself in a chair.

"Morning, gents! Nice day after the rain. Cold, but bright."

"Tink you would like a job, Murkins?" inquired Pete.

"Bless you, I'd never have time. You would be surprised what a lot there is to do in a house of this size. Work, work, from morning to night."

"M'yes! And you let your wife do it."

"It keeps her in health," observed Murkins. "She would get too stout if she wasn't to have plenty of exercise."

"Mighty funny ting dat you don't get stout. But look here, old hoss. I'm going to start as a moneylender. Do you tink you could get me some clients on commission?"

"Why, of course I could!" declared Murkins, brightening up. "I tell you



what I will do with you. I'll borrow a hundred pound just to give you a start. Then I'll get my brother to borrow another. Then I've got a cousin as—"

"Steady, dere! Seems to me dere are too many in de same family."

"I've got lots of friends as would oblige you."

"I don't seem to hab a yearning for your friends. I tink I would rader had a few strangers frown in."

"I can get you as many customers as you like. I could get 'em for you all day long. How much do you want to lend?"

"Two-free thousand pounds."

"Well, I tell you what I will do with you," said the obliging Murkins, helping himself to one of Jack's cigars. "I'll borrow the whole lot, and that will save you the trouble of taking offices."

Pete did not appear to be impressed with this kind offer, and Murkins smoked a second one of Jack's cigars, while he dilated on the advantages of such an arrangement, then his wife came into the room.

She looked tired and cross. She saw the amount of work her husband had not done, and knew that he had taken about an hour commencing. It was enough to try the temper of a good-tempered woman, and she was nothing like that.

Sweeping up the ashes, she was about to sweep from the room, when Murkins most unwisely spoke.

"Let me do that, my dear," he murmured.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Mrs. Murkins gave an angry sniff, and hurled the short-handled brush at her husband's head. At least that is what she aimed at.

As a matter of fact, the handle of the brush caught Pete on the ear, then it cannoned off, dashed through Slomer's paper—he having deigned to take up Pete's "Mercury," and the business end of that brush caught him on the nose.

Directly Mrs. Murkins saw the error of her aim, she bounced from the room. Slomer uttered a howl of pain and rage, then leapt on Pete with an impact that sent him backwards, smashing off the mahogany back of the chair, and bumping the back of Pete's head on the floor.

Now, this ought to have satisfied Slomer, especially as he was sitting on Pete's chest. It more than satisfied Pete. Not so Slomer.

His nose was hurting badly, and he was quite determined to have revenge. Pete had been sitting next to him, and he never doubted that he was the culprit.

Slomer clenched his fist and struck at Pete's upturned face with all his strength. The blow was a very heavy one, and there is not a doubt that it would have hurt Pete severely had he not jerked his head aside. As it was it hurt Slomer's knuckles against the floor, nor did he fare any better with the next three blows that he dealt in quick succession; after that Pete changed places by rolling him over and lying on the top.

"I dunno what's de matter wid de man," observed Pete, sitting up. "He seems to be in a most excited state. Do stop laughing at him, boys. You'm only exciting him, and if you go on in dis fashion de poor old hoss will be habing fits. I tink de best ting I can do is to undress him, put him to bed, and let de gentle Mrs. Murkins nurse him. What's de man gasping about now? Let you get up? Oh, I can do all dat; only, you'm so mighty rough when you are up. Now, do try to remember dat you'm a middle-aged old party wid a big waistband, and not a Rugby footballer."

Pete rose, and seated himself in Slomer's easy-chair, where he puffed at his pipe, which, strange to say, had not got broken.

"You black vagabond of a nigger!" howled Slomer, shaking his fist in Pete's smiling face. "You have assaulted me!"

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete. "I made sure it was you who had assaulted me."

"What is this disgraceful disturbance in my house?" demanded Mrs. Murkins, rushing into the room. "Oh, you sinful creature! Look at my chair!"

Pete, to whom this was addressed, did look at the chair, then he looked at the angry lady.

"I wonder if dere is any justice in dis world for a nigger?" growled Pete. "First ob all I nearly get my head knocked off wid a soft-haired-and-mighty-hard-handled broom; den a raging man scaling 'bout twenty stone, falls on my chest, and bangs my head on de floor, and smashes de chair, den I get called a sinful creature for what I didn't do."

"It wasn't his fault, my dear," ventured Mr. Murkins, as his better half glared at him.

Mrs. Murkins made no verbal reply. She knew perfectly well that it was Murkins's fault for not stopping the broom with his head. She knew on which side her bread was buttered.

Uttering a banshee-like shriek, she caught her husband a clout over the head that sent him sprawling across the room, then she plumped herself in Pete's lap, and shrieked in his ear for him to protect her from her brutal husband.

"Golly, golly! Ain't dis mighty awful?" groaned Pete, gazing sideways at the hysterical lady, who was tapping her heels on the floor and shrieking at the top of her voice. "Take her away, Jack and Sammy!"

Jack and Sam did nothing of the sort. They were shouting with laughter.

"Golly, golly!" groaned Pete. "Dis will break my heart. I ain't strong enough to nurse eighteen stone ob hysterical lubliness. Jump up, my dear, and I will fetch Murkins for de purpose. I'd much rader you yowled in his ear."

"My chair is ruined! Who is to pay for that?"

"Should say Slomer was de properest person; still, I'll pay for dat. I will buy you a new easy-chair as well, my dear, so dat you can sit on it when you want to hab de hysterics. Do stop your laughter, Jack."

"Pete, you are a dear!" sobbed Mrs. Murkins, dabbing her eyes.

"I feel more like a beast ob burden at de present moment," groaned Pete, and the lady, taking his gentle hint, relieved him of her weight; merely mentioning that she would go and buy the two chairs at once.

## CHAPTER 2.

### How Pete Fitted Up His Offices—Slomer Has a Very Bad Time.

PETE was discussing the matter of going out to find offices for his precious scheme when Mrs. Murkins entered the room smiling.

"My husband has been telling me that you require offices.

Pete," she said. "Now, I have two empty rooms, and all you will need will be the furniture. I shall let you have the rooms at a nominal rent—say fifty pounds a year, payable in advance."

"I'm most inclined to tink, my dear, dat de situation would not suit at all, and—"

"Oh dear! I feel so faint. After the upset I have had to-day—oh! Oh-h!"

"Dat de situation would not suit some businesses," gasped Pete, dodging behind Jack; "but dat for my purpose it would be just de bery



ting. Fifty pounds in advance, my dear? M'yes! We hab de money here. Thank you! Much obliged! Good-morning!"

"Come and look at the rooms, Pete. They are lovely."

"Jack will do dat. I'm a lot too busy for de purpose."

Mrs. Murkins was perfectly satisfied. Pete was not; and, after hesitating for some time, he went to look at the rooms, but he took the precaution of making Jack and Sam come with him, in case Mrs. Murkins wanted to have hysterics again.

The rooms were on the top floor. You could get from one to the other, and you could get from either out of doors into the passage. They needed papering and whitewashing, while they looked as though a good cleaning would do them good. Pete knew that they had to be his offices, and so he determined to make the best of them.

It may here be mentioned that when Pete gets one of his brilliant ideas it has to be carried out at once. His dog Rory, when he gets the idea of chasing a rabbit, is no more keen on the job than is Pete.

"Free—six—nine—twelve, and a bit," observed Pete, stepping that room.

"Free—six—nine, and a bit," he added, stepping it the other way. "What's dis pipe, my dear?"

"Gas. All laid on."

"M'yes! We shall want a gas-stove for de winter months, and some gas-brackets. Shall fit dese offices up myself, 'Nuff said! Come along, boys! I'm going to show you dat de profits on de moneylender business are so enormous dat if I carry on my operations long enough dere won't be any poor in London, 'cos I'm going to gib all de profits to de poor. Now, I'm going to start wid a capital ob ten thousand pounds, and I sha'n't stop till I hab turned dat into— How much do de poor want, Jack?"

"Three or four hundred million might help them a bit."

"Bery well, I sha'n't stop till den. We'm got plenty ob capital."

"So we have, Pete. Our treasure-trove brought us that."

"Bery well, you ain't got de right to hab more money dan you require and let oder people hab less dan dey can lib on. At de same time, in moneylending business you hab got to economise, so I shall fit dese offices up at the cheapest rate, and do de work myself, 'Nuff said!"

So Jack and Sam thought, because they knew that whatever they said beyond would not have the slightest effect on Pete, he having made up his mind.

"Come on, Sam," murmured Jack. "He will lose a frightful lot, but we shall never miss it, and it will do the poor some good. There ought to be some fun over this."

Pete went marching on with Rory at his heels. He pulled up at a decorator's shop, then, after a slight pause, during which he gazed at some wall-papers in the window, he entered it. The proprietor's name was Belby. Jack noticed this, though probably Pete did not, for, seating himself on the counter, he pulled out a sheet of foolscap.

"What's your name, old hoss?" inquired Pete, reading his particulars.

"Belby."

"Amount ob—ob loaves?"

The worthy Belby was a stout, choleric gentleman, with a rubicund face. It turned redder than ever, then he appeared to come to the conclusion that he had got a dangerous maniac to deal with. He got as far behind his counter as the dimensions of his shop would allow him to go.

"Two each day—four on Saturdays," murmured Belby, glancing at Jack and Sam, as though wondering whether they also were dangerous maniacs. They certainly looked sane enough, so for that matter did Pete.

"Stop!" exclaimed Pete. "I hab got de wrong form here. Dis is de moneylender form. I don't tink dat is loaves. I believe it is loan. M'yes! Dat is loan right enough, only I ain't writted it as carefully as might be. I want de bimensions ob de rooms. I hope de second one was de same size as de first. Still, I 'spect it was. Here we are! Twelve and a bit by nine and a bit. How much will dat come to?"

"Five pounds!" said Belby. He was humouring Pete, preparatory to making a dash into the street, and calling a constable.

"Well, dere you are, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, pulling out a handful of gold, and handing the astounded tradesman five sovereigns. "Now, de next question is de pattera."

"I—er—yes—exactly! What was the particular thing you require?"

"Wall-paper, ob course! Do you suppose I come in a paper-shop to buy kippers?"

"No, sir! Decidedly not. Stupid of me not to think of it. You require a wall-paper for a room twelve by nine. I presume you mean feet?"

"Eh?"

"Not yards?"

"Does dat make much difference?"

"Well, you see, it would make three times the difference."

"I stepped across de room, and called free for each step."

"Then depend on it they are feet. You could scarcely step three yards. What is the height of the room?"

"Didn't notice dat. Still, gib me enough paper for de purpose, and if dere's any ober I will paper de hall."

"Well, say twelve pieces at seven shillings each, and a dado," murmured Belby, glancing at Jack and Sam again. He wanted to work out the five pounds, but did not want to deal with men who had the slightest technical knowledge, and he feared that Jack and Sam were not safe customers for his purpose.

Pete cared nothing about the cost. He only wanted pretty colours.

"Dat's rader elegant," he observed, selecting a sweet thing in apple-green with red flowers on it. "Now I want some frost."

"Some—er—what?"

"A frost. A good broad one, to frow up the effect."

"Do you mean a frieze?"

"M'yes! Dat's it. Someting ob a violet shade to match de red and green."

"Scissors!" gasped Jack.

"M'yes! I shall want dem. I'm going to put de paper on myself."

"Don't you think you had better put it on the wall? It will look funny if you put it on yourself."

"I reckon it will look funny if he puts it on the wall, too," said Sam.

"You shut up, Sammy! Dat's de identical colour. I like violet. Gib me de necessary number ob yards ob dat. Hab you got a dodo?"

"They are defunct, Pete," said Jack. "You mean a dado. A dodo is a bird."

"Eh? I tink you are right. Someting ob a yellow to match de green and violet. While I'm selecting dis, mix me up a couple ob buckets ob paste, and two-free buckets ob whitewash. Den I want you to paint me free or four black boards wid 'Pete, Moneylender' on dem. I also want some full sized brushes. Now, hurry up! I'll hab dis yellow dodo. Let me hab de bill for de lot. Jack and Sammy will carry it round."

Belby made the bill come to fifteen pounds odd, and Pete paid the balance, then bolted.

"Look here, Belby!" exclaimed Jack. "You can send those things



round to this address, and you had better be quick about it, or you will have Pete bothering in again. He has made up his mind to paper his rooms, and nothing short of sudden death will stop him."

"He'd better let me do the work."

"I know; but he wants to economise. You can see that by the purchases he has already made. I'll bet he has gone to make some more now. Come along, Sam! We will have a day up West."

It was dark when they returned, and they at once made their way up to Pete's offices, where an extraordinary scene awaited them.

Pete was in his shirtsleeves, balancing himself on a board that was placed on two pairs of steps in quite a professional way. That was all that was professional about the matter.

He had cut off the end of the lead gaspipe, and bent it out to form a bracket, then lighted the gas, which was flaring out in a manner that must have made the meter tick like a Waterbury watch. It looked dangerous, too, especially as there was a strong smell of gas in the room, which mingled with that emanating from two huge pots of blue and crimson paint.

Pete had commenced operations by hanging his paper, and he had nearly finished the job.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "You are putting your dodo where your frost ought to be. The dodo ought to go at the bottom, not at the top. Then again, you have got some of your pieces of paper upside down, and haven't you made yourself in a jolly mess! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you wouldn't guffaw at my work, Jack. You make me nervous, and I particularly want dis room to look nice."

"Don't you think you would have made it look nicer if you had begun your whitewashing and painting before the papering?"

"I don't see dat dat matters."

"Well, perhaps you will see presently. Ha, ha, ha! Just look he— Hi, murder!"

Jack had stepped backwards to view the full effect, and in doing so he stumbled over one of the pails of paste, then he went to the floor with a crash, and knocked over the pot of crimson paint. The manner in which that paint and paste flowed round him looked as though he were going to get into a rather worse mess than Pete himself.

"Yah, yah, yah!" howled Pete. "Golly, golly! Yah, yah, yah! Oh, hold me up, someone! Yah— Hellup! Murder!"

Pete had forgotten that he was standing on a narrow plank, with a huge pot of paste in one hand and a big brush in the other. He slipped, and the next moment fell on the top of Sam. Sam got as much of the paste-brush as would go into his mouth, and the contents of the paste-pot in his face, then he and Pete crashed to the floor.

"I say, Sammy, what did you want to get in my way for like dat? Oh, do stop your laughter, Jack! Dere ain't de slightest ting to laugh at, is dere, Sammy? Yah, yah, yah! De man has yaffled up de best part ob my paste."

"I'm glad to hear that it's the best part of it," spluttered Sam; "and very thankful that I didn't get the worst part. The taste of the best part is bad enough for me."

"Yah, yah, yah! You hab made yourself in a mighty mess, too; still, you ain't in such a picturesque mess as Jack. Yah, yah, yah! Just look at de man's back. I wouldn't advise you to sit on any ob Mrs. Murkins' chairs till you dry, Jack. Yah, yah, yah!"

"I reckon something is happening below!" exclaimed Sam, as a mighty howl rent the air.

## PETE, MONEYLENDER.

am was perfectly right. It was. The paint was streaming through the ing, and it so happened that it was streaming into Slomer's bed-room; the unfortunate part about the matter was that Slomer, who was going that night, was shaving, and if Jack had chosen the very spot, he ld not have upset that paint more directly over Slomer's head.

s the stream poured down, Slomer gave a spasmodic jump, and he also e his cheek a gash with the razor; hence his howl.

ow, Mrs. Murkins had heard Pete's fall, and as she rushed upstairs she rd Slomer's howl. Under the impression that that unfortunate gentle- a was being murdered, she flung his door open, and the sight that was ealed to her was more than enough to excite any lady, however calm might naturally be.

lomer was standing with a razor in his hand, howling. It is true that being a full-blooded man, was bleeding freely, but by reason of that nson paint, he looked to be bleeding frightfully, and, as a good many er people would have done, Mrs. Murkins jumped to the conclusion t he had cut his throat.

The combination of circumstances was quite sufficient to cause her to m this hasty conclusion. He had a razor in his hand, and he was eding freely, while he looked as though he had bled about a painful. en he owed her three weeks' rent!

"Murder!" shrieked the terrified woman, rushing into the kitchen, where husband was smoking his pipe, and looking for winners. "Police! fetch 'em!"

"Bust them!" growled Murkins, glancing over his paper, and knocking ashes from his pipe. "I don't want them."

"Mr. Slomer has cut his throat!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Mr. Murkins. "Hurray!"

He had spotted a winner, and it was not often that he did that. This is ay he cried "Hurray!" and not because Mr. Slomer had cut his throat.

"You wicked wretch!" yelled his wife. "And he's worth twenty shillings week to me—if he pays."

"You can stick it on if he don't, my dear, and make him pay thirty. He's right——"

"I tell you he's cut his throat. Go for the police this instant."

"It's funny as a man can't have a bit of peace in his own house," growled urkins, pulling off a slipper, while he reached for a boot.

"He's bleeding to death!"

"Well, a constable won't do him any good. I hope he ain't doing it on r carpet."

"You inconsiderate wretch! Will you go for the police, or will you t?"

"Why, of course I'm going, my dear. I'm going as quick as I can," said urkins, examining the heel of his boot, and mentally deciding that he ould have a new pair out of his winnings. "I don't see why I should be amed 'cos a lodger chooses to cut his throat."

Mrs. Murkins saw that it was a hopeless job. She never had been able to urry her husband yet. He would have been a good five minutes before he t out of the house, and then the chances are he would have stepped across the milk-shop to tell the landlord that he had netted a fifteen-to-one ance in half-crowns, and that might have taken till closing time.

"Go and stop him!" yelled the excited lady, rushing out for the police rself, and yelling in a manner that ought to have fetched the constable t the next beat.

"I'm blowed if I do!" growled Murkins, resuming his paper. "I ain't cklng a man with a razor as wants to cut his throat. He might start on



mine. Well, this is a run of luck, too. Fifteen-to-one! Thirty-seven-and-six. I only wish I had made it sovereigns, or that I could spot them every day."

"And only the sorrows of others throw their shadow over me," is a grand poetical thought; but, alas! it does not often occur in real life. Murkins did not bother about Slomer's shadows. He had enough of his own to worry about, without taking on the troubles of others.

The constable came, saw, and conquered. He did it in this manner:

Rushing upstairs he saw Slomer apparently bleeding profusely, and with a razor in his hand. That constable, like most of the force, could use his fists. He landed Slomer one in the wind that sent him to the floor, then sitting on him, grasped his wrist, and cautiously took the razor from him. It was dexterously done, and wisely done, because when a man has an open razor in his hand, and commences slap-dashing, it is dangerous, and you want to take the upper hand with him. The constable took it. Once before he had tackled a dangerous maniac who had a weapon, and been in hospital for six weeks for his pains, and as he had a wife and six children to support he had to be cautious.

Mr. Slomer's words were quite incoherent, and the constable was not listening to them. He merely closed the razor, and shoved it into his pocket. Then, believing that he had a dangerous maniac to deal with, he handcuffed him. After that he rose—so did Slomer.

"There's a lot of blood," observed the constable, looking at his hands. "Why, it's paint—red paint—that's what's the matter with that—and—his throat ain't cut!"

"You dastardly scoundrel!" howled the excited man. "Of course I haven't cut my throat. I'll bring you before the—the Commissioners. I'll have you dismissed from the force!"

Now, this was extremely hard on the constable, who was a downright good-hearted fellow, and there are many more of them. There may be some bad ones, but they are few and far between. They get a good many kicks, and not too many halfpence. All this one had done was to try to prevent Slomer cutting his throat. Still, that constable was accustomed to abuse, so took no heed of it.

"I give that nigger in custody!" howled Slomer. "He calls himself Pete. I give him in charge for cutting my throat."

The constable did not quite understand how this could be; but when he saw the way in which Pete's room was papered, and the shocking mess, to say nothing of Pete's patent gas-bracket, he came to the conclusion that he had another dangerous maniac to deal with.

"I shall have to arrest you!" exclaimed the constable, stepping up to him.

"My dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete, placing his pasty hands on either shoulder, "I ain't done nuffin."

"Here, get your hands off me!" bawled the constable. "Look what a mess you have made me in!"

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete, gazing at his hands. "Neber mind, old hoss, you will be able to get a good impression ob my finger-prints if eber you want dem. Yah, yah, yah! You hab made yourself in a mess, Slomer. How did you get all dat red paint ober your noddle."

"Take these things off!" hooted Slomer, rattling his manacles. "If you don't take that scoundrel in custody I will have you dismissed from the force."

"I don't understand it," growled the constable. "I'm called in to prevent your cutting your throat, which is an illegal action. Well, I've put those manacles on so as you can't cut your throat."

"I don't want to cut my throat, and——"

"Funny ting dat," interposed Pete.

"Are you going to take that nigger in custody?"

"Did he cut your throat? You had the razor?"

"He caused me to cut it. I was shaving, and the villain emptied all this paint over me."

"Were you shaving in this room?"

"No, in the room beneath, and the paint ran through, and——"

"Well, how can you give a man in custody for an accident like that?" exclaimed the constable, taking off the manacles. "You can claim damages, but——"

"He seems to hab got dem already, old hoss," said Pete. "Should say he's got enough damages to last him for some time to come."

"What are you trying to do?" demanded the constable, gazing at Pete's work.

"I'm decorating my new offices, old hoss. What do you tink ob my dodo? Do stop dat yowling, Slomer. What's de sense in telling us dat your froat is cut. We can't help it. You ain't de only pig who has had his froat cut. I didn't cut your froat."

"You made me do it."

"Nunno! I wasn't tink ob you. I was tink ob Jack and Sammy, and de mighty mess dey had made in my new offices."

"It was I who accidentally knocked the paint-pot over," laughed Jack.

"Did you do it with the intention of making him cut himself, sir?" inquired the constable, looking far from serious.

"Certainly not. I did not know his room was immediately beneath this, nor that he was in his room, nor that he was shaving. And look what a jolly mess I have made myself in. You don't suppose that I would purposely have gone such a roundabout way to make a man cut his throat? Then again, his throat is not cut. He has certainly given himself a cut on the cheek, but when he has washed the paint off, I don't think he will find much blood there."

"Well, you have no charge against the gentlemen," observed the constable. "Of course, you can bring an action against them for damages; but I don't see that you will get much by it. There might have been some negligence, of course. I can't take a gentleman in custody for tumbling over a paint-pot, whatever the consequential damages happen to be. I should advise you to ask these gents to be a little more quiet next time you want to shave, else get a barber to do it for you."

Then the constable left the building, and Mrs. Murkins stood gazing at the frightful mess.

The extraordinary papering she did not mind, having received her rent in advance, she did not care what Pete did to the rooms. The damage to the lower room she intended to charge for heavily. The damage to Slomer was a matter of perfect indifference to her.

For this reason she took the matter with a coolness that was exasperating to Slomer.

"I fear there is danger with that gas, Pete," she observed.

"Nunno, my dear! Dat's quite safe enough, and it gibs a nice heat to de room. I am going to hab a gas-fire put here to-morrow."

"But how are you going to put that gas out?"

"Eh?"

"I say how are you going to put it out?"

"I dunno dat it wouldn't be better to leabe it burning all n'ght. It



would sort ob air de room. Do stop your noise, Slomer. You are worse dan a dozen cats. I shall consider de matter ob putting de gas out, my dear. Good evening, my dear!"

Mrs. Murkins took the hint, and went; she wanted to escape Slomer, and when he followed, she informed him that she was just going to make out his bill, and would speak about the matter when she brought it up.

That settled him immediately, and she went downstairs to settle her husband, but found that worthy had slipped out, and he did not return till a little after eleven, by which time Pete had got on splendidly with his room.

"Now, boys," he exclaimed, "how do you tink would be de best way to put out de gas, 'cos I ain't going to do any more work to-night?"

"I really think the safest way would be to turn it off at the meter," answered Jack. "The only objection to that is, that Slomer, or some of the other people in the house, might object."

"M'yes! Den again, we would find it rader gloomy habing our supper in de dark, and getting to bed widout a light. Don't you know ob a better way? Yah, yah, yah! You are in a drefful mess, too, Jack, and de worst part ob de business is dat you hab wasted my paint; still, dat won't put de gas out."

"You might knock up the pipe with a hammer."

"Capital idea, Jack! I must say you get some good ideas sometimes. Just run and fetch me a good-sized hammer, Sam."

Sam got Murkins to find him one. He lent the one which his wife used for breaking coal, and that was heavy enough for anything. It was far too heavy for her; in fact, Murkins had bought it for himself, but whenever she wanted coal broken she had to use that hammer. Murkins had never used it in his life, and never intended to do so. It would have been ten times too heavy for him.

"Dat's de identical hammer, Sammy," exclaimed Pete, wiping the handle, which was covered with coal-dust, on Sam's coat. "A hammer like dat would knock up most anyting. Now, I can do it on de corner ob de mantelpiece, just pulling de pipe round so, and— Woorooh!"

Pete uttered a wild howl, and flung the hammer from him. It caught Sam on the shins, and made him leap about as wildly as Pete.

"Golly! Ain't dat pipe plaguey hot!" cried Pete.

"And isn't that hammer jolly heavy!" growled Sam. "When you want to fling hammers across the room, I wish you would fling them in Jack's direction."

"Did de hammer hit you, Sammy?" inquired Pete, blowing on his hand, where the pipe had burnt it.

"Of course it hit me, bother it! Caught me on the shins."

"You ought to be bery thankful—"

"Well, I'm not. I'm not a bit thankful."

"I mean you ought to be thankful, Sammy, dat it did not hit you in de eye or on de nose, or any ob dose tender parts. You see, it might hab hurt you."

"It has!"

"Dat's only on de shins, and a place like dat don't count. Just bend de pipe on to de mantelpiece while I do de slogging."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. You can do your own plumbing, or you can get Jack to help you, if he is sufficiently stupid."

"Should say Jack was stupid enough for most anyting," observed Pete.

"Just bend dat pipe in de right direction, Jack, while I knock it up."



"Not I, you beauty."

"Den I 'spect I shall hab to do it myself," growled Pete, catching hold of the heated pipe with the end of his coat, and bending it in the right direction.

There was a smell of scorching paint, while some of Pete's new wallpaper was blackened. His idea was to knock up that pipe with one fell blow, and raising the hammer he brought it down with quite unnecessary strength.

The flaring light went out, and there was a sound of a heavy blow, while Pete uttered a yell that made Mrs. Murkins imagine that more throats were being cut.

"Ha, ha, ha! What have you done this time, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Someone is frowning tings at my toes, and hitting dem ebery time, Jack."

"Ha, ha, ha! I believe you struck that mantelpiece too hard."

"I'm mighty certain dere's someting struck me too hard, and it's on de toes. Do stop your guffawing, Jack, and strike a light."

"Have you got a candle?" inquired Jack, feeling for his matches.

"M'yes! Dere's one on de mantelpiece; only it wouldn't gib me enough light. You will find it in its flat candlestick."

Jack got the candle alight; then he and Sam burst into roars of laughter.

The mantelpiece was made of some sort of composition to represent marble. The blow Pete had dealt it had smashed off a huge corner, and that had dropped on his toes. The blow had also smashed the pipe flat, and caused the gas to go out, but it had not stopped it leaking, because Pete had split the pipe a little higher up.

"Look here," exclaimed Jack, "that pipe is leaking furiously!"

"Eh?"

"It is filling the room with gas!"

"Well, I can't help dat, Jack. I ain't knocking it up any more. Golly! I believe I hab smashed my toes! Dey feel as dough dey were badly frost-bitten, and——"

"Never mind about your toes. You must——"

"But I do mind about dem, Jack! I can't help minding. I sha'n't mind so much when dey stop hurting; but dey ain't showing any signs ob stopping at present."

"I reckon that while Pete is bothering about his toes the room will be full of gas, and then there will be an explosion."

"Den I tink de best ting we can do is to get out ob de room, boys."

"Nonsense! I tell you there will be an explosion!"

"In dat case, I would much rader get out ob de room. Golly! I dunno when I felt so much pain in de toes!"

Jack saw that it would be hopeless to get Pete to do any work while his toes were paining him, and so Jack knocked up the pipe himself.

"Do you like de smell ob gas, Jack?" inquired Pete, as he watched the operation.

"Not likely!"

"Oh, I tought you did, by de way you kept sniffing at it."

"I want to see if it leaks."

"Dat ain't going to leak, Jack. Golly! Dere's old Slomer bawling at someting again. Go down and see what he wants, Sammy. Dere's someting wrong wid de man, and I don't want to hab a row wid him dis time ob night."

Sam did not want a row, either, but he went down to interview the irate gentleman, who was howling himself hoarse on the landing beneath.



## CHAPTER 3.

## Pete's First Customer—Pete Recognises an Old Foe—Trouble in the World.

SLOMER had been to a supper-party, and he was in evening-dress. He had only just gone to his bed-room, and the noise the comrades were making exasperated him. He did not know how long it would last, and had an idea that he would get very little sleep that night if he did not stop it.

Directly the sun went down Slomer commenced to express his views, and he called Sam all the names he could think of.

"Ain't de man making a mighty row!" exclaimed Pete, picking up the flat candlestick and going to the top of the stairs; then, looking over, he saw Sam and the irate Slomer immediately beneath him.

Pete leant his arms on the balustrade, made a sign to Jack for silence, and grinned.

The altercation amused him, because Sam was getting bullied for one of Pete's faults. Slomer appeared to have been attending to the liquid part of the supper, and his language was coarse, not to say impious.

Pete, who never used bad language, and never drank except in strict moderation, neither thought Slomer's language nor his state funny; but he did think it funny that Sam should get bullied for no fault of his own.

He had got his first finger through the handle of the candlestick, which was hanging at right-angles, and that candle was dripping grease at about three drops per second down the back of Slomer's dress-coat.

Pete did not notice that, neither did Slomer, who was leaning against the side of the stairs to steady himself.

His hat was a little on one side, and slightly to the back of his head, and that was also receiving a fair share of grease; but the coat was getting the worst of it.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Why don't you behave yourself, Sammy?"

Slomer looked up with a suddenness that caused his tall hat to fall to the floor, then he received three or four drops of grease in his face, and his howl of rage was worthy of an excited hyena.

"You dastardly scoundrel of a nigger!" hooted Slomer, shifting his position; then, gazing at his hat, which looked as though it had been snowed on, he made a strenuous effort to express his feelings.

Pete gazed from the infuriated man to the candlestick, which he righted.

"Do stop your guffawing, Jack!" he said. "You make me so nervous dat I don't know what I am doing."

"Ha, ha, ha! I can tell you. You are dropping grease on Slomer!"

"My dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "I'm sorry!"

"Sorry! Sorry! You scoundrel—you low-bred scoundrel! Sorry! You dare to grin at me like a Barbary ape, and tell me that you are sorry?"

This was, of course, utterly ridiculous, because a Barbary ape, or any other ape, never yet did grin. They always look sad. An ape of any sort will look sad while he pulls an old gentleman's wig to pieces or smashes up his pilloined spectacles. They never grin.

"Why didn't you tell me I was dropping de grease on you, old hoss?"

"Idiotic beast!" howled Slomer, taking off his coat and glaring at it.

"How was I to know?"

"How do you tink he was to know, Sammy? Oh, do stop your guffawing! Can't you see you are annoying de miserable old hoss? Neber mind, Slomer, you go to bed, and if you don't wake up in de morning wid a headache it will be because you are accustomed to it."

"Dastard! Do you insinuate that I am drunk?"

"Well, you ain't been drinking only milk, my dear old hoss. De best ting for you to do is to stop all dis noise and go to bed. You may wake up in a better temper, and it's mighty certain dat you can't wake up in a worse one. Come along, boys! Dere's a mighty smell ob gas here. I believe dat pipe is leaking again; still, it can't do any harm unless we take a light into de room, and we ain't going to do dat."

Pete entered his bed-room, and got to bed. Jack and Sam followed his example. But Slomer did nothing of the sort. He thought he smelt gas, and he was perfectly correct. Pete had allowed so much to escape that it might be smelt all over the house.

Slomer was in a furious passion, but he was not so angry as to overlook his own peril, and he howled to Mrs. Muggins to turn the gas out of the house.

Now, that good lady had had a serious quarrel with her husband, who was in a beaming sort of condition. She was now retiring to her well-earned rest, for, whatever her faults might have been, she was certainly a hard-working woman. Her husband had got the deadly sin of sloth in its deadliest form. He had done nothing that day—nor, for the matter of that, for that year—so she naturally considered that he was the proper person to go into the cellar to turn off the gas, and she gave him the order, making a mental vow to wait until he was undressed, and then send him down again if he had not obeyed her command.

"Tim Murkins!" she shrieked.

"Yes, my dear!" came a distant voice.

"Turn the gas off immediate! It is escaping into the house!"

"Yes, my dear!"

"Your dear, indeed!"

Was Murkins downhearted at the cruel taunt? No, he was not. He was trying to noiselessly extract the cork from one of Slomer's bottles of stout. There was a certain expression of anxiety on his face, but nothing like grief. The lights had all been turned off except the one in the kitchen, where he sat—after he had extracted the cork. He smoked his pipe, and gravely shook his head.

"Men have a lot to put up with in this life," he mused—"a rare lot. It's a crool world. Here's gas escaping into the house this time of night! They say if there ain't enough gas in the air, or if there's too much, it won't explode. I hope it's one or the other. Smells to me as if there was too much. Still, I'll turn it off."

Most men would have done so at once. Murkins was not built that way; he never did anything at once, and very seldom did anything at all except, perhaps, smoke. He was too lazy to like a row, so, having finished Slomer's stout, he turned the gas off at the tap, having first lighted a candle, then he went to the meter.

"It's a hard life—a hard life!" murmured the unhappy man, turning the gas full on, under the impression that he was turning it off.

His wife only allowed a very small quantity of gas to come into that house, and if her paying guests complained, she vowed to them that the meter was too small, and that she would have a larger one fitted. There was plenty of gas coming into the house now, but Murkins did not know it. He went upstairs and truthfully—according to his belief—asserted that he had turned it out of the house. His wife knew that she would be up at least three hours before him, and decided to let him have her views supposing he should be speaking falsely.

The following morning Mrs. Murkins, having discovered her husband's little error, turned off the gas and opened the windows; then she wasted



half an hour in giving some of her views to her still sleepy husband. And when she had finished he asked her if she would mind sending him up a cup of strong tea, because he felt poorly and had got a headache.

To this mild request she did not accede, so Murkins turned over and went to sleep again.

Just before breakfast Jack and Sam went into Pete's offices, and howled with laughter at the effect. Pete had been out, and having knocked up Belby, made him mix some fresh paints.

There was no monotony about Pete's painting, because when he got tired of painting in scarlet he went on to light blue, and as he generally used the same brush for both colours he got several shades. He had finished all the wood-work, and a good deal of paint had gone on his paper. In painting the window-frame he had painted a good deal of glass. But Pete was not particular to an inch or so.

As Jack gazed at the ghastly effect he roared with laughter.

Pete had utterly ruined his light suit of clothes. He had also ruined a suit for Jack, and now that worthy had got a new light suit on, so he kept his distance from Pete.

"How do you tink it looks, boys?" inquired Pete, flinging his brush into the pot, and wiping his hands down the leg of his trousers.

"Ha, ha, ha! Supreme!" roared Jack.

"Den what are you guffawing at it for?"

"It is so beautiful that it makes me laugh."

"Well, Jack, if it is as beautiful as all dat, I wish you would not spoil de wet paint by leaning against my door."

"Botheration!" gasped Jack, springing away from the door, which was painted blue, picked out with scarlet—so was the back of Jack's coat and trousers.

"It's no good my taking pains wid dat door, Jack, when you go and rub all de fresh paint off in dat manner. See what a lot ob trouble you'm gibing me."

"Am I in much mess, Sam?" inquired Jack, getting out of the way, as Pete commenced to repaint his door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam.

Although Jack had received no direct reply to his question, he guessed what the answer was.

"I don't see where the economy comes in!" growled Jack. "You have spoilt two suits of my clothes and one of your own!"

"Can't help dat. Now I'm going to start whitewashing de ceiling."

"Then I'm off!" growled Jack. "But hadn't you better come to breakfast?"

"I ain't got time for breakfast. Besides, I found a meat-pie in de larder, and a pint or so ob milk."

"He has drunk the breakfast milk!" said Jack. "And I expect he has eaten the meat-pie intended for Slomer. That worthy likes meat-pie for breakfast, you know. Still, that can't be helped. We shall be back by lunch-time, Pete."

"Wouldn't you like to watch me do de work?"

"No, I would not. I prefer to be in another place," answered Jack, leaving the room. Then, having changed into another suit, he had breakfast.

Slomer was in such a state of fury that he would scarcely speak to them. The pie had been intended for him; and Murkins, when sent out for more milk, kept them waiting over half an hour for breakfast.

Then as Jack was going out, Mrs. Murkins waylaid him, and informed

him that Mr. Slomer had invited a friend to dinner that night, and made a mild suggestion that Pete should dine out.

"Well, I will see if it can be managed, Mrs. Murkins," said the obliging Jack; "but, you see, he is so busily engaged with his repairs that it is very doubtful if I shall be able to induce him to come out. However, I will do my best."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed that lady. "You see, it might save trouble. I believe Mr. Slomer's friend is a very wealthy nobleman, and he would not like dining with a—with Pete."

"What is the nobleman's name?" inquired Jack.

"Sir Henry Rice, sir."

"All right! We will see what can be done, but you had better prepare dinner for us, because I don't believe for a moment Pete will come out till his repairs are finished. Perhaps the great man will like him. A great many people do."

Mrs. Murkins had her doubts, but did not express them.

When Jack and Sam returned that afternoon, for they changed their minds, and had lunch out, Pete had finished his offices, so far as the decorating went. He had whitewashed the ceiling, and, in doing so, had made the floor in such a frightful mess that he decided to use his surplus paint, of which he had about a pailful, for painting the floor. Some portions of it were blue, and the others scarlet.

Pete was blue, scarlet, and white!

Jack and Sam were so convulsed with laughter that they walked into the room without noticing that the paint on the floor was wet.

"My eyes!" exclaimed Jack, lifting up his feet. "You ought to put notices up of 'Wet Paint.'"

"Should tink people would notice dat widout de notices, Jack," answered Pete, leaving the precious office with a hop-skip-and-a-jump, much to the detriment of Mrs. Murkins' carpets. "Don't tread on de paint more dan you can help, Jack!" bawled Pete.

"I am not going to do so," growled Jack; "but how am I to get out of the room without treading on the paint?"

"Gib a jump. You can get out wid two jumps at most. See if you can get out wid one. I'll bet you a dollar dat you can't get out wid one standing jump."

Now, Jack was rather proud of his jumping powers. He had taken his blue at Oxford, and a standing jump of say eight feet, which was all he had to clear, was nothing to him.

"I'll bet you a sovereign, to be given away in charity, that I do," said Jack.

Sam shifted along the passage, where he was out of sight, and shook with suppressed laughter. Pete looked serious.

"Bery well!" exclaimed Pete. "I'm afraid I shall lose, all de same, I don't want my painting spoilt. I take de bet."

Jack clenched his fists, and swung his arms to and fro, then, bending his knees, he took a spring that he knew should land him half across the passage.

But, alas! he had not reckoned for the slipperiness of the sloppy paint in which he was standing.

His legs shot out like those of a kicking horse, and he rose say a couple of feet in the air, then, with outstretched arms and legs, he fell flat on the painted floor, and took up a few square inches of paint with his cheek.

"Yah, yah, yah!" howled Pete. "Scuse me! Yah, yah, yah! Golly, golly! Yah, yah, yah! I know I shall laugh directly. Your little mishap makes me feel quite pathetic, Jack. Yah, yah, yah! Must turn on de



poetry ober dis job. Yah, yah, yah! What comes in rhyme wid fall and rise?"

"Oh, my eyes!" gasped Jack.

"So it does, Jack!" exclaimed Pete. It was merely Jack's exclamation. He was not in a poetical vein. "But I can't work in your eyes. M'yes! How's dis:

"Den Jack stretched forth his hands, and he gave a great leap,  
From de paint dat was blue, and de paint dat was deep.  
For de space I must clear which is painted bright red,  
I could easily do, if I stood on my head.  
Oh, neber, no neber will I try it no more!  
Quoth Jack de great jumper, as he fell to de floor.

"For de paint dat Pete's placed on de hard wooden boards,  
Is too slippery far, and no foothold affords.  
I hab banged de hard floor wid de front ob my head,  
And I'm painted a piebald ob scarlet and red.  
Oh, neber, no neber did I feel so much pain,  
And neber, no neber will I do it again!"

All the beauties of Pete's poetry were lost on Jack, who was gazing at his third suit.

"Yah, yah, yah! howled Pete. "You hab left your impression on de floor, Jack."

"Have I?" growled Jack, gazing at his hands, one of which was painted blue, and the other scarlet. "If I gave my impressions now I might shock you. You silly, sloppy owl, look what a frightful mess you have made me in!"

"Dat's right!" exclaimed Pete. "Blame de poor nigger! How was I to know you were going to fall? Yah, yah, yah!"

"I am absolutely confident that you had a good idea that I should do so," observed Jack, striding down the stairs, and leaving a trail on the first three steps. He walked into the street, looked both ways, and saw an ill-looking man, trying to sell matches. Jack had noticed the poor wretch as he came in, and had wondered how he got his daily bread.

"Come this way!" cried Jack, seizing him by the collar.

The man dropped his tray into the mud and went, for the simple reason that Jack was a strong man, and he a very weak one. You are apt to get weak if you don't eat, unless you go into the Poplar Workhouse, and live on the earnings of hard-working men, and the kindness of the guardians. Well, this man had never done that. He was trying to earn a few coppers by selling matches, having failed at earning them at anything else. He had spent his last coppers in matches, but they did not go off.

He did, however. He went with Jack, for two reasons. One was that he had no licence for his great enterprise, and the other was because Jack was the stronger man, and the poor match-seller firmly believed that he was a detective. He could not see what a painted state Jack was in, because that worthy had him by the collar at the back, and ran him into the house and up the stairs quickly. The next thing the poor match-seller knew was that he was in Jack's bedroom.

"Now, look here, my friend," quoth Jack. "I am not going to harm you. Are you poor; it is a stupid question, but——"

"My wife and three little ones are poor, sir. The rest does not matter. I know that I am in the wrong, and that I shall have to go to prison, for I cannot pay the fine for having no licence, but——"

"Rats! What do I care about licences?" interposed Jack. "How can a man in your position pay seven shillings—or whatever it is—for trying to get his living. It may be right. I don't know; but I do know that were I a Government official I would hesitate— Pooh! What's the good of talking? Now, look at the beastly state I am in. That was Pete's doing. You see the grinning nigger there? I bet him a sovereign, for charity. Here you are. He has spoilt three suits of clothes of mine. Two of them lie there. The third one will lie there directly, if you wait while I fetch it off. Now, those suits are yours, if they are any use to you. You may be able to get the paint off with turpentine, or something like that."

"Ah! It is answered," murmured the man.

Pete eyed him keenly, and his dog Rory, who had followed into the bed-room, wagged his tail, as the stranger stroked his head. That was enough for Pete. He always declared that Rory would never be friendly with a dishonest man.

"What's your name, old hoss?" demanded Pete.

"James Fergus."

"Want to borrow any money. I'm a moneylender. Tink you would like to borrow someting? You see, I want customers."

"I could never pay you back."

"You seem to be a man wid some sort ob education."

"I have fallen on hard times."

"Tink dose clothes are any use to you?"

"Certainly they are. That paint can easily be got off."

"I vow it was easily got on," growled Jack.

"What's your age, old hoss?"

"Thirty-five."

"Been vaccinated?"

"Yes."

"Had de measles?"

"Yes."

"Eber lived out ob England?"

"Yes."

"Dat's a bad sign. Are you seventy years ob age?"

"I am half that age."

"Noder bad symptom. Eber gambled at Monte Carlo?"

"I have never gambled in my life."

"Understand de moneylending business?"

"No."

"Been a director ob an Australian Mining Company?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, dat's why you are poor. If you want to get rich you ought to get a director of an Australian Mining Company, else an American one. I'm afraid you won't suit. Got any references?"

"No!"

"Well, dat's a good sign. Consider yourself engaged as my secretary at free pounds a week. Dere are de first free pounds. Come here to-morrow morning when de paint is dry, and you will start work. De hours are long and arduous. We start at twelve in de morning, and stop at free in de afternoon, wid an hour and a half during de dinner hour. 'Nuff said! Good-night! Must get dressed for dinner now."

Pete left the room, and James Fergus stood there with the three sovereigns in his hand, and a look of utter bewilderment on his face.

"Pack up those clothes," ordered Jack. "If you are wise, you will come here to-morrow at twelve o'clock. That is all I am going to say, and you can thank your lucky stars that I did not clear the leap."



Jack got his damaged suit off, then scribbled on a card that he had given the clothes to James Fergus, and that worthy went away with those clothes in his arms, and with tears in his eyes. You see, he was thinking of a hungry wife, and three hungry children.

"I ain't got time to go out for dinner, Jack," declared Pete, when Jack tried him.

"We get a better dinner out, you know."

"Bery well, I shall hab de worse dinner in and de better supper out. I ain't going out."

Jack did not say another word, because he knew that it would be perfectly useless. If he had explained that Slomer's friend was too high and mighty to sit at the same table as Pete, that worthy would certainly have insisted on his rights to being there, and the chances are he would have retaliated.

Now, Mrs. Murkins was so confident that Jack would succeed in inducing Pete to dine out that she actually told Slomer it would be so, and she laid his table in the usual room, though with something more than the usual pomp.

The soup was on the table, and Slomer was just about to serve his guest, when Pete and his comrades entered the room.

"Mrs. Murkins," cried Slomer, "I object to that nigger being in the room! You told me he would not be here."

"I was under the impression that he was going to dine out, sir. Mr. Pete will, no doubt, have dinner in the smaller apartment."

"Suttingly, my dear!" exclaimed Pete, glancing at Sir Henry Rice, who like Slomer, was in evening dress. "I shall be most happy; but before I go I would like dis poor old hoss to hab plenty ob soup."

Then, to the amazement of everyone in the room, Pete picked up the stranger, and smashed the soup-tureen to pieces with his body. After that he fairly mopped the table with him, and the number of plates and glasses that he smashed was considerable.

Pete finished by seizing the stranger by the ankle, carrying him into the hall upside down, and flogging him till his yells actually brought Murkins up from the kitchen, where he had been dozing over the fire.

At last Pete released his victim, who bolted from the house, yelling as he went.

"I tink we will hab our dinner in dis room, my dear," said Pete, re-entering the dining-room. "Slomer won't want all de space to himself, seeing dat his visitor has left."

"You dastardly hound of a nigger!" howled Slomer, gazing from the wreckage towards Pete, who flung the cane into the hall, and seated himself in an easy-chair. "Is it not enough that you should insult me, but that you must insult my honoured guest, a gentleman of title, and one with whom I am having large business transactions?"

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete.

"How dare you, fellow! How dare you, I say! What am I to say to Sir Henry?"

"I dunno, unless you ask him how he liked de soup. It ain't no good asking him how he liked his flogging, 'cos I know he didn't like dat."

"Oh, you hound of a nigger! I have a good mind to give you the thrashing you deserve. I shall give you in custody. This outrageous assault shall be punished. Where is my friend, Mrs. Murkins?"

"De echo answers 'Where,'" observed Pete. "You can bet dat man is in anoder place. You see, I wanted to gib him a little surprise, so I mopped de soup up wid him. I rader tink I hurt him a bit; still, no man can go frough life widout suffering some pain. He has taken a dose ob his, and he

ought to be bery tankful now dat it is ober, 'cos, don't you see, he won't hab all dat pain to go frough again, unless he happens to meet me."

"Send for a constable, Mrs. Murkins!" roared Slomer.

"It is useless, my good man," said Jack. "All you could do would be to summon Pete. You could not give him in custody for horsewhipping a man who has fled."

"What did he behave in that disgraceful manner for?"

"I have not the slightest idea, my dear fellow," laughed Jack. "I am not accountable for Pete's actions, I am thankful to say. You had better ask him."

"What made you assault my friend, dog?"

"De assault ain't admitted."

"Not admitted!"

"Nunno! I suttinly gabe de man some soup, and a bit ob a flogging. Yah, yah, yah! I laid dat cane on rader hard, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he bears de marks ob it for a day or two. He's most bound to bear de smart ob it for an hour or so. Would you mind clearing dis sloppiness away, my dear, and letting us hab dinner?"

"I shall have to charge you with the damage, Pete," said Mrs. Murkins, who did not mind the mess so long as she could make a good profit out of it, and that she fully intended to do.

"Bery well, my dear. You can gib Slomer a free dinner at my expense. You see, de poor, simple old hoss is upset; but he ain't nearly so badly upset as he would hab been if I had not chucked his friend out ob de place. De only ting to be hoped is dat he ain't commenced on de large business transactions dat he spoke about."

"Why, fellow? Why?" cried Slomer. "Sir Henry is a most honourable gentleman. I know it for a fact."

"I am glad ob dat, 'cos I happen to know dat he is one ob de biggest rogues unhung."

"You lie, you dog! You lie!"

"Well, you can tink what you like 'bout de man; only, if you let him hab so much as twopence ob your money you are a bigger idiot dan I took you for."

"Preposterous! I have already placed a hundred pounds in his hands for investment, and——"

"Yah, yah, yah! You can write dat off as a bad debt. De man's real name is Spicer. Least, dat's de name he gabe me when he tried to rob and murder me de oder night. A man named Burger is his confederate, and he's got two-free oders. Dey had rader a rough time ob it."

"Spicer, you say, Pete?" exclaimed Jack. "The last four letters of that name spell Rice. Are you sure there is such a person as Sir Henry Rice, Slomer?"

"There must be some mistake," groaned Slomer. "I have known him for several months."

"Can't help dat, old hoss," said Pete. "I hab known him for several days, and dat's rader too long for my liking. He knew me directly I came in de room, de same as I knew him. You will neber see your hundred pounds again. Still, you hab got de consolation ob knowing it was not a thousand."

"You must have made a mistake!" cried Slomer; striding up and down the room.

"Nunno! It's you who has made de mistake, old hoss, said Pete. "I had made a mistake, and Spicer and Rice were not one and de same man, den he would hab called in a sloop, and dealt wid de matter in a more serious



manner; but, don't you see, he would not care to do dat now, 'cos you might gib him in custody for robbing you ob a hundred pounds, and I might gib him in custody for trying to rob me. As it is, I am perfectly satisfied. I hab punished him for his bad behaviour, and dat's enough for me."

"But it is not enough for me!" roared Slomer. "If the man is a swindler I will put him in prison. I'll—I'll——"

"Ob course, you may do all dat, but you won't get your hundred pounds back, unless I'm bery much mistaken. Yah, yah, yah! Some people in dis world are mighty soft, and you'm one ob dem, my poor, old denuded hoss. You can hab a free dinner wid us, seeing dat I hab swabbed up your soup wid Spicer's body."

"I'll—I'll go to the police-station at once!" cried Slomer. "I—I won't be robbed! I tell you that it is all false. I have security for my money, and—and—I won't be robbed. No man shall rob me, I tell you!"

"You may be right 'bout dat, old hoss," said Pete; "but my impression is dat you are about free sizes wrong. De bobbies will only laugh at you. It's no good losing your dinner as well as your hundred pounds. Better defer your visit for an hour or so."

But Slomer rushed from the room without making any repiy.

#### CHAPTER 4.

#### Purchasing Furniture—A Charming Client—Some Desperate Fighting.

THE comrades had finished dinner when Slomer returned, and he was in such a state of fury that he kept bullying Pete. He informed him that he should claim fifty pounds damages, and that he would put him in court if he did not pay it, then he went to bed, and they were heartily glad to get rid of him.

"Now, boys," exclaimed Pete, after breakfast the next morning, "I am going to make a few little purchases. De gasfitter and de telephone-fitter are coming dis morning."

"Ha, ha, ha! What do you want the telephone for?" inquired Jack.

"To help me to lend money," answered Pete.

"You won't need the slightest help in that direction," laughed Jack. "You will find lending money the easiest matter in the world. But you must remember James Fergus will be here at twelve. At least, I hope he will. You ought to leave some work for him to do."

Pete did. He wrote on a piece of paper that he was to go out, buy half-a-crown's worth of papers, and look through the advertisements and see who wanted to borrow money.

Then Pete made his way to a furniture shop, and was received by a shop-walker, who eyed him and Rory somewhat coldly.

"I want some furniture, old hoss," observed Pete. "Hab you got any?"

The great man waved his arm around by way of answer.

"Funny old hoss, ain't he, Jack?" observed Pete, in a voice that was perfectly audible to the great man.

"We only sell furniture for cash," he observed loftily.

"Bery good plan, too, my dear old bag ob bones."

"I haven't time to waste with you. Do you want to purchase anything or not?"

"De man's fermented. I tell him I want to buy some furniture, and he asks me if I want any. Do you suppose, old hoss, dat I am going to buy furniture if I don't want it?"

"Are you going to pay cash for it?"



Pete rapped the great man's head with his knuckles, causing him to yell, while it caused the rest of the staff to laugh.

"It don't sound cracked, eider," observed Pete. "He says he only sells for cash, and den asks me if I am going to pay cash."

"What sort of furniture do you require? What is it?" added the great man, turning to an assistant.

"The manager wants to see you as soon as you are disengaged, Mr. Gull," answered the assistant.

"All I can say is dat manager must hab funny taste if he wants to see you, Gull. Now, show me some chairs, and try to look a little less like an idiot."

Mr. Gull said something that was unbusinesslike, and then pointed to some leather chairs; at least, they were leather cloth. Pete did not know the difference.

"That suite is nine pounds. Two easy-chairs, sofa, four small."

"M'yes! Dey look all right, but I'm most afraid dey ain't strong enough for my purpose. Would dat easy-chair bear me sitting in it?"

"Of course it would. It would bear you jumping on it, and— You silly villain!"

Pete took a mighty leap into the air, and landed with his feet on the seat of that unfortunate chair.

He smashed the frame in front, and his boots went through the leather cloth. Probably they would have gone through the canvas bottom as well had not the chair collapsed on the floor.

"I won't take dat suite," observed Pete. "It ain't strong enough for my requirements."

"You will pay for that chair."

"Why, you said I could jump on it, old hoss!"

"I did not really mean it."

"Den you shouldn't say what you don't mean."

"The damage will be three pounds."

Pete sighed, and handed over the money, then he purchased a thirty guinea drawing-room suite. Gull at once asked for payment, because Pete was going on with his purchases, and when that worthy handed him bank-notes he went away to see that they were all right.

"I tink de light green ob dis little lot will match de painting and de purple dodo," observed Pete, seating himself in one of the chairs. "Dey ain't as strong-looking as I should like, still, he says dey are. Now, you see, Jack, I want to make de office showy—wid economy. I don't want to spend too much on de furniture— Golly! Look at dis smiling object coming along!"

"Mr. Parsons, our manager, sir," murmured Gull, whose manner had changed to a most respectful one.

"So you'm Parsons, are you, old hoss?" exclaimed Pete, tilting the chair backwards, and pulling out a clay-pipe. "Well, I'm a moneylender. You don't want to borrow any money, I suppose?"

The smile left Parsons' countenance. He was not angered—only frightened, for Pete was balancing himself on that chair in a most reckless manner. A seventeen-stone lady might have sat on it with impunity, but it was not built for a six-foot and heavy-weight nigger to balance himself backwards, and suddenly there was a loud crash.

The back and the back legs of the unlucky chair smashed off, and as Pete tried to save himself by catching the front legs, he smashed those off; then, holding one in either hand, he gazed from one to the other in a surprised manner that caused Jack and Sam to roar with laughter.



Pete was sitting on the floor, and a lady, with a hat a yard or so in diameter, who had come in to spend half an hour, seemed to thoroughly enjoy the joke. She was comparatively young, and looked far younger than she was, and she was remarkably beautiful. Pete sighed, and shook his head gravely as he glanced from the fair one towards Jack.

"Mend dat chair a little," observed Pete, springing to his feet. "Attend to de lady. We shall be back in half an hour."

Then Pete seized Jack by the arm, and ran him from the shop.

In an hour's time they returned, and the fair one was still looking at furniture. Parsons and Gull had long since come to the conclusion that she was not a purchaser, and so they turned their attention to Pete, who was. The lady said she would call back to decide, and Pete said he wanted a desk.

"I can recommend this one," said the manager. "Solid walnut. You see, suppose you are in a hurry to leave your office—so, pull down the roll-top, and every drawer is locked. Try them."

Pete put his fingers under the piece of carved walnut, by which the drawer should be opened, and gave it a wrench that tore the woodwork away; then, gazing at the damage, he shook his head dubiously.

"You ain't got anything stronger dan dis, hab you, old hoss?" inquired Pete. "I hab a fancy for rader solid furniture."

"You need it, too, sir," observed Parsons, smiling. He could afford to be amiable, seeing that he had got three pounds for mending a chair that would cost about ten shillings. He would have let Pete smash up half his stock at the same rate of pay. "However, this can easily be repaired. You pulled the drawer rather too hard. Suppose now, you are in a hurry, you can lock that desk in say three seconds. Allow me to show you what I mean."

The manager opened the top and all the drawers, then seated himself in front of the desk.

"Now, suppose I am called away, and have private papers in these drawers. Mr. Gull, just go across the apartment and call me."

"Quite realistic, dis!" growled Pete, who hated humbug in any shape or form.

"Sir—Mr. Parsons!" piped Gull, curling his moustache.

With either hand Parsons closed the six lower drawers, drew down the roll-top, turned the key, and placing it in his pocket, walked away.

"Dat's all right, old hoss!" growled Pete. "But dat requires a lot ob practice, and—"

"My dear sir, not at all—not by any manner of means! Allow me. I open all the drawers. Mr. Gull knows how simple it is."

"Very much so, sir," observed Gull, who always said the same as his manager.

"Now, say you are sitting at this desk, Mr.—er—Mr.—"

"Pete, de nigger, old hoss. Gib him your card, Jack, 'cos he will want to know where to send de office furniture to."

"It shall be delivered this week, gentlemen," said Parsons.

"See here, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "dat furniture is going to be delivered dis afternoon, and if it ain't, I'll come and test ebery chair you hab in de place!"

"It shall be delivered, sir, before four o'clock. Now, suppose you are in a hurry, and are seated here."

Pete seated himself, took out a fountain-pen—which really belonged to Jack—then commenced to write "PETE" in huge letters on the leather of the desk.

Suddenly a shrieking voice rang out. It was a little of Pete's ventriloquism, but very startling to those not in the know:

"Pete! Pe-hete! Come to me! Help! Murder!"

Pete leapt to his feet, kicked one of the drawers to with his foot, crashed another one in with his fist, had a left-footed kick at the other side, and then he slammed the roll-top down with a violence that shook the floor, smashed the key as he wrenched it round, and rushing across the shop, sent Gull flying head-over-heels, bringing down a large vase with which his head came in contact.

"He's a dangerous maniac!" gasped Gull, struggling to his feet and rubbing the back of his head, which had first come in contact with the vase and then with the floor.

Parsons was of the same way of thinking, but he knew that the desk must be sold now. It would need a lot of repairs to make it look anything like new.

The price of the desk was thirty-five pounds, subject to an offer. Parsons knew his way about.

"The price of the desk is forty-five pounds, sir," he observed, as Pete came back, looking as though nothing had happened; "but under——"

"I'll gib you forty pounds cash for it," said Pete.

"We are always willing to meet a customer, and——"

"Do dose remarks apply to Gull?"

"Ha, ha! Quite so. I hope you are not hurt, Mr. Gull? Accidents will—— Well, I will take your figure, and will replace the woodwork and——"

"Neber mind 'bout dat," said Pete. "I want de ting for use, and not for ornament. Send it round before four o'clock. You will find dose notes don't belong to Swindell. Now, I want a carpet to match scarlet and blue painting, wid a violet dodo and a yellow frost."

Pete spent three hundred pounds odd in that shop, but he was quite satisfied—so was Parsons. Gull, who had a bump at the back of his head, did not appear to be so satisfied. However, that did not trouble Parsons. The employes under his rule were never likely to be satisfied, unless they were abnormally contented men.

There are a good many peculiar moneylenders in London, and some of their offices are strange. To go into them, and to look at those desirous of helping others by lending them any amount from twenty pounds to ten thousand with no security, you would think that they had not got twopences to lend.

But there was no stranger moneylender nor stranger office in all London than Pete's. His telephone was fixed, and that pleased him more than anything else.

"I don't see how it is going to work, Jack," he observed, gravely shaking his head at it.

"The electric current goes along that wire and carries your voice."

Pete put his finger on the covered wire, then uttered a wild howl, and leaping backwards, knocked an inkpot off the table, and put about a quarter of a pint of ink on his new carpet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "You could not possibly have got a shock."

"Nunno, Jack," answered Pete, calmly rubbing up the ink with his foot, and making it three times worse, "I didn't exactly get de shock, except to my cistern! You see, I thought I was going to get one, and dat caused ye yowl. Now, de man explained de working ob dis little contraption. You hold de ting to your ear—so—and wind de handle; at least, I tink dat's how it went."



Jack let Pete wind away for about five minutes, and then told him that it had no effect while the receiver was off.

"Golly! Why didn't you tell me dat before, Jack, and not waste my time like dis? I'll try to ring de young lady up again."

Pete idea of ringing her up was peculiar. He wound away for about five minutes, and then Jack suggested that he should take the receiver off and listen to what she had to say. Judging by Pete's words, she was vexed.

"Eh, my dear? I didn't know you could hear me. Well, I'm glad ob dat. Eh—you ain't? Well, we can't all be glad at de same time in dis life, can we, dear? You see— Eh—what do I want? Why, I want some clients. You see, I'm a moneylender, and I want— Nuffin to do wid you, my dear? Well, I suppose it hasn't, unless you would like to borrow some money, and— What? Well, p'r'aps your sister would, or some ob your lovers. What number? Well, I should say a pretty girl like you would hab two-free hundred. Golly! She's angry now. I can tell by de sort ob yowl in her voice. Oh, golly! She heard dat. What do I want, my dear? I don't want anything. Woorooh!"

There was a rattling in Pete's ear that caused him to drop the receiver. The angry young lady was giving him the benefit of a little ringing. The bell, of course, did not sound, but the rattling did.

"I don't care much for de cistern!" growled Pete. "Still, p'r'aps I shall get used to it presently. Now den, you buzz off, boys, 'cos you'm interrupting my business. I hab put in a lot ob advertisements, telling anyone wanting money to apply to Pete, Telephone No. 642. I 'spect I shall be getting some calls presently. I wish you would not scratch dat sofa before you lie down on it, Rory. You are spoiling de sleep ob it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you mean nap?"

"Nap and sleep much de same ting, Jack. Buzz off! I don't want you. Come here, Jimmy. Now, you see, dese are de interests charged. I had dem worked out for me. You can do de filling in ob de bills, and all dat. Jimmy has had a good education, boys, only he didn't put it in de right direction. Started as a clerk, you know, and came down to be a match-seller, at which game dere ain't enough profit. Nunno! De man ought to hab started as a moneylender, 'cos de profit on dat line ob business is enormous."

Jack and Sam glanced at each other, and went. Jimmy got out his account-books, and worked out a system for keeping them. The change in his personal appearance, now that he was wearing one of Jack's cleaned suits, was surprising.

Pete seated himself at his desk and commenced to write; but he had not written many words when Jimmy entered to tell him that a lady had called to see him on business.

"Say I'm disengaged for free hours, and after dat time I shall be out for free weeks."

"Then, shall I show her in, sir?"

"Don't you dare to call me dat again, and don't you dare to show dat lady in when I tell you I'm disengaged."

"You mean engaged?"

"Much de same ting when I'm busy. Is she pretty?"

"Very!"

"Den send her away at once, and tell her never to come here again. I don't want her marrying Jack, and—"

"I shall do nothing like that, Pete!" exclaimed the lady, smiling sweetly as she swept into the room. Then she uttered a sort of suppressed scream

as she gazed at Pete's decorations. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, gracefully seating herself in an easy-chair. "What extraordinary decorations!"

"Don't you like dem, my dear?"

"I can't say that I do," answered the lady. "But, Pete, don't be unkind to me. My name is Gladys Trehearn. My poor husband died many years ago."

"Poor man!" growled Pete, as the lady stopped to see what effect her words had. "I'm mighty busy just now, Gladys, and——"

"Yes, so I heard."

"You see, Pete, I'm all alone in the world, and——"

"Wowow—wooroo!" howled Pete, leaping to his feet, as his telephone bell rang in the most violent manner. "Beg pardon, Gladys, but dat bell startled me, and my nerves are rader upset dis morning, what wid—— Hellup! Dere it goes again! I wonder who is dere?"

"Hadn't you better see?"

"How do you tink I had better do dat, my dear?"

"Take the receiver off and listen."

Pete approached the instrument, then he leapt back again, for once more the bell started off.

"Hallo!" he howled, when the bell had stopped ringing. "Nunno, my dear, I ain't howling at you! Only I wanted to—— Your husband wants to see me? Well, tell him to call."

Pete replaced the receiver, and sat down at his desk.

"As I was saying, Pete, I am quite alone in the world——"

"I'm bery sorry for you, my dear, but I can't help it. You see, it ain't de slightest use you coming to me, 'cos I would neber gib my consent to any such arrangement. I dunno why you went to de furniture shop yesterday."

"So you recognise me?"

"Well, my dear, I recognised dat hat. Now, as I was saying—— Woohoo! Dere goes dat bell again. Ain't it enough to drive a nigger mad? Eh—what? Look you here, old hoss, if you dare to disturb me again—— Habn't disturbed me at all before? Well, someone else did. I ain't got time to attend to you. Dere's a beautiful widow in my office, and she wants to marry Jack. I'm trying to get rid ob her before Jack comes in. Eh? Well, call round and see me."

"Now, my dear," exclaimed Pete, "as I was saying——"

"Do you mean over the telephone?"

"Golly! Could you hear dat, my dear?"

"Why, you silly man, everyone in the house must have heard it!"

"Golly! I neber tought ob dat!"

"Well, Pete, I am not thinking of marrying."

"Dat may be, Gladys; but you will be tinkin about it if Jack asks you de question."

"I learnt at the furniture shop that you were a moneylender, and I am in need of a little money."

"Oh, is dat all? I tought you had come to ask my consent to your marriage wid Jack. Golly! If dat bell ain't going again, and it makes me leap in de air each time it starts, 'cos it startles me. I sha'n't take any notice ob it. Go on, my dear."

"How much could you lend me, Pete?"

"How much do you want, my dear?"

"Could you lend me a hundred pounds?"

"De interest is twenty-five per cent.—dat means twenty-five pounds you will hab to pay me beyond de hundred."

"I don't mind that. Could you lend me two hundred?"



"That would be two twenty-five pounds' interest."

"Well, we may as well make it five hundred."

Pete pulled a large cheque-book from his drawer and filled in a cheque for five hundred pounds.

"Would you rader hab de cheque or de money, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"I would rather have notes, please," answered the charming widow, when she saw the slovenly way Pete had filled in the cheque.

The bankers, however, were quite accustomed to Pete's cheques, and he sent Jimmy to the bank, which was close by.

Meantime the bell kept going at an extraordinary rate; sometimes it would stop for a few minutes, then it would go on again louder than ever.

"If dat bell don't drive me into a lunatic asylum, I dunno what will!" growled Pete. "I shall tie it up for de present."

He looked about for a piece of string, and not finding any, cut about three feet off the communicating-wire; then he used the corded wires to tie up the hammer. It was rather thick for the purpose, but he forced it through, bent the hammer forwards, and tied it up as though he fondly imagined that it would ring again.

Jimmy, who was perfectly honest, came back with the notes, and Pete handed them to the astonished lady.

"Pete, you are a dear!" she exclaimed.

"Well, you be off, my dear!" growled Pete.

Mrs. Trehearn gracefully made her exit, having shaken hands with Pete.

"Just make an entry in de book, Jimmy," said Pete, when his first client had disappeared. "Gladys Trehearn, five hundred pounds, at twenty-five per cent. How much profit do I get on dat?"

"A hundred pounds—and twenty-five pounds, if——"

"Well, keep a separate account ob de profits."

"What is the lady's address?"

"Eh?"

"Her address?"

"I forgot to ask dat."

Jimmy groaned. He foresaw that his appointment would be of short duration.

"For how long have you lent the money?" he inquired. He felt that the question was a needless one, because he made a pretty shrewd guess for how long that money would be lent.

"I didn't mention dat. Still, just make de usual date."

"From what I have been able to make out it is six months."

"Bery well. Should say dat would suit."

"Did you get her to sign a promissory note?"

"Golly, I forgot dat! Who's dat? Dis business is getting on my nerves."

It was a very big man with a very red face and a very loud voice. He was shown in; then a gaspy expression came over his face, after that he burst into a roar of laughter.

"What's de next article?" inquired Pete, eyeing the stranger up and down.

"Are you Pete?" inquired the stranger, seating himself in an easy chair, and lighting a cigar, while he kept his shiny tall hat on his head.

"I am."

"Well, I'm Mr. Grice. There's my card. Saw your advertisement and have come about a small loan of a hundred pounds. What interest do you charge?"

"Twenty-five per cent., and de loan must be for six months."

"Very well. I'll take it."



Pete called for a promissory note, and told Jimmy to fill it in. That worthy did so for a hundred and twenty-five pounds.

"Will you hab a cheque or notes?" inquired Pete. "I hab got enough notes in my pocket," added Pete, pulling out a large roll.

"I'll have notes," exclaimed Grice, picking up a pen, and signing the note.

"What's your age, old hoss."

"Thirty-five; but what's that got to do with it?"

"Are you single or married?"

"Single."

"Well, dat's a good ting for your wife. Eber been in prison?"

"See here, my lad, I didn't come here to be insulted, and it wouldn't go well with the man who tried it on."

"What security can you give?"

"Personal."

"In dat case I shall have to stuff you into dat safe till de money and interest are paid."

Pete's safe was a small one, though heavy. Grice would have required a fearful lot of stuffing to get into it, seeing that he was fully six feet tall and proportionately broad.

"See here, my lad," he cried, striding up to Pete, who remained seated.

"Don't you play the fool with me. You hand me over my money."

"I ain't lending you money widout security."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like your personal appearance. Ob course, you may be honest enough, 'coss you can't judge by a man's countenance; but as I consider you look a mighty big thief, you must 'scuse me for not lending de money."

"There's your security," roared Grice, striking the table with his fist, which he brought down on the promissory note.

"It don't look worf a hundred and twenty-five pounds to me."

"You have lent the money, and I'm going to have it before I leave this room."

"Can't see how I hab lent de money when it is in my pocket."

"You have got my signature. Anyone would lend me the money on my note of hand."

"Well, my dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "if dat is de case you take dat promissory note to de nearest bank and tell dem to lend you de money."

"You give me my money, or I'll knock your nigger's head off your shoulders."

"It ain't your money, old hoss. Dat little lot is my money. Good morning. Shut de door after you."

"You won't pay me, won't you," cried Grice, placing his tall hat on the table, and buttoning his coat. "Very well, then I will pay you."

Then to show that he was in earnest he caught Pete a blow on the top of the head with his fist that would have stunned most men. It did not appear to have the slightest effect on Pete, who remained seated in his chair with truly exasperating calmness.

"Now, see here, old hoss," he exclaimed. "We don't allow any sort ob disturbance in dis office, which is a well-conducted one, and if you feel like knocking anyone about, de best ting you can do is to go outside and knock down de first bobby you come to. Dey are used to dat sort ob ting, and don't seem to mind it."

"Are you going to give me that money, or are you not?"

"You guessed it de second time, old hoss," said Pete.



"Then take that, you black beast of a nigger."

What Pete was requested to take was a blow at his head; but he did nothing of the sort. Putting his head round it, he rose to his feet, then with his open hands, he commenced to slap Grice's face first on one side and then on the other, with a rapidity that was surprising.

Grice was so confused by these stinging blows, that, although he struck back, he only hit Pete on the top of the head once or twice. He never once hit him in the face.

"Tell me when you hab had enough ob de slapping, old hoss," exclaimed Pete. "I don't want to hurt you in any way."

"Stop it, you fiend!" howled Grice.

"Don't tell me to stop if you tink you would like a little more," observed Pete, keeping it up in fine style. "It would not be de least trouble for me to keep dis up all night, to say nuffin ob de daytime. Had enough, eh? Well, good-morning, old hoss. Nice sort ob day, ain't it, and remarkably warm for de time ob de year? Turn to de left, please, and shut de door. Oh, here comes Jack and Sammy. Come in, boys. Golly! Here's a fire-escape man coming."

"I am from the Telephone Company," observed the official, "Something appears to have gone wrong with your telephone. We cannot make you hear, and there has been a lot of calls for you."

"Come in, my dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete. "You see, dat bell annoyed me. It kept rattling away just as I was starting to be busy, and it gabe such shocks to my cistern dat I tied it up."

"Why, you've severed the connection," gasped the official. "You have cut the wires."

"Dat rope? Well, I wanted dat to tie up de bell."

"There wasn't any need to tie up the bell after you had cut the connection. You would find it come cheaper to use an ordinary piece of string—or else leave the receiver off. You will have to pay for the repairing of this if you want to use the telephone."

"How much will de charge be for de repairs?"

"Five shillings."

"Dere you are, old hoss. Get on wid de job, and do it as quickly as you can. I didn't know dat cord was ob any use. And look here, could I hab a telephone widout any bell?"

"What would be the use of that?"

"I dunno. But I'm mighty certain dis one ain't much use. It's more trouble dan it's worf. However, buzz off, and get de repairs done. Golly! Here come some more customers. I'm going to take a half holiday dis afternoon. I hab a hundred pounds profit dis morning, so we will go into de East End and gib it away to de poor."

Jack and Sam did not question him as to how he had made his profit, because they knew perfectly well that it would be a paper one, and those are never worth considering, especially in the line of business Pete had started. Neither did he mention that Gladys had called, thinking that the charming widow would be dangerous as far as Jack was concerned.

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### In the Slums—How Pete Distributed the Profits—Friend or Foe?

**A**FTER dinner that night, the comrades started east, and Rory seemed to feel very much injured because they would not take him, although, in reality, he had lost nothing, for it was about as miserable a night as could be imagined.

To begin with, it was raining, and then there was a dense fog, which



grew denser the further East they proceeded. Jack and Sam raised no objections, because they knew Pete was going to distribute a hundred pounds amongst the poor, and it was worth getting wet and cold, and probably miserable with sights of poverty, to help in that work.

Pete had got a hundred pounds in gold in his pockets, and about twenty pounds in silver."

"You see, boys," he observed, "I am only going to gib away de hundred pounds profit, but I brought de silver 'cos I tought some ob de people might not be worthy ob so much as a sovereign at a time. I shall make de account up when I get home, and just spend de hundred pounds."

"Quite so, Pete," exclaimed Jack. "But how do you know that you have made a hundred pounds profit?"

"Why, I lent five hundred pounds at twenty-five per cent. Jimmy said dat came to a hundred."

"It comes to a hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"Eh? I believe he did say dat amount, only you see de profits on a money-lending business are so large dat I wasn't considering de odd money. I can make dat up to de poor."

"Quite so. Or you might put it down to office expenses. You will have a few pounds to deduct for those. But look here, Pete, suppose that man—men are not always honest, and——"

"He wasn't a man, Jack. He was a woman—sort ob female, you know."

"Come, Pete, Gladys wouldn't like to be called a female——"

"Golly, golly!" gasped Pete. "I knew it was a serious matter. Could tell by de way you looked at her in de furniture shop dat it was a case ob lub at first sight. Where d' you meet her afterwards, Jack?"

"I didn't meet her."

"Den how did you know she came to borrow five hundred pounds from me, and how did you know her name?"

"I saw the name on a card on your table, but had not the slightest idea that the name belonged to the lady or the lady to the name."

"Oh, I see! Well, it ain't as bad as I tought it was. Now come along. W'm got to distribute my profits among de poor."

"Yes, that's the idea," exclaimed Jack, "and a very good one, too; but suppose that lady never pays you back a penny of the money she has borrowed?"

"Eh?"

"I want to know where your profits will come in then?"

"But she will pay me back, Jack. She said she would."

"Well, I don't suppose you would have lent her the money if she had told you she did not intend to pay it back. She may be perfectly honest."

"I tink she was, Jack. She looked it."

"But suppose she has not gôt the money to pay you back?"

"Den I don't 'spect she will do it."

"Then where will your profits come in?"

"It's a funny ting, Jack, dat you start supposing all dese absurd ideas. I know when a person is honest by de personal appearance. I wouldn't lend money to dat old hoss who wanted it, 'cos I didn't like his appearance."

"And you did like the appearance of the charming widow?" laughed Jack. "However, try your money-lending business for a few months, and then see what your profits are like."

"Dat's exactly what I am going to do, Jack, and in de meantime we will gib away dese profits. To do dat it will be necessary for us to find some poor people who want money."

"We sha'n't have the slightest difficulty in doing that when we get down



East," laughed Jack. "In fact, I don't think it would matter to what part of London we went; we should be able to find plenty of people who would accept a portion of a hundred pounds—or even the whole of it."

Pete chose the way at random, and he called the first ragged urchin he met towards him.

"What's your name, my lad?" he inquired.

"Bill."

"Bery well, Bill, would you like a sovereign to buy food wid?"

"Who are you getting at, Snowball? Do you take me for a muggins?"

"Well, dere's your sovereign. Don't spend it all at once, and you can send any oder children to me dat you tink would like some money. You might also send some ob their moders. 'Nuff said!"

Pete was quite right. There was enough said. Bill gazed at his sovereign, carefully turning it over, then he bit it, after that he dodged round the corner, and kept his eyes on Pete. In about two minutes he came back again.

"I've brought another kid as wants a sovereign," he said.

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm a smart lad," cried Pete, handing him a second sovereign; "but see here, Bill, I don't want you to send de same boy each time. I want you to send oder children dat would like some money.

Bill was a popular lad, and had many friends. He sent them all, stipulating that they should give him half what they got, and in about ten minutes Bill had five pounds capital. No doubt he would have made a good thing out of it, had not Pete scattered a handful of silver amongst the crowd. And then Pete and the comrades found themselves surrounded by a clamorous crowd of men, women, and children.

The elders came rushing out of the public-houses, and as Pete refused to give to the men, they got very nasty, and commenced to hustle Pete, with a view to helping him distribute that money.

"Here, you get out ob my way, old hoss!" cried Pete, giving a ruffianly-looking man a slap on the top of his head that caused him to sit on the pavement and gaze at the stars.

"A dirty nigger ain't going to knock us about like that!" cried another. "Out him, mates!"

Then an ugly rush was made. The comrades got their backs against a door of one of the slum buildings, and they hit out in a manner that kept the foe at bay. They fought shy of those blows after three or four had been received, and when Pete made a dash amongst them, they scattered along the street.

"My friends, take refuge here!" exclaimed an old man, opening the door against which they had been fighting. "Those men will murder you. Quick! I will bar the door. They will not harm you inside my house. My name is Berry, and everyone knows me for an honest man."

"You ain't got many acquaintances, hab you, old hoss?" inquired Pete, eyeing the old man, who wore a long, grey beard, and who had small, bleary eyes, which his shaggy brows almost concealed. He did not look anything like an honest man.

"Many, many; and I befriend them all, only, unfortunately, I have not got enough money to scatter it like you do."

"Well, you see, old hoss, I'm a moneylender," observed Pete, "and, as you know, dey always hab a lot ob money. I am sort ob proving to dese two grinning articles, whose names are Jack and Sam, while mine is Pete, dat moneylenders can't be robbed; and as I don't want to take de profits I make, I am gibing dem away to de poor."

"Ah! A very worthy object," said Berry; "but you set about the distribution the wrong way. You should only give it to the deserving



poor. You should distribute it through a man who knows them as well as I do."

"What, sort ob hand you de money, and let you distribute it as you tink fit?"

"That would be the better plan."

"Oh, well, I will tink it ober, old hoss; but seems to me I rader prefer my plan for de start! You might forget de distributing part ob de business, or you might find dat de poor weren't deserving enough for de purpose. Nunno, Berry, you'm such a mighty honest-looking man dat I wouldn't like to put temptation in your way. 'Nuff said."

Berry was taking stock of the three comrades. He had been watching Pete's extraordinary method of distributing money from the window, and had come to the conclusion that he would save them trouble by getting them into his house, where they would be able to distribute as much money as they required.

"There are a few poor men in my kitchen, to whom I have been giving a supper," observed Berry. "I happen to know that they are very deserving. Perhaps you will come into the kitchen and see them? You will be able to form an opinion of their honesty. This way, if you please."

There was no need for Berry to show the way to his kitchen. It smelt so strongly of tobacco, rum, and onions that a blind man could have found it; besides this, some noisy voices also served as a guide.

Berry descended some stairs, turning once or twice to make sure that the comrades were following him, then he opened the door of the kitchen.

It was a large room, with a long table in it, and about a dozen men were seated at supper, which consisted of some sort of stew. Neither the kitchen nor its occupants were by any means clean; and if the men were honest, their looks certainly belied it.

They looked about as big a set of ruffians as Berry could have collected, even in that rough part.

Amongst them, seated at the further end of the table, Pete recognised Burger, the man who had previously tried to rob him under Spicer's auspices, and, knowing at least that this ruffian was not anything like honest, Pete stepped up to him, seized him by the back of the neck, and banged his face into the plate of stew with a force that smashed the plate.

Then the trouble began. With one accord, and without the slightest warning, the whole gang sprang upon Pete, and the next moment they found themselves fighting with the three comrades.

Berry watched the scene in silence from the doorway.

Beyond the smashing of china, and the occasional groan of a man who received a blow, there was not as much noise as might have been expected.

The one aim of the men was to get behind Pete, and this they succeeded in doing, but they suffered considerably while doing so; and then, as they clung to him, he flung them in all directions.

One of the honest creatures drew a jemmy, and made a murderous blow at Pete's head with it, but ere the blow descended the miscreant received Pete's fist between his eyes, and down he went; then Pete got possession of the jemmy, and after that no one ventured near him.

"Just keep near de door, boys!" exclaimed Pete, grabbing Berry, and dragging him into the room, the door of which he locked. "I hab lost all my money in dat scuffle, and it's just as well dat we didn't bring any valuables wid us. Now, I'm going to hab dat money back. You see, Berry, as your friends are so mighty honest, I am going to hold you responsible for de loss, and it will hab to be made good before we leave dis place."

"You can't fight the lot of us," growled one of the miscreants; "and if we have any of your nigger's nonsense we shall set on you agin."



"You will find dat we can fight fairly well when we once start, old hosses! Ob course, we would rader not start if we can help it, but when we really let ourselves go you will notice de fact, 'cos you will find it become rader warm."

"Who's got your nigger's money, you worm?"

"I dunno, and it doesn't make the slightest difference to me; but it will make some difference to him, 'cos I'm going to gib him as much as he deserves, and dat will be a bit more dan he requires."

"Put that jemmy down, and we will quickly show you who's master!"

"Shall put it down on your noddles if you don't hand ober dat money."

"We ain't going to allow a nigger to defy us!"

"You ain't got de choice in de matter, my poor, denuded old hosses! You see, I'm going to hab dat money back before I leabe dis place, den I'm going to stir you up. I hab taught wild beasts, so I ought to be able to teach you, one way or anoder. Dere's going to be a bad fight, and as it has got to come, I may as well start at once. Take dat jemmy, Jack. I don't fancy weapons will be used, but if dey are you can use dat one. I'll soon hab anoder."

"Here's your money, lying on the floor," growled Burger. "It must have dropped out of your pocket when you was attacking us."

"All right! Dat seems to be some ob it, but it can lie on de floor till de fight is finished. Don't interfere, boys, unless you see de need for it, only don't let anyone escape. Dis money belongs to de poor, and dey are going to hab it."

"We don't want to fight," growled Burger, who saw that Pete meant mischief.

"Nunno!" he exclaimed. "And I didn't want to be robbed. We'm bof going to hab a little more dan we wanted."

There was a noise now, for, clenching his fists, Pete dashed amongst them, and they made a very poor show of resistance. Every man thought more of getting out of the way of the blows he struck. It was one man against twelve, and they ought to have been able to overcome him by concerted action, but there was nothing like that. Within two minutes, Pete was chasing the cowardly ruffians round the room.

Burger was the only man who drew a knife, and the next moment he must have wished he had not done so, for as he sprang at Pete, stabbing him in the arm, he received a terrific blow in the face, and went down stunned and bleeding.

The sight of that blow completely quelled the rest, who now only dodged out of the way as he rushed at them. They were completely demoralised, and sued for mercy.

"Bery well!" exclaimed Pete, winking at his comrades, as Sam bound up his wounded arm. "I dunno dat I particularly want to hurt you, but, mind you, I shall if you don't obey me. De amount ob money dat has got to be placed on dat table is eighty pounds. I dunno exactly how much I had, but I'm certain dere was as much as dat. It belongs to de poor, and de poor are going to hab it. Neber mind 'bout dat arm, Sammy. It's only just frough de flesh."

Burger placed two bags of gold on the table, and declared that he had found them on the floor. He was still in a very dazed condition. Then, as this did not satisfy Pete, some loose gold and silver was also placed there.

"You don't appear to hab had leisure to undo de bags ob gold," observed Pete, "and I know one ob dem was half empty; it still seems to be in the same condition. Bery well! I will accept dat for de lot. Now den, old rascal," added Pete, as he collected the money. "You'm too old to hit,

and I dunno dat it would do you any good to send you to prison, but you hab got to remember dat your thieves den is marked, and you may hear some more about dis matter. You might ask Spicer how he liked de flogging I gabe him, Burger. Tell him dat I shall gib him anoder one de next time I meet him, and de same remarks apply to yourself. 'Nuff said! Come along, boys!"

Then the comrades left the place, and Jack flung the jemmy into the hall. "Seems to me dat dey are all mixed up togeder! exclaimed Pete. "It's mighty certain dat Spicer knows some ob dem, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's at de head ob de gang. Still, we ain't police constables, so I don't see what more we can do in de matter. Dey ain't robbed us, and you can bet de bobbies hab got deir eyes on dem. We hab got to distribute de rest ob dis money, and I tink we will do dat by going into some ob de houses."

"I reckon you would find it a safer plan to send it by post," said Sam; "or else give it to some of the missionaries."

"Nunno! I hab got to do it myself."

"In that case it is no use arguing the matter," laughed Jack. "If you have made up your mind we sha'n't be able to alter it. We will come with you."

That errand quite upset Pete. Some of the scenes of poverty were too much for him, as also was the gratitude of the poor creatures. He only gave to women and children, but there were plenty of them, and he came away sick at heart with the suffering he saw.

"It's too mighty awful, boys, to tink dat dere's such poverty knocking about in de world. Work ought to be found for all men who want it, and dose who do not want it ought to be made to take it."

"The question is, how can you do it?" exclaimed Jack.

"Tax de rich. If a man has got a few square miles ob land he ought to employ people on it. Ebery man ought to be able to get work, and if dere ain't enough room in England, let de Government send dem out to where dere is, and see dat dey get de work."

"You overlook the difficulties," said Jack.

"Dat's de best way, if you want to conquer dem. Ob course, dere are difficulties, same as dere are in eberyting else. It's de duty of de Lords ob de Admiralty and de suffragettes to put a stop to it, and I shall tell dem so if dey ain't careful—at least, I shall tell de Lords ob de Admiralty, and you can tell de suffragettes, Jack."

Pete was very silent on the way home, and when they arrived there they found Slomer in a very bad temper. The fact is, he was grieving over the loss of his money, and it made him angry with every one, especially with Pete, so he blamed him for other things.

Pete sat by the fire smoking his pipe, and apparently listening, but when Slomer had been reviling him for quite half an hour Pete commenced to refill his pipe.

"Say all dat ober again, old hoss!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't listening."

"You silly, empty-headed brute of a nigger!"

"Well, you see, my dear old hoss, I was tinkin' ob de poor people we met to-night, and how mighty hard deir lives must be, and I couldn't bery well be tinkin' ob what you hab been saying at de same time. If you don't mind just repeating de observations, I will make remarks upon dem, and tell you where you are right—if dere happen to be any points on which you are right. Seeing de way you hab been talking, I should tink dere must be one or two points where you ain't quite wrong, dough I must say you generally are wrong. Still, you can't help dat, not habing much ob a brain-pan. I fancy de poor man has got fatty degeneration ob de brain."



Jack. I dunno weder Sammy could do anyting for it. P'r'aps tapping him might do some good. You might try tapping his head wid a hammer for a start."

"You are a disgrace to this boarding establishment!" declared Slomer. "I don't see why I should be annoyed by a ruffian like you! I'll have you turned out of the place!"

"I don't tink dat's one ob de wise remarks," observed Pete. "You see, my poor, denuded old hoss, it stands to reason dat Mrs. Murkins would rader get rid ob one ob you—I must say you look more like free ob you—dan she would like to get rid ob us. Dere's more profit out ob us in a day dan dere is out ob you in a week. In fact, considering de amount ob food you wolf, I should say dere isn't any profit at all in you!"

"You stupid brute, you eat ten times as much as I do!"

"Two wrongs don't make a right, old hoss. You are quite old enough to know dat. I'm 'most afraid your education must hab been neglected, and dat your schoolmistress was too sparing wid de slipper. I ain't got time to take you in hand now; besides, my slipper is rader too thick for de purpose. Yah, yah, yah! De man has gone to bed. Well, I dunno dat it isn't de best place for him. He's no mighty good out ob bed. Funny ting it is how some men can get into a rage when dere ain't good cause for it. Seems to me dat de best ting to do when dere's a lot ob temper flying about is what Byron Wagglespeare advises."

"What's that, Pete?" laughed Jack.

"Let de oder fellow wrangle till de storm has passed away,  
Den he'll do a lot ob tinkin 'bout de tings you didn't say."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's capital, Pete!" declared Jack. "But neither Byron nor Shakespeare wrote it."

"You tink dey couldn't hab managed it widout—— Golly! Here comes de old hoss again!"

Slomer strode up to the mantelpiece, then he looked on the table.

"You have taken my purse, you black rascal!" he cried. "Give it to me at once!"

"Now, see here, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "you ain't got de right to leabe your purse about like dat! It's placing temptation in de way ob a poor nigger."

"If you don't give me that purse I will send for a constable at once! I placed it on the corner here by the matches, and forgot to pick it up."

"Den you ought to be punished for your carelessness, old hoss."

"You are sitting in my chair."

"Cos it was de most comfortable one, old hoss, and I changed ober when you left de room. You ain't got de right to leabe a purse about like dat, specially as you don't know how much is in it."

"Yes, I do. There were two pounds ten in gold in it. I took out half-a-sovereign and gave it to Murkins to pay for—for something."

"Quite right, too, old hoss. Always pay for what you owe. I hope Murkins ain't forgotten de change."

"There was no change, you thieving nigger! I believe you are a burglar, or something worse, but you won't rob me with your money-lending, as you call it. I know you! Are you going to give me that purse, or are you not?"

"Nunno! I don't like careless men, and tink dey ought to be taught a lesson."

Now, it so happened that Jack had seen Pete reach his hand out and take something from the mantelpiece, then place it in his pocket; and knowing

how fond he was of practical jokes, also knowing that if Slomer could place him in an awkward position he certainly would, Jack thought the sooner the joke was ended the better it would be.

"Give him his purse, Pete," he said.

"He's got to be taught a lesson, Jack. He ain't got de right to place temptation in de way ob a nigger, who ain't as honest as he might be."

"Now, Pete, don't play the fool!" said Jack sternly; though he feared it would be quite useless if Pete had made up his mind to play a practical joke. And he really had done so. "Give the fellow his purse."

"I wish you would not be so mighty obstinate, Jack!" observed Pete, puffing at his pipe with exasperating coolness while he stroked Rory's head. "I hab told you already dat de old hoss's schoolmistress didn't use de slipper wid sufficient severity. Now, I am going to show him dat it is dangerous to leabe a purse about when black men are knocking around. De same remarks apply to white men."

Slomer rang the bell violently. Mrs. Murkins answered it, and when she found that a missing purse was the cause of the disturbance she called her husband up; because, remembering the missing rent, that was so cruelly stolen from him, she thought he might know something of the missing purse.

Mr. Murkins was busy with his paper, and he let his better half do some shrieking; then when the voice was getting threatening, he laid his paper on the table.

"Work, work, from morning to night!" he groaned. "She's a good wife in some senses, but she expects a man to do more than is in his power. It's downright disheartening! I rather fancy Snowball. Then there's a nigger in the house—Snowball and a nigger. Combining the two, I shall back Snowball for the sweepstakes."

"I'm coming, Martha!" bawled Murkins; and he actually got as far as the stairs, then he went back to see the odds against Snowball. But he got up at last.

"Did you see me take out my purse when I gave you the money for that account this evening?"

"For the beer bill? Yes, sir."

Slomer muttered something that sounded like "Fool!"

"Where did I put my purse?" he continued.

"On the corner of the mantelpiece, sir."

"That is proof positive. No one has been in this room since. I left the room a minute ago, and when I came back for the purse it was gone. You have stolen it! You have admitted as much. Now, unless you hand it to me this instant you shall be given in custody!"

Pete wiped his eyes with the corner of Murkins' coat, and sighed deeply. Jack and Sam laughed. All the same, they would have preferred his giving up the precious purse. Mrs. Murkins flatly refused to allow her husband to go for a constable, because she knew that he would not be back till shortly after eleven. She also refused to go for one herself, because she declared that she was quite certain Pete was not a thief. Under these circumstances, Slomer went for one himself, and actually brought that constable into the room. But the policeman was a man of good understanding, and he guessed from Pete's manner that he was not a common thief.

"I think you will be wise to make a thorough search for the missing purse before you give the negro in custody," he said.

"I tell you he has stolen it! It was on that mantelpiece. He moved across and took it off. Those two young men know that."

"Not at all!" exclaimed Jack, smiling, as the constable looked at him.



"I know that my comrade Pete took something off the mantelpiece, but I do not know what it was. It is absolutely certain, constable, that he would no more steal a purse than I would—or you would. He may have taken it in fun. Do stop your nonsense, Pete! Don't you see the matter is getting serious?"

"I can't help dat, Jack," said Pete. "What would de sentence be for stealing a purse, old hoss?"

"That depends on who you was brought before, and what you had done before."

"Suppose I confess, will it make any difference to de sentence?"

"It might do."

"Sort ob make it longer?"

"No; shorter. But anything you say I may use in evidence against you."

"I admit de purse was on de mantelpiece, and I admit it ain't dere now."

"Do you wish to say that you stole it?" inquired the constable, with evident surprise.

"Eh?"

"I say did you steal it?"

"What, sort ob put it in my pocket for de fun ob de ting?"

"Well, you won't find it so funny if that gentleman gives you in custody."

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete, causing Mrs. Murkins to step forward, because he struck a match on the mahogany arm of her easy-chair.

"Did you steal the purse?" demanded the constable.

"Am I bound to answer dat question?"

"Well, you can please yourself about the matter; only if you are joking—"

"But I'm quite serious, old hoss. To answer dat question truthfully, I did not steal de purse. All de same, I know who did, 'cos I saw him do it."

"I'll swear it wasn't me!" cried Murkins, as his wife fixed a stony stare upon him.

The unfortunate woman knew that he was far more likely to be the thief than the comrades.

"Who did it, then?" demanded the constable, who thought he had got a case, after all.

"Am I bound to convict dose two idiots sitting dere—I mean Jack and Sammy?"

"You are not bound to convict anyone, or to say anything, but if you don't make the matter clear, and if this gentleman gives you in custody, I shall be bound to take you to the station."

"I ain't at all sure dat you would be able to do it, Bobby. Ob course, you might try."

"I give him in custody!" cried Slomer.

Pete placed his fingers together, and touched his forehead with them. The constable snapped handcuffs on his wrists, because of the previous words Pete had uttered. That worthy glanced at Jack, and slowly shut one eye. He knew exactly what the constable would want to do, and had given him every facility.

"It's false! Pete is not a thief!" cried Mrs. Murkins, who did not want to lose such a profitable lodger. "Why, he has lent a lady five hundred pounds this very day!"

She was giving the show away, because she ought to have known nothing about that little matter unless she had been listening. But she had good

cause to like Pete, because he was such a profitable lodger, and she meant to take his part now. The only thing was that she felt very fearful that her husband knew more of the missing purse than he would have cared to tell the constable.

You see, a man who bets, and loses the rent, is bound to be suspected, whether innocent or guilty.

"How could it have been you, when you never entered the room?" snarled Slomer.

"It looks a dead cert. on Snowball," growled Murkins. "Yet I've backed many a certainty before, and they ain't come in one, two, or three."

Needless to say, seeing that his wife was in the room, Murkins said this beneath his breath.

"What did the man do after he had taken the purse?" demanded the constable, watching every man in the room. He had come to the conclusion that Pete was not guilty; and, judging by that worthy's innocent expression and the manner in which he winked at Jack and Sam, he felt confident that Pete had something up his sleeve, and that it was not the purse.

"He put it in his breast-pocket," said Pete, with a deep sigh, while he used the tail of the constable's tunic to mop his eyes; and then Pete started howling in a manner that raised the echoes, and he did his blubbering remarkably well, too.

"Who was the man?" demanded the constable, making an effort to look serious.

"Boohoo! Boohoo! Am I bound to convict myself?"

"Of course not. But if you tell us who the man was—supposing it wasn't you—don't you see that you will clear yourself from the charge?"

"Boohoo! I'm always dissuspected one way and anoder! De man—Don't see why I should serve eighteen years' hard labour! Boohoo! I don't like hard labour! I ain't been used to it for some years past. But de man who took Slomer's purse off de mantelpiece and placed it in his breast-pocket was Slomer, 'cos I happened to notice him doing it before he left de room. And he can't say dat I put it dere, seeing dat I ain't been widin two yards ob him all de time he has been in de room. I ain't going to be excused ob highway robbery, and handcuffed in dis manner! Boohoo! I'll tell my moder 'bout it! Boohoo! Woohoo!"

"I say, my lad," exclaimed the constable, who was almost deafened by Pete's awful howls. "There's no need for you to make that noise. The gent has found his purse."

So Slomer had. He dived his hand into his breast-pocket, and then it dawned on him that he had placed the purse there as Pete and his comrades entered the room.

"I—er—I find there has been a mistake, constable," he muttered. "I have the purse here. I must have placed it in my pocket without thinking. You can take the handcuffs off the prisoner."

"Boo-hoo!" howled Pete, rushing from the room. "Wow-how! I don't see dat a poor nigger has de right to be charged like dis. Wow-wow! One would tink dat I was a criminal ob de deepest crime."

Pete's howls ascended the stairs, and once they heard him howl out that he was going to "escape."

"You've done a pretty thing for yourself," growled the constable.

"Take no notice of the matter," said Slomer. "Let the brute go."

"And what about my handcuffs?" exclaimed the constable.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "I hope you won't charge Pete with stealing them."



"I say, fetch him down, young gent," exclaimed the constable.

"My dear fellow," answered Jack, "I simply could not. If you catch Pete, and get the handcuffs back, I shall be surprised. I may tell you that he is possessed of a vast fortune—we all are—and he is not at all likely to steal a few sovereigns, when he has a few hundred thousands at his back. He has given away a hundred pounds to the poor this very night, and no man woman or child who is in want would ask Pete in vain. The matter rests with Slomer."

"So it does," exclaimed the constable. "You have obstructed the police in the execution of their duty with your silly practical joke, and you have made me handcuff a man who you knew was perfectly innocent. I shall arrest you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. He was relieved to know that Pete was not going to get into trouble over what he had imagined was a foolish joke, but Slomer was not relieved at all. It seemed to him that he was being arrested for stealing his own purse, and he did not like it; but having found that purse in his breast pocket, he knew that his position was an awkward one.

"You are talking utter nonsense!" snarled Slomer. "I have not obstructed you at all."

"Yes, you have," declared the constable, who wanted to frighten him. "You have called me off my beat to play a silly practical joke, and you will have to answer for it—that is to say, unless you get those handcuffs back."

Slomer went upstairs, and listened outside Pete's door. He heard deep groans, and they sounded so alarming that Slomer was really frightened.

The door was locked, so he rushed downstairs, and told the constable that he believed Pete had committed suicide.

"Then you are likely to be charged with manslaughter," said the constable, who knew perfectly well that Pete had done nothing of the sort. "You have got yourself into a nice difficulty with your practical joking."

"It wasn't a joke. I really thought the nigger had taken my purse."

"That makes it worse than ever, because you have given an innocent man into custody, and caused him to commit suicide."

They all went upstairs, the constable leading the way, and pointing out a few of the penalties that Slomer would be likely to suffer.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### Pete and the Groans—Slomer's Surprise—The Constable's Discovery.

PETE'S door was still locked, and the groaning was very much pronounced. For several minutes the constable tried to induce the groaner to open the door, but, as it was quite without effect, he put his shoulder against it.

A light was burning in the room, and the bed was raised in a mound. All that was visible of Pete was his hat, which lay on the pillow, but the groaning was really startling.

The constable pulled off the bedclothes and revealed a bolster and the remains of the handcuffs, that gave the impression they would require a deal of repairing before they could be used for another prisoner. The chain was broken, and each of the bands was smashed at the clasp. The groaning was there right enough, but Pete was not.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the constable, listening, then looking under the bed. Pete was not there, neither was he in the cupboard.

Jack and Sam, of course, knew that he was making use of his ventriloquism, but where he was hiding they did not know.

"Well, I believe he's—he's—where can he be?" gasped the constable. "His voice appears to be all over the room. He's broken my handcuffs, too. Someone is going to pay for them, and that someone will be you."

Slomer vowed he would do nothing of the sort. He kept looking over his shoulder, because those groans were getting on his nerves. He went outside the room, but the groans seemed to be still in the room; then he smelt tobacco.

His bed-room door was partially open, and when he entered the room, he found the smell of tobacco stronger than ever. Now he lighted the gas, and his yell of fury brought the remainder of the party into the room, which adjoined Pete's.

Pete was lying in Slomer's bed, into which he had got with his muddy boots, and he was smoking a short clay pipe. He had ceased his groaning now, and he looked remarkably comfortable.

"Come out of my bed, you scoundrel! howled Slomer.

"Go away, old hoss," answered Pete. "Don't you see I want to get to sleep after all dis excitement?"

"You sha'n't sleep in my bed. Why, you have got your muddy boots on, you villain."

"You can sleep in my bed, my dear old hoss."

"Do you think I will sleep in the bed of a dirty nigger."

"Well, go and sleep on de floor. You ain't coming into dis bed to-night, 'cos if I shift my position I shall lose all my beauty sleep."

Jack led them away, and made matters all right with the constable, besides paying for the damaged handcuffs, and that worthy went away well satisfied with his night's work, because he was a richer man to the extent of five pounds, to say nothing of any profit there would be on the handcuffs.

For one hour Slomer tried to get Pete out of his bed, but that worthy would not shift. He smoked pipe after pipe, and filled the room with smoke, and then he commenced to snore; after that Slomer left, and Mrs. Murkins found him sleeping accommodation elsewhere.

That unfortunate woman was thankful when the noise had ceased. Her husband did not care a bit, because he had plenty of time for sleeping in the daytime. It was about four o'clock in the morning before all lights were out, and Pete did not wake at his customary early hour. He was a man of regular very habits, and always took a certain number of hours' sleep, the hour at which he commenced same making no difference to the duration of his sleep.

Thus it was that at ten o'clock the following morning he was still soundly asleep when Mrs. Murkins awoke him to inform him that a lady was waiting to see him on very urgent business.

"Tell her dat I'm engaged for de next seven hours, my dear," growled Pete.

"It is past ten, and breakfast has been ready an hour."

"Don't let Slomer start on it den, else dere won't be any left for me."

"The lady must see you, Pete."

"Ain't dis mighty awful. She can't see me just yet."

"Shall I ask Mr. Owen to see her?"

"Golly! Don't you dare to do anything like dat!" yelled Pete, leaping out of bed. "Don't you tell Jack she is here. I don't want her to turn her dove-like eyes on him. Nunno! You tell her dat I will be wid her shortly. Is she Gladys?"

"She is the lady who called yesterday, and she has a taxi-cab waiting outside. It's registering against her."

"Well let it go on registering," grumbled Pete. "She ain't got de right to call here dis time ob de morning."



Pete went down and had his breakfast, then he smoked a pipe, and after that he went into his office, where Gladys was awaiting him.

"Oh, Pete!" she exclaimed. "You have kept me waiting a terrible time. It was cruel of you when you knew that I was so anxious, and I have a taxi outside. I know the horrid thing has been ticking away at a dreadful rate. I want to borrow some more money."

"But, my dear, you can't hab spent five hundred pounds in one day."

"I could spend much more than that, Pete. I played bridge last night, and a horrid cat won everything. I don't believe she played fairly."

"Ladies neber do, my dear."

"How dare you say such a thing, Pete. We are far more honest than men. I never cheat."

"Yah, yah, yah! I say, my dear, was your late laminated husband rich?"

"I think you mean lamented. He was not so very rich."

"Lucky old hoss."

"Oh, Pete, I have lost him! I am all alone."

"I was tinkin' how lucky he was to be able to die rader rich. I'm certain if he had gone on libing he would hab died mighty poor at de rate you win money at cards. You ain't got de right to play cards, and if I was your moder I would—correct you in de proper manner. I won't lend you anoder penny."

"Dear Pete, don't be hard on me."

"Frozen flint-stones ain't nearly as hard as I'm going to be; and it ain't a bit ob good calling me 'Dear Pete.' I know perfectly well you will say to your friends dat stupid black beast wouldn't lend me any more, and I can't pay you."

"Think how dreadful that would be."

"It wouldn't be nearly so dreadful as if I was to lend you five hundred pounds."

"I shall ask Jack. He looks kind."

"Mind dat rat by your feet dere," cried Pete, making some squealing come from that direction. But he did not know Gladys. It would have taken more than that rat to frighten her away when she thought there was a chance of getting five hundred pounds.

"I don't care about the rat," she said calmly. "I dare say the poor thing is all alone in the world like I am. I thought you were so kind, too. Oh, if I could only join my husband!"

"Ain't you got any sort ob consideration for de poor old hoss. Besides, you couldn't gamble where he's gone to. Here, don't do dat, my dear. Stop dat crying. Understand me, I won't hab it."

Pete had shown his hand now. Gladys took out a small lace handkerchief, and sobbed.

It was quite fatal. Pete could not bear to see a woman crying, and he let her have the money, then escorted her to the taxi-cab, and paid the fare, but he made her sign a promissory note for the money, in the vain hope that she would not come back again. He was in terror of her meeting Jack.

He left James Fergus to read his correspondence, which was of vast dimensions, by reason of the extraordinary advertisements he had put in, and then he attended to his clients, and the amount of money he lent to females made James gasp.

"He will lose every penny of it," groaned Fergus, when speaking to Jack on the subject.

"I know he will," laughed Jack. "In the first place, I don't believe he is a registered moneylender, and that would prevent him recovering the money, besides rendering him liable to a



heavy penalty. But it is no use talking to him. Let him go on in his own sweet way until he gets tired of it."

"They are calling all day long. I believe one tells another, unless it is the advertisements."

"Probably it is a little of both," laughed Jack. "However, let him have his fling, and if he doesn't get tired of it, and become convinced that it is quite possible to rob a moneylender, I shall be surprised."

Pete had been established in his precious business for a little over a week, when one evening when he thought business was over for the day, a shabbily-dressed woman entered his office. She was one of Pete's clients, and he had lent her five pounds, the sum she asked for.

"Come for some more, Jane?" he inquired, pulling out some gold.

"No. I have come to pay the first half-crown," answered the woman, placing the money on the desk.

"Golly! I ain't accepting dat!" growled Pete.

"But you said it would be all right if I paid you half-a-crown. It said so on the note I signed. I cannot pay more."

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete. "How much do you earn a week?"

"Ten shillings is the most. Sometimes it is not so much."

"Den what you do wid all de rest ob de money?"

"I have my little boy to keep. My husband is dead."

"Where's de little boy?"

"Downstairs. He is waiting outside. We are going to buy a few things."

"H'm! Bring de little boy up here. What's his name?"

"Tommy."

"Well, bring him up, den I will consider de matter ob de repayments."

Tommy was a fine little fellow. He was very poorly dressed, though very clean and tidy. He gazed at Pete with widely-open eyes.

"Well, Tommy," exclaimed Pete, "what do you tink ob de nigger? Yah, yah, yah! Rader black, ain't he? But, you see, all de washing in de world won't fetch dat off. Now, dat's my dog. You hab neber seen such a dog as dat, I know, 'cos——"

"Shake hands, Tommy!" came a high-pitched voice, apparently from Rory, who at a sign from his master stood on his hind-legs and held out his paw.

Jane gazed at Pete in blank surprise, but she did not see his lips move. Tommy, who was about seven years old, seemed to take Rory's talking as a matter of course, and in a few minutes he was romping with Rory.

"Stop dere for one moment, my dears!" exclaimed Pete, hurrying from the room. He was back in a very few minutes. "How do you make all dat money, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"Working for the tailors. They pay me according to what I do."

"I see. You sew up de clothes. 'Spect you could make clothes?"

"If I had the patterns."

"Could take dose from anoder suit. My'es! We hab de promissory note here. Put dat half-crown in your pocket, Tommy, and spend it on sweets and toys."

Pete rolled up the promissory note, held it over the gas, and lighted his pipe with it.

"Now, Jane," he exclaimed, "I ain't going to allow you to pay dat money back. I am going to make you a present ob it. I am also going to employ you for two-free years, and your wages will be two pounds a week. Dere is de first week in advance, and you will hab de oder sent to your address ebery week by my bankers. I spoil a good many suits ob clothes, so do Jack and Sammy. What I am going to do is to make your



tailor-employers take my exact measurement, and den I shall arrange de whole ting wid dem. Tommy must lib in de country, so you will find a nice little cottage dat suits you, and where dere is a good school handy—Hi, golly! Don't you do dat, my dear. Don't you dare to cry. Dere's nuffin to cry 'bout. Put de gold in your pocket. It's all honest gold. 'Nuff said! I won't listen to dat. As regards de cottage, I shall buy de furniture, and hab it settled on you, so dat no one can touch it. I may buy de cottage as well; but I will see 'bout dat. If I don't buy it, I will pay de rent."

"What have I done to deserve it?" sobbed the poor creature. "I think you are de best man dat ever lived!"

"Shoo! Don't talk like dat, 'cos it ain't anyting near de troof. De way you hab brought dat child up, considering de money you get, is a credit to you. In de future you shall be able to bring him up widout de slightest trouble. And when he's a man he will look after you, I hope, just as well as you hab looked after him. Golly! Dere goes de dinner-gong! Come along, Tommy! Dis way to London! Come along, my dear! You'm going to dine wid Jack, Sam, and Pete to-night. Shoo! You'm in my employment, and hab got to do what I tell you."

Slomer had already commenced dinner. Jack and Sam were waiting for Pete.

"Dis lady is Jane—one ob my clients, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "Dis is her little boy Tommy. Dose two chaps are Jack and Sam, my dear. Dat old hoss guzzling away is named Slomer. 'Nuff said! I told Mrs. Murkins to lay two extra covers."

"Mrs. Murkins," cried Slomer, as the landlady entered the room, "I will not submit to this! I am accustomed to de company of ladies and gentlemen. It is bad enough to have to sit down with a common nigger—I will not have dat woman and her brat at de table!"

"Would you like dinner in another room, sir?" inquired Mrs. Murkins, who preferred offending Slomer to Pete.

"No, I would not. And what is more, I won't have it!"

"Soup for de start, my dear!" exclaimed Pete. "You had better keep your eye on me, and den you will know de exact amount to eat. Don't take any notice ob Slomer; he always gets a little more stupid as de day goes on. But he can't help dat, poor, old, denuded hoss. Your little boy behaves a lot better at table dan Slomer does."

At first Jane felt ill at ease, for Slomer kept passing nasty remarks; but de comrades soon put her at her ease; and as Pete whipped away Slomer's plate of fowl just as he was about to commence on it, and placed it before Jane, Tommy shrieked with laughter. It was done in an instant, and just as Mrs. Murkins, who was waiting at table, was handing him de vegetables. Slomer had turned to help himself to cabbages, and he placed de piled-up spoonful on de cloth.

"Tommy!" exclaimed his mother.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, as Slomer gazed in blank amazement at de dab of cabbage on de clean cloth. "Dat ain't de place to put your greens, old hoss. You should put dem in your mouf. Take away his wine, Mrs. Murkins, and bring him up some water. You ain't behaving at all micely for a man ob your time ob life. I shall hab to let Tommy sit next to you and teach you better manners. De vegetables dis way, Mrs. Murkins. Thank you. Suppose I help you, my dear."

"I refuse to take my meals with a scoundrel of a nigger! He is a disgrace to civilisation."

"That he is not!" cried Jane. "Oh, you would never say so, sir, if you knew how good his heart is!"



"Hang his heart, woman!"

"I do not say so. I have good cause to bless his heart, for by his generosity and kindness he has lifted me from grinding poverty. For myself, I am deeply thankful. Then what must I feel for my boy? Fancy, gentlemen, my husband was a schoolmaster. It is true that we were poor, but when he died I was left penniless, with an infant to support. I did my best, but my best was very small. I am thankful to say that Tommy has never been in actual want of food. Do you believe that Pete is what that gentleman says, sir?"

"Don't call me 'sir,'" laughed Jack. "I wish you to call me Jack, the same as he insists on your calling him Pete. I think he is the stupidest fellow that ever walked this earth, and the best-hearted one. In your case I think he acted very wisely. With his other clients, as he calls them, I think he acts like a raving maniac. To my knowledge, he has lent a thousand pounds to one lady, and he knows as well as I do that he will never get one penny back."

"Shut up, Jack! You know nuffin ob de sort. Oh, do be quiet, Slomer! If you don't stop dat noise, I shall stuff dat cabbage down your froat! You don't understand de moneylending business, and de enormous amounts dat are made at it. Still, I will prove it to you before I hab done. You can't take one single transaction as a fair test."

"I see," laughed Jack. "You are like the man selling cocoanuts. You lose on every single cocoanut, but it is on the quantity that you make your money."

"Funny ting dat directly I stop de noise ob old Slomer, someone else starts on de job. But neber mind, my dear, you get on wid your dinner, 'cos I hab a call at dose tailors to make to-night, and I want you and Tommy to come wid me. You can come also, Jack and Sammy."

At Jeban's you can get a suit of clothes remarkably cheap. And Jeban is a very prosperous man. All he requires is that you shall pay him cash. For the information of those who do not know him, it may here be remarked that he is a man of—say, forty, very big, and with a blonde moustache. To do him credit, he is at his business from morning to night, and so it is a very prosperous one. His method is simple. He prices up the cost of the clothes his new customer is wearing, and then offers him a rather better suit at a less price.

Pete strode into his shop, which is a large one; his comrades Jane and Tommy followed.

Pete pulled out his handsome gold watch, and sighed.

"Ain't much time, eider. Now, let me see, where's my card?"

Pete dived his hand into his pocket and pulled out a bundle of notes; next he tried another pocket, and pulled out a handful of gold, amongst which was a card.

"You see, old hoss, I'm a moneylender, and as dis woman has paid me back honestly, and says she works for you, I tought I would buy her little boy a suit ob clothes. Den I want free suits for myself. I would rader not hab dem all de same, and I don't want to pay more dan, say, free pounds a suit. Tink you can do something for dat?"

"I can do you a beautiful suit for three guineas, sir—quite as good as the one you are wearing now; and I rather fancy you paid more than that for it. Allow me to take your measure."

Jeban, being a man of business, did not care whether his customer was a nigger or a Heathen Chinee, so long as he had the money. Pete had given ocular demonstration of that, and so he was treated with great respect. Jeban placed chairs for the comrades, and motioned to Jane to stand back.



"Magnificent chest, sir!" he exclaimed. "Are you standing in your ordinary manner?"

"M'yes! Could disinflate de chest--so."

"Dear me! You have not been at your business all your life."

Then Jeban called out Pete's sizes, and knowing that he had got a good customer, ran the tape over him a second time.

"I like to be very exact," he observed, "and, really, your chest measurement is so great that I thought there must be some mistake."

"You might measure Jack and Sammy. I tink dey want some suits," observed Pete. "I like a man who can appreciate a full-sized nigger. You see, white people don't like niggers as a rule. Suppose I take nine suits, could you knock off de odd shillings on each one?"

"Certainly I will! And as you take an interest in this woman, she shall have some extra work next week. Allow me, sir!"

Jack and Sam submitted, hoping that Jeban would turn them out something that they would be able to wear. He certainly took great pains. Other customers came into his shop, but he left his assistants to attend to them, although he kept a watchful eye. Jane stood waiting patiently. Tommy played with Rory, who had accompanied them. Rory loves all children, like his master, and he has never yet bitten a woman, though the same could not be said of him with the male sex. At any rate, Rory will play with a child for hours together, and that child would never make him growl. It is true he does it in a superior sort of way, as though he knew it was his duty to make children happy.

Alas! how many of us are there who do their duty as well in that respect? How many males take the trouble? Perhaps there are many, but there are not so many as there should be among the rich. My lord goes shooting partridges, and enjoys himself, though it is doubtful whether the partridges do. But how much more does the rich man enjoy himself when he feeds the poor, and they participate in his enjoyment!

It was half-past eight. The comrades had been measured. Pete merely had to select the cloths, and a bundle was placed before them.

Pete is not a man to choose in a hurry, unless the pattern happens to strike his fancy, and it is absolutely certain that the pattern that would strike his fancy would never strike the fancy of Jack or Sam.

All the same, they knew that Pete had made up his mind to choose the patterns, so that their ideas were quite out of the question.

"You ain't got something ob a larger check dan dis?" inquired Pete, selecting a frightfully gaudy thing.

"Certainly, sir! We have a very striking thing here. Allow me!"

Pete did allow him, and the pattern took Pete's fancy.

"I was wondering weder we ought all to be dressed de same," mused Pete, pulling out his pipe and filling it."

"Is that the pattern that pleases you?" inquired Jack.

"I rader like it."

"Then land Sam with it, for I'm hanged if you are going to land me!"

"Could you let me see dat cloth in bulk?" inquired Pete.

"Certainly, sir! Bring down that roll of cloth," answered Jeban.

The roll was placed before Pete, who rather liked it; but he had several more rolls brought down.

"M'yes!" he exclaimed, placing a chair for Jane. "Dat looks somewhere about suitable for Jack. It's between dose two, but I will decide dat presently. Now for Sammy. I tink something ob a quieter mixture would suit him."

"Hadn't the gentleman better choose for himself?" gasped Jeban.

"Nunno! Sammy hasn't got much taste. He's like Jack in dat respect."

An hour passed by, and Pete was still choosing with the patience of a camel. The worst of it was that he would insist on seeing the cloths in bulk, and the rolls of cloth he had down were all over the floor. There were three that he was undecided about for Sam, but when it came to his own turn there were about seven.

"Now for Tommy!" exclaimed Pete; and he went through the thing again, except that now he kept pointing to rolls of cloth that were in very inaccessible places.

Jeban was tired, hot, and cross by this time, for he had been hauling about the heavy rolls. Pete had them all unrolled a little more, and then turned to Jane.

"Now, how do you like dis one for Tommy?" pointing to a gaudy thing, one check of which would have about covered Tommy.

"You are very kind," answered Jane. She was a truthful woman, and could not possibly say that she liked the pattern.

"I tink de lady would like someting wid a little green just here. Just let me look at one wid a green stripe along dis blue."

Jeban mopped his brow. There is a limit even to business patience, and Pete had reached it.

"See here, sir!" he cried. "I have shown you every cloth I have got in the place!"

"What's dat roll up dere?"

It was the last one. Jeban got it down with the aid of a ladder.

Pete shook his head at it and sighed.

"Do you care for dis one I hab considered for Jack, my dear?" he inquired, pointing to another gaudy thing.

Jeban was making furious signs to her to say that she did, and Pete was watching him in the glass.

"I—I think it is rather loud, but——"

"Do you tink it would suit Sammy?"

"I think he would like something quieter."

"Well, look here, old hoss," said Pete, turning to Jeban, "I don't seem to care for dese cloths. Do you know ob anoder tailor where I can see some more?"

"Do you mean to say that you can't make a selection out of those?" roared Jeban.

"I don't want to choose in a hurry——"

"Hurry be hanged!" howled Jeban. "You have been over two hours choosing. You have kept my establishment open after hours. You have made me upset the whole shop. Look at all the work of putting that cloth back!"

"I should leabe it dere, so dat de customers can hab a good choice. Dey can easy climb ober de rolls. I don't care for dose, but I'll come each day for a week or so, and look at some more. I rader like looking at cloths."

"You scoundrel of a nigger!" hooted the now infuriated man. "If you dare to come to my shop again I—I'll shoot you!"

"Now, my dear old hoss, dat ain't de way to do business. You must take a little trouble."

"A little trouble be hanged! A nigger is not going to play the fool with me. I insist on your buying the nine suits."

"Nunno! You can't expect me to buy a cloth dat I don't care for."

"A cloth! Why, I have unrolled fifty!"

"Bery well, get in anoder fifty, and I will hab dose unrolled. Don't laugh at de man, Jack. You can see he's angry already."

"Perdition!" hooted Jeban. "Look at the time you have wasted!"



"I ain't in a hurry, my dear old hoss."

"But I am, fellow!"

"Well, as you say you hab kept your shop open later dan usual, you can easy open it earlier to-morrow, so as to make up for de lost time. You hab got to consider all de time ob Jane's dat you hab wasted. I 'spect you pay her about a penny an hour, and dat ain't sufficient. She has decided dat she don't like de patterns, and derefore on dis suspicious occasion, I sha'n't hab de suits. Why, de man is beginning to dance now! See if we can keep him company."

Then Pete made Tommy shriek with laughter by prancing about in front of the enraged man.

The chances are, if Jeban had not run over Pete's measurements, he would have made an attempt to kick him out of the shop; but he was not doing anything so stupid as that under existing circumstances. He expressed his fury with abuse, and he raved in such a manner that Jane became quite alarmed.

Pete's consummate coolness, however, allayed her fears, although she was quite unable to allay Tommy's shrieks of laughter.

"Well, my dear old hoss," exclaimed Pete at last, "what you are saying about niggers may be all correct, but dat don't alter de position ob dose cloths, and what I would advise you to do is to roll dem up."

"You never intended to buy a suit, you black hound!"

"Well, de principal object ob de visit was to look at cloths, and I hab succeeded in dat direction. I would also like to point out dat you are a miserable cur ob a sweater, and dat ain't at all a nice ting to be. You see, old hoss, it's worse dan going up to a rich man and stealing de purse from his pocket. You ain't got de right to pay starvation wages, and to keep poor people toiling day and night, den pay dem just enough to keep body and soul together. It's de worst form ob robbery dere is."

"Get out of my shop, you scoundrel!"

"I dunno dat I'm so much worse dan oder men," observed Pete, striking a match on the counter, and relighting his pipe; "but we ain't dealing wid me. We are dealing wid you, and you must know dat you are one ob de worst scoundrels dat eber walked dis earth. You lib in luxury, and p'raps hoard up money, and de people who make dat money for you are left to starve. You pay dem for a week's work about as much as dey earn in a day, and you don't care weder dey starve or not, so long as dey keep alive so dat dey can go on toiling for you at a penny an hour or less. Nunno, I ain't going till I hab expressed my opinion, and you can send for as many hobbies as you like. I had shown you how nasty it is to work for nuffin. I hab made you toil away wid dose rolls ob cloth, and I ain't going to buy anything. We are going to buy some suits, and Tommy is going to hab his—in fact, I shall buy him a couple ob dem; but dey are going to be bought from a respectable tailor, and one who don't pile up his money by sweating poor people."

"Go for a constable!" roared Jeban. "Bring one here immediately!"

"Dere are cases, no doubt, where your vile work has caused de deaths ob little children," continued Pete. "Dat's manslaughter. It's worse. It's murder by slow starvation. All right, constable," added Pete, as one of them entered the shop. "Sit down dere for a few minutes, while I point out de error ob dis man's ways. I'm telling him dat he's a sweater. He pays poor people starvation wages."

"Well, I've got nothing to do with that," said the constable.

"I give that nigger in custody," roared Jeban.

"What's the charge?"

"He has come into my shop, and, under the pretence of purchasing

goods, he has made me unroll all these cloths. It will take me all night to put them back again."

"Well, you can't give him in charge for that. I suppose you unrolled them of you own free will?"

"He pretended he was going to buy."

"Lots of ladies do that, but the shopkeepers don't give them in charge. We would have half the ladies in the West End in prison if they did that."

"You see, Jeban, according to de present law you may hab de right to pay poor people starvation wages," continued Pete, "but you ain't got de right to gib people in custody sort ob indiscriminately. I'm mighty sorry for you, 'cos you'm got a lot to answer for."

"Turn him out of my shop!" howled Jeban.

"I'm not at liberty to interfere unless there is a breach of the peace," said the constable, who knew perfectly well that Jeban was a sweater of the very deepest dye.

"Now, dis poor woman ain't going to work for you any more," continued Pete. "She's going to work for me, and I am going to pay her proper wages. I ain't going to horsewhip you as you deserve. Unfortunately, dere ain't no law to flog such pitiful scoundrels. 'Nuff said! Go and order a cab!"

Jeban could not stand this. He made a rush at Pete, who caught him by the right hand, and then placed a grip upon it that caused Jeban to dance about and howl.

The constable looked surprised, because he did not understand what was happening. Jack and Sam did—so did Jeban. He struck at Pete's head, but that worthy merely guarded the blows, and tightened his grip till Jeban could strike no more; then Pete released him, and he danced about the shop with tears in his eyes.

"I tink we may as well go now," observed Pete, leaving the shop. Then he hailed a cab, and, putting Jane and Tommy into it, ordered the driver to take them to her home, and he gave him five shillings by way of payment.

"I will arrange de oder matter to-morrow, my dear," said Pete. "I will take Tommy for his clothes, and den we will find de cottage. Drive on, cabby."

The cab rattled away, and for some moments Pete was busy with his pipe. "Dat man Jeban makes me tired," growled Pete.

"I reckon you have made him tired to-night," laughed Sam. "Come along! He's still excited about his hand, and is trying to explain matters to the constable."

"Funny ting, but I bery nearly placed him across de counter," growled Pete. "I ain't at all sure dat I sha'n't do it now. He wants a good lesson."

Jack and Sam, however, got Pete away without any further lesson being given.

#### CHAPTER 7.

##### A New Client—A Friendly Invitation—The Mystery of Furze Hill.

PETE did not attend to his precious business for a day or so. He spent a good deal of his time in looking at cottages, and then he furnished one.

He was returning from one of his journeys, when he saw a motor-car standing outside the house, and, on entering, was informed that a gentleman was waiting to see him on urgent business.

"How long has de man been waiting, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"Over an hour," answered Mrs. Murkins.



"In dat case I will hab dinner before I see him. If he has waited one hour he can easy wait anoder. Golly! Ain't I hungry!"

During the meal, Pete received several messages that Mr. Stanley Manchester was in a great hurry, and Pete amused the comrades by treating those messages with supreme contempt.

"Now, I tink we will all come up and interview de man," said Pete, when at last the meal was finished. "I know what he wants perfectly well, but it is exactly what he won't get, unless he gibs me good security. I ain't lending to de male sex widout security."

"But you can't expect to get about sixty per cent. interest with security," laughed Jack.

"Den dey can't expect de money."

"All right! Have your own way," laughed Jack. "I still maintain that you will discover a moneylending business is not all profit. Come on, Sam, though I am not going to interfere."

Mr. Stanley Manchester was a man of about thirty-five years of age, fair, tall, and decidedly handsome. He wore a drooping moustache and an eyeglass, and he was dressed in the height of fashion.

"Ah, glad you have come at last!" he drawled. "Are you the actual lender?"

"No," answered Jack; to whom the question was addressed. "Pete there is the moneylender."

"Well, sit down, my dear fellows!" exclaimed Stanley, as calmly as though the office had belonged to him. "You have got a charming place here, Pete. The decorations are simply superb, and I like the colouring of your floor. Did you do the decorations yourself?"

"M'yes!"

"Well, it is a pity you didn't splash in a few more colours while you were about it. Have a cigar? Now, do you know what I have called about?"

"Yes."

"Good! You got my letter?"

"Spect I did. I keep de unopened letters in dat corner ob de room," said Pete, pointing to a heap of about three hundred.

Stanley Manchester gazed at the formidable pile through his eyeglass.

"But when do you open them?" he inquired.

"Well, I 'spect de important ones amongst dat pile will get opened to-morrow."

"How can you tell which are the important ones before you open them?"

"Eh?"

"I wrote you three days ago."

"In dat case I 'spect your letter is in dat second pile. Dat's de pile for destruction. You see, when de accumulation ob correspondence gets too much in arrear, I just burn it."

"Suppose someone sends you money?"

"Yah, yah, yah! Should say dat would be a most unlikely occurrence. I hab neber opened a letter like dat."

"Well, I must say it is a funny way of doing business, nor can I understand how it is you know what I have come about."

"You hab come for money. No one eber comes here for anything else."

"Ha, ha! Good! I want five thousand pounds."

"I'm mighty glad you don't want much, old hoss."

"I suppose you have the money?"

"M'yes! But I don't suppose for a moment dat you hab got it. Weder you do get it or not is anoder matter."

"Well, look here, Pete, you and your friends had better come to my place, and we can arrange the whole thing. I can put you up, and give

you plenty of shooting. Of course, I should want the thing kept private. I can give you ample security for your money."

"De interest is twenty-five per cent. How much does dat come to on five thousand pounds, Jack?"

"One thousand two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Well, dat ain't a bad profit," observed Pete. "You can hab de money for a year, and I shall deduct de interest from de amount advanced."

"Well, I don't much mind about the interest, because I have a very large sum coming to me within a year. But I want the five thousand in full. However, we will discuss that later on. Now, can you come down?"

"What about de shooting? I rader like de idea ob dat, but I tell you plainly, old hoss, you will hab to gib security."

"Certainly. I will give you a bill of sale on my furniture and motor-car. I don't keep horses. My motor-car is worth a couple of thousand pounds. and the furniture is worth a lot more."

"What about de guns for de shooting part ob de business?"

"I can lend you those. I have plenty. We should want a solicitor to draw up the document, but there's no difficulty there. I dare say you know of one?"

"Seem to be two-free in London."

"All right, my dear fellow. It is all the same to me. The solicitor for the estate would do, as far as I am concerned, and he has an inventory of all the things, so that he could bring us the document already drawn up. Look here, if you will come down to-night, and stay a few days, we can have a good time of it."

"Do you mind a dog coming?"

"Certainly not. I like dogs. We can stop at the solicitors on the way down, and you can give him instructions concerning the matter. Stop a bit. I'll telephone to them now. I know their number."

Pete's telephone was all right now, and Stanley rang up the Exchange, then gave the number.

"Are you Brough & Murton, the solicitors?" inquired Stanley. "Ah, right! I am Mr. Stanley Manchester. Will you ask Mr. Brough to come to the 'phone? Thanks!"

"It's all right. He is in, but I doubt if we shall be in time to catch him, and— Oh, is that you, Brough. I'm Stanley Manchester. I want to see you on urgent business to-night, and— Can't you wait ten minutes? Eh? Well, I'll run you to Waterloo Station in my motor. Good-bye!"

"Come on, old chaps. He wants to get off. You might tell your landlady to have your luggage ready by the time we come back."

Jack and Sam raised no objection, although they did not like the look of things. It is true that Stanley's manner appeared to be genuine enough, but Jack could not understand why a man should pay such interest if he were going to give security.

"All right, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, going to his safe. "I hab got de money here. You see, I keep de notes in de safe, 'cos it saves de trouble ob drawing cheques each time people wants money. Funny ting how many people do want money one way and anoder. M'yes! Dere's more dan enough here, I can see. Now den we are ready, Stanley, and just you recollect dat moneylenders can't be robbed, so dat it isn't de slightest use your trying it on."

"Not likely, dear boy. I promised to run the lawyer to Waterloo, but that won't take us long, and we can explain the matter to him on the way."

Brough & Murton's offices were very large ones, and although it was late one or two clerks were still there, for the lights were burning. As



the motor-car drew up, an elderly, fussy-looking man came up, carrying a bag, and wearing a frock coat and a tall hat, while the rest of his clothing was remarkably neat.

"Jump in, Brough," exclaimed Stanley. "I'll soon whizz you to the station."

"I don't want to be whizzed, thank you. I would rather miss my train than have my neck broken. I am a married man with a family."

"And you ain't got much consideration for dem, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"How do you mean?"

"You say you don't want to hab your neck broken. Tink ob all de insurance money dey would get for you. Den I suppose Murton would still pay dem your wages."

"Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Brough!" exclaimed Stanley, driving off. "I want you to draw up a bill of sale on all my furniture and this motor-car. You have the inventory. Pete here is going to lend me five thousand pounds at twenty-five per cent. interest for one year. As you know, I have a large sum coming to me before that time, so I sha'n't feel the thousand pounds odd for interest."

"He rader likes de interest, my dear old bag ob tricks," observed Pete.

"Sir! I am a professional man, and——"

"Ha, ha! Take no notice of him, Brough," laughed Stanley. "He is a funny fellow."

"So he may be, Manchester, but he is not so funny as you are to pay twenty-five per cent. when you are giving ample security."

"Well, dear boy," exclaimed the airy Stanley, "would you like to let me have it for less?"

"My firm do not deal with bills of sale—except to draw them up for clients if required. I never advise a client to give a bill of sale. It requires registration."

"Can you get dat done for me, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"Of course I could do so, but don't you think you had better get your own solicitor to do it? Of course, if I am acting for Mr. Manchester, I cannot act for you."

"Well, suppose you stop acting for him, and start performing for me? Only, mind, I don't want any ob your monkey tricks, 'cos I'm a registered moneylender. Yah, yah, yah! You didn't know dat, Jack, but you can't get ober moneylenders, and I took out my dog-license—I mean my money-lending license. Now den, old hoss, I wish to insult you concerning——"

"I don't think you will have the slightest difficulty in doing that, young man. A solicitor of my standing does not perform monkey tricks."

"Den I 'spect dey do it sitting; but neber mind about dat. Do you consider dat my money will be perfectly safe in Stanley's hands?"

"Of course it will not. You cannot get perfect security in this world, especially if you expect twenty-five per cent. interest. If I am to act for you, I should say that you are making a good bargain. If I am acting for Mr. Manchester I should say that he was making about as wild and stupid a bargain as a giddy young man could make. But, there, it is no use talking. I have known him since he was a child, and he was always the same. His father was a careful man; I regret that the son is not so cautious. If you are determined to do this, Stanley, I will act for either you or Pete; but I cannot, of course, act for both."

"Well, act for Pete, and draw up the blessed thing."

"If you have any debts your creditors will come down on you when the bill of sale is registered."

"I am using it to clear them off, and to give me a couple of thousand to keep me going till I get that other money. Nothing can stop that."

"Well, that's true enough. Now, when do you want to carry this transaction through?"

"The sooner the better. Pete has brought the money. Can you come down to-morrow? Look here, we are going shooting, and you can come with us."

"I am busy——"

"Bother the business!"

"I fear your neglect of business has bothered you. However, I will draw up the bill of sale to-night, and call on you at Furze Hall to-morrow morning."

"Right you are. This is Waterloo. Good-night, Brough! Don't forget your bag."

"I never forget anything, young man. Good-night, gentlemen!"

Then he walked away in a dignified manner, and Stanley smiled.

"He's not a bad sort, except that he's such a pompous old idiot. Now, let's get your togs."

"How far is Furze Hall?" inquired Pete.

"About forty miles, but it won't take us long to get there. I shall open her out as soon as we get outside London."

The comrades soon had their portmanteaux in the motor-car, and then Pete lifted Rory in, and away they went.

It occurred to Jack that the forty miles were rather long ones, for Stanley was driving at a pace that would have been reckless had there been any traffic. Once a constable shouted to them, but Stanley did not take the slightest notice, and it was evident that he was a skilful chauffeur; besides that, he appeared to know his road well, for he named all the little villages that they passed through, and in passing through them he slackened his pace to ten or twelve miles an hour.

It was past ten o'clock when, descending a steep and narrow lane, they passed through some carriage gates, then, turning sharp to the left, the drive led them to a large square-built house. The comrades could see very little of the house, except that it was surrounded by trees.

A double flight of steps led them to the entrance-hall, which was very large, and handsomely furnished. The front door was open, but a footman in livery was there to receive them.

"These gentlemen are going to stay here for a day or so, John," said Stanley. "You will show them to the spare rooms. No doubt you will be able to look after yourselves, old chaps. Make yourselves at home, you know. This is Liberty Hall, and you can do whatever you like. John will see that you are comfortable. We shall require supper, John. Something cold will do."

"Well, boys," exclaimed Pete, when they entered a handsomely-furnished sitting-room to await their host's arrival, "dis seems all right. I shall hab to add all de money we save here to de profits I make out ob de man."

"Quite so," exclaimed Jack. "Or deduct them from your losses. At any rate, you appear to have good security for your money. Some of this furniture is very valuable, and the whole house is furnished on the same lines."

"M'yes! Should say dat grand piano was worf a hundred or so. I dunno weder dis furniture is real Splinterdale."

"Ha, ha, ha! You mean Chippendale," cried Jack.

"I was confusing de chip wid de splinter."



"I reckon you will take chips off it if you get fooling about," said Sam. "But here he comes."

Stanley was an excellent host, and he took a great fancy to Rory. He was not at all particular about his furniture, and gave Rory fowl bones on the rich carpet; then, later on, when Pete gave them some singing, Stanley lifted Rory on the top of the grand piano, and shouted with laughter as he tried to find out where the music was coming from.

"I say, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "ain't you frightened dat dog will damage de polish?"

"It doesn't matter, dear boy. It can easily be repolished. Ha, ha! He's a funny fellow—so is his master. Give us something sentimental. You have a magnificent voice."

The singing was kept up till past midnight, and then they all retired, Stanley ordering breakfast for nine o'clock.

Pete was up soon after break of day, and he went for a walk round the grounds, which were of very large extent; in fact, there was a large wood in them, and as Pete strolled through he saw quantities of birds.

He was still strolling about when Stanley met him.

"I heard you sleeping all right," he exclaimed. "Ha, ha! What a ghastly, horrid row you do make with your snoring. It shakes the floor-boards."

"Is it so pronounced as dat, now!" exclaimed Pete. "You hab got some nice grounds here."

"Yes. But, as you see, I don't keep them up. You want three or four gardeners, really, for a place of this size, and I don't care to go to that expense, especially as I never have any visitors. I am right away from every one. The nearest house is the doctor's, and that is seven miles distant. However, as there are hundreds of acres of shooting, I can generally enjoy myself. I am not here all the year round, of course. You might come and have a look at the furniture, to see that you have ample security. Then, of course, there is the motor-car."

"Dat's all right, old hoss," exclaimed Pete. "I can see dere is enough security for my purpose. You see, Jack declared dat it is quite possible to swindle a moneylender, and I'm going to prove to him dat it ain't, so I hab to be careful. You might pay me back if I had no security, den again you might not, and as I'm most inclined to tink de latter would be de case, I prefer to be able to make you pay me."

"A matter of business, my dear fellow. I hate business in any shape or form; still, we have to attend to it sometimes. Now, we shall have that old stick-in-the-mud Brough here directly. It will be rather fun taking him shooting. He can hit a barn door when he is moderately close to it. Are you a good shot?"

"Fairly well; but Sammy is de man. He neber misses. If you hear Sammy's gun go off you may know perfectly well dat he has hit de ting he aimed at."

"Well, suppose we get back. Brough is sure to be here before his time. He's a fussy old chap. I ought really to send the motor-car for him, but I'm not going to do so."

"De old hoss seems to be going to act as my solicitor," observed Pete, "so p'r'aps I ought to meet him, only I ain't going to. He will hab to meet himself, and bring himself here."

Brough turned up a little before nine, and an excellent breakfast was placed before them. There was a good deal of game, and Stanley explained that John had shot it.

"I let him shoot when he's got time. He's a capital shot, aren't you, John?"

"It's very good of you to say so, sir."

"And a magnificent poacher?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Well, do you mean to say I didn't catch you shooting trout?"

"Only one, sir."

"No, you had the others in your basket, and I had some of them for breakfast. I tell you what, John, after you bring the lunch-basket mid-day to-day, you shall join the party."

"It is like your kindness, sir."

"He's a splendid chap," exclaimed Stanley, as John left the room. "I wouldn't part with him for anything. Now, then, Brough, you are eating nothing."

"Indeed I am; but I can't keep pace with my client. When are you going to settle that business?"

"Oh, any time will do," exclaimed Stanley carelessly. "Now you are here you had better stop a day or so."

"Young man, I never neglect my business. I have taken one day off, and that is as much as I shall do for many months to come. I have drawn up the document, and the sooner it is signed the better; if it is to be signed at all. After business is done I don't mind giving up the remainder of the day to sport."

As soon as the meal was finished Stanley conducted them to his study, and then he wanted to get the business done straight away, but Brough insisted on reading every word of the bill of sale, after which he took Stanley's signature, and got Jack to witness it.

"I will act as the other witness," he said.

"Den I 'spect if I hand ober de money dat will be all correct," said Pete, pulling out the notes. "You count dem, Jack. Dey are all sorts up to a hundred pounds. Don't count one ob de hundred-pound notes for a fiver, else I shall lose some ob my profit."

It was all settled, and Brough took possession of the bill of sale for registration purposes.

"Now, understand me, Stanley, this must be paid promptly," he said.

"I am acting as Pete's solicitor, and it would be my duty to advise him to recover the money forthwith in case of default."

"That's all right, my dear fellow," answered Stanley, stuffing the notes into his pocket. "I shall be in funds before the time. In fact, I shall clear it off in about six months' time. Now for a good day's sport. I always search for my game, and don't have a lot of beaters to drive it up to my gun. We will try the lower wood first."

Game was plentiful, and the comrades had excellent sport.

John brought the lunch, also a gun for himself, and Stanley told him to help himself to anything he required.

All went well till lunch was about half over, and then Rory, who had had enough to eat, went for a little hunting on his own account.

He started a rabbit, which came bounding towards the party. The rabbit doubled, and avoided the cloth. Rory went right across it, and put his feet in Brough's face as he leapt over his head. He also smashed a glass of wine, which that worthy was just sipping, into his face.

Pete had seized his gun, and leapt to his feet to get a shot at the offending rabbit, but as he did so, he placed his heel on his solicitors' fingers, and judging by the way that gentleman howled, he was hurting him pretty considerably.



Pete did not know what he was howling for, but was intent on sighting the rabbit. Brough did not feel inclined to wait for that. Seizing his fork with his other hand, he gave Pete a terrific prod in the leg.

"Woyow!" howled Pete, leaping into the air.

His gun exploded, and he fell right on the top of Brough, who was knocked sideways on the cloth, and he smashed a dish with his face.

"Did I shoot de rabbit, Sammy?" inquired Pete, sitting on the fallen man.

"Ha, ha, ha! No! But you very nearly shot me. And don't you think you had better get off your solicitor's chest?"

"I tink de dear old hoss is all comfortable like he is, Sammy," observed Pete, who did not see why a man should stick a fork into his leg without receiving some sort of punishment. Eh? What's dat, old hoss? Get off? Well, ob course, dat's a simple, little matter; only, if I do get off dere is just de danger ob your prodding me wid de fork again, and I wouldn't like you to lose your temper in dat mannèr. Trod on your fingers, did I? Well, you shouldn't keep your fingers on de ground just at de spot where I want to stand. Dere you are, my dear old bag ob tricks. You can get up as much as you like. Yah, yah, yah! You hab made yourself in a mess wid dat pie."

"You silly vagabond!" snarled the angry man. "How dare you behave in this manner?"

"And to a professional gentleman, too," exclaimed Stanley. "Mr. Brough, I am extremely sorry——"

"You ain't as sorry as de old hoss is."

"I hope you will allow the matter to pass. I believe it was an accident on Pete's part. Allow me to give you a fresh glass of wine."

Brough drained the glass, and then he appeared to calm down in a manner that did him credit.

"Well, well, accidents will happen," he exclaimed. "I'm sorry I hurt you, Pete."

"So am I, old hoss."

"And of course you are sorry that you hurt Mr. Brough, aren't you, Pete?" exclaimed Stanley, who was very desirous of making peace.

"Eh?"

"I say you are sorry you hurt Mr. Brough."

"Den you ain't as troofal as you ought to be, Stanley. I'm mighty glad I hurt de old hoss, 'cos dat is exactly what I wanted to do."

"Well, don't let's get into an argument over the matter. We will have a good afternoon's sport. Look here, Brough, I will try my skill against yours, though I'm rather doubtful, judging by the way you have shot this morning."

"He may hab shot dis morning, all right," growled Pete, who felt rather sore, especially about the leg, for that fork had probed him deeply. It seemed to him a vicious act.

However, Stanley patched the matter up, and the rest of the afternoon passed off all right.

"Beg pardon, sir," exclaimed John, as they were on their way home, "but the milkman left word this morning that there had been an attempted burglary in the neighbourhood, and one of the men was tracked as far as your woods."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Stanley. "Well, I don't know that there is anything of value to steal here. My silver is all at the bank. Then again, if the ruffian did pay us a visit, we have Rory to give us warning. All the

same, I think I will ask the police to give an extra eye to the house. Why didn't you tell me of this before, John?"

"Well, sir, I didn't want to spoil your sport."

"I don't think it would have done that. Look here, Brough, suppose you stop here for the night, and to-morrow morning I will run you up to London. Our friends will be able to get some sport in the woods, and John will see that they are comfortable. You won't mind stopping here just to see that all is right, will you, Pete?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, that is the best idea, Brough, and I can promise you some really grand singing to-night. We are going to have a game dinner."

Brough consented, and the evening passed off in a very agreeable manner.

At about twelve o'clock the following morning Stanley started off in the motor-car, and the comrades spent the day pleasantly enough; but in the afternoon Stanley sent a telegram to say that he would not be home till the following morning, and would they keep a good look-out that night."

"Should say we ought to be able to do dat, John," observed Pete. "Look here! What servants do you keep?"

"Only the cook and myself at present, sir. The master does not care for too many servants about the place, because he is so often away. He is a rare theatre-goer, and I wouldn't be surprised if that is why he is staying in town to-night."

"Anyting more been heard ob de burglar?"

"The constable thinks he is hiding in these woods. I thought if we were to lock up the place early to-night—unless, of course, you want to sit up—we might be able to catch him. If he means coming here it stands to reason he won't come when he sees the lights burning till past midnight."

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat's one for de burglar and free for yourself, old hoss. But neber you mind. We will go to bed at say eight, and den he will tink de place is left alone, specially if he knows your master is away."

Thus it was arranged. Pete did not undress, but taking Rory into his room, he lighted his pipe, and lay down on the bed. It was his intention to keep watch all night, but instead of doing so he fell asleep after he had finished his second pipe, and had it not been for Rory there is little doubt that he would have slept till morning.

But presently a warning growl from Rory awoke him.

Rory was a splendidly trained dog, and that was the way he had been taught to growl when in the depths of the forest, and danger menaced them.

"Shoo, Rory!" murmured Pete. "Not anoder sound. You lie on dat bed and don't you bark."

Pete had only taken his boots off, and he went down in stocking-feet. A savage warrior could scarcely have moved less noisily.

The night was intensely dark, but Pete could hear someone moving in the drawing-room. Now a strange thought occurred to Pete. Had Burger, or some of his ruffianly associates, learnt that they had come to that place, and followed them down, hoping to get a rich haul? Of course, it was about the most improbable thing on the face of the earth, but Pete had his suspicions of Tim Murkins, having seen him in far from reputable-looking company. Besides, he knew that Tim was not honest.

It would have been an easy matter for him to tell where they had gone. When Pete gets an idea into his head, it requires a lot of shifting. He entered the room, and seeing a shadowy form pass the window, sprang upon it, then, by the strength of the man, Pete's conviction was confirmed.

The way those two men fought was surprising. They hammered at each-



other with all their strength, and their strength was considerably above the average.

Furniture was smashed, and blows were freely dealt, until Pete landed a scorcher that sent his adversary senseless to the floor.

At that moment Jack and Sam rushed into the room. Jack had a light, and it revealed the senseless burglar lying on the floor.

He was a man of vast stature, in the prime of life—though he did not look it now, for he was badly knocked about, nor had Pete escaped quite free. Their clothes were badly torn, and the room was worse wrecked.

"I hab caught de burglar," observed Pete. "I tink dese blind cords will be strong enough to bind him up."

Pete wrenched them down, and bound the unconscious man's arms behind his back; then he bound his ankles.

"It's a funny ting dat you boys can't keep watch at night when dangerous burglars are hanging about."

"Well, you see, Pete, we heard you snoring, and so we thought the burglar would be frightened to enter the house with that row going on, and we went to sleep."

"I caught de man in de fact," observed Pete. "I had no idea dat he was Burger, but I see now he ain't. I hope I ain't hurt him."

"I reckon he looks as though you had," observed Sam, taking the water-bottle and pouring some water over his brow.

"Well, you see, Sammy, he's a mighty strong man, and as we were fighting in de dark, I couldn't see exactly where I was planting de blows. He seemed to be planting his in several places, and dey were all painful places. I tink I gabe him an upper-cut, and dey often make a man go to sleep. Still, he's waking now. Cheer up, old hoss, you ain't hurt, dough I must say you deserve to be."

The nocturnal visitor, notwithstanding that his arms and legs were bound, struggled into a sitting posture, and then he glared at the comrades.

"You vile scoundrels!" he gasped. "I'll live to see you hanged!"

"Seems to me, old hoss, we'm a lot more likely to lib to see you strung up. How dare you burgle dis house in such a manner. Come, tell me de troof, and what you say will be used in evidence against you. I'm a moneylender. You—you can't get ober one ob dat sort."

"You are a raving maniac!" howled the bound man. "I am Mr. James Harris."

"Yah, yah, yah! Why don't you call yourself esquire while you are about it?"

"Why not?"

"Yah, yah, yah! A burglar don't often get his letters addressed like dat."

"A burglar, you black ruffian. I am the owner of this house. I suppose you are going to rob me. Well, if you don't murder me, it won't go well for you when you get loose."

"Eh?"

"I say I'm the owner of this house."

"I see; and Stanley Manchester is your tenant."

"You stupid villain, what are you talking about? This house is mine, I tell you."

"And de furniture belongs to Stanley Manchester," observed Pete.

"The furniture belongs to me, you miscreant! I never heard of such a name as Stanley Manchester."

"You cannot rob a moneylender," observed Jack.

"De man can't be speaking de troof, Jack," growled Pete, who began to

think that something was radically wrong. It is true that James Harris's clothes were badly torn, and that he did not look as respectable as he might have done; all the same, he did not look like a burglar. He wore a gold watchchain, and a diamond scarfpin; and burglars do not do that as a rule.

"I ain't at all sure 'bout dis matter," growled Pete, setting the unfortunate man at liberty. "You don't look like a burglar. All de same, I don't see how you can be de owner ob dis furniture, when Stanley Manchester gabe me a bill ob sale on it for five thousand pounds, and de bill ob sale includes his motor-car."

"Fury! It is my motor-car."

"What about de footman John?"

"Look here! I can't fight the three of you, and I am unarmed; were it otherwise, I would shoot the lot of you. You have entered my house in my absence, and I presume my housekeeper, who is the only servant I keep indoors, has connived at the villainy; but——"

"Dere's more in dis dan meets de eye, Jack," groaned Pete.

"You can't rob a moneylender," observed Jack.

"Well, I ain't been robbed. I hab got de bill ob sale."

"Indeed! I thought your solicitor had it."

"Solicitors are always honest."

"Sometimes they are deceived. But was Brough a solicitor?"

"Why, we saw him come out of his office!"

"You can't rob a moneylender."

"Jack, you'm like some old parrot, keep repeating de same ting again and again."

"What has all this to do with me?" howled James Harris. "Here I enter my own house, and am assaulted in the most disgraceful manner. My furniture is smashed to atoms. I am seriously injured. You dare to bind me, and call me a burglar. What the thunder do you mean by it? That's what I want to know. Send for my housekeeper. I am going upstairs for a minute. I will fetch her."

"Nunno, old hoss, you don't!" exclaimed Pete. "You see, you talked 'bout shooting us, and if dis is really your house, dough I don't see how it can be, when Stanley Manchester said it was his house—all de same, you might know where to find a revolver; and, you see, we don't care to be shot."

"Perdition! I was born in the house, and my father was born here before me."

"Well, it stands to reason dat he must hab been born before you; but weder he was born here, or not, is anoder matter."

"There is not the slightest use in speaking to that raving maniac," said Harris. "You appear to have some sense, young man."

"Jack ain't got much sense," observed Pete.

"He does not appear to be a raving maniac like you," snarled the badly-damaged man. "Explain to me how it is you are in my house?"

In a few words Jack told exactly what had happened, and he told it in a manner that was convincing.

"We have never seen your housekeeper," added Jack. "The only servant we have ever seen was the footman, in livery. Stanley called him John."

"Send for that woman!" howled Harris. "I have been abroad, and returned sooner than expected. I intended to let this house for three months, but the agents were unable to get my terms."

"Keep to de point, my poor old hoss."

"Keep to the point, you vagabond! Do you think I am going to let a



lot of blackguardly niggers come into my house, and—and smash it up—and smash me up—and—and be anything like calm?"

"I'm satisfied dat you ain't a burglar."

"Hang your satisfaction! Who cares whether you are satisfied or not?"

"Who do you tink would do all dat, Sammy?" inquired Pete.

"I reckon I don't know."

"You don't seem to know much, Sammy. What do you know?"

"That you can't get the better of a moneylender, according to your own words, though not exactly to your own showing."

"We don't say anyting more 'bout dat matter for de present, Sammy," observed Pete, glancing sideways at Jack, who was grinning in a manner that gave the impression he would say a good deal more about it. "De fact remains dat dere seems to hab been a mistake; but if dis old hoss proves to my satisfaction dat he is de owner ob dis house, and dat all de furniture in it, including de motor-car, belongs to him, I shall be willing to cancel de bill ob sale on his paying five thousand pounds dat I hab advanced on it. I shall forego de interest."

"You raving maniac! I don't suppose you have fivepence to lend. And I don't care if you have lent five million pounds on the security of my furniture. The only consolation to me is that you will lose every penny of any money you may have lent; and you will also pay me for all the damage done. Then, if I don't put you all in prison for entering my house in my absence, you can think yourselves very lucky."

"Look here, Mr. Harris," exclaimed Jack. "Suppose you and I go upstairs and bring your housekeeper down. It is quite possible that she will be able to throw some light on the subject. I can only assure you that if you have spoken the truth, and your manner certainly gives me that impression, we shall make every restitution that it is possible for us to make. We are not without means."

"Then I vow I will make you pay for this villainy!"

"It is not a matter of villainy. I have told you the absolute truth, and there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that I shall be able to prove my words. You must know that we are not burglars, otherwise we should certainly rob you now, because you could have no chance against the three of us. Besides, if we had wrong intentions, what would have been the sense in Pete letting you loose, when he had once succeeded in binding you? I can quite understand your rage, supposing that what you say is correct. But you have got to remember that the unrobbable moneylender has apparently been robbed of five thousand pounds, and having been made such an utter idiot on one occasion, he does not want a repetition."

"Steady dere, Jack! I don't care for de idiotic part ob de remark."

"Of course, we know, Pete, because you have told us, that you can't rob a moneylender."

"Golly! I do wish you would be quiet 'bout dat matter, Jack. How do I know dat Harris ain't a professional burglar, and, you see, he ain't been able to rob me?"

"Rob you, you black maniac!" howled Harris. "It is you who have robbed me. Send for my housekeeper. At least she has got some sense, and she will be able to tell you that I am the owner of this house and all that is in it."

"You ain't de owner ob dis nigger, old hoss."

"No! I'm not the owner of you, you raving maniac! If I were, I would tie some stones round your neck and fling your carcass into the river!"

"Yah, yah, yah! Seems vexed wid me for someting."

"Oh, send for Janet, my housekeeper!"

"She won't like getting up at dis time ob de morning, old hoss, 'specially if she's rader old," said Pete.

"What do I care what she likes? She is my servand, and has got to obey my orders."

"I'm rader inclined to tink de poor, denuded old hoss must hab made a mistake in de houses," observed Pete. "P'r'aps he's been dining out, and has mistaken de keyhole."

"Send for Janet!" yelled Harris.

#### CHAPTER 8.

#### The Plot Revealed—Harris's Fury—A Long Chase—Some Wild Adventures.

THESE was no need to send for that good woman. She had heard the disturbance from the first, and had locked and barricaded her door, under the impression that there were burglars in the house.

But when she heard Harris's voice she hurriedly dressed, and now entered the room.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, gazing round the room.

"What is the meaning of this, Janet?" demanded Harris.

"Well, I never did; and all the best furniture broken!"

"Is dat your master, Janet?" inquired Pete.

"Certainly!"

"You are sure he ain't a burglar?"

"Of course I am."

"Well, if you are a certificated housekeeper, and de man belong to you, and you can assure us dat he's quite respectable, I shall be satisfied. It's all right, Harris, my poor old hoss. I hab come to de conclusion dat you ain't a burglar."

"What are these miscreants doing here?" demanded Harris.

"They are Mr. Stanley Manchester's visitors, sir."

"In the name of all that's sensible, who is he?"

"He's the gentleman you let the house to, sir."

"Fury! I have not let the house at all!"

"Why, I had a letter from you from France, saying that you had let the house for three months to Mr. Stanley Manchester; that he would be here on a certain day with his manservant, John, and that as he wanted it for the shooting, he would invite some friends down. That I was to cook for them as well as I could, but that I was to do none of the housework, and that I was not to interfere with them in any way. My wages were to be paid by you, but there was no doubt Mr. Stanley Manchester would give me some perquisites for the extra trouble. And he did, sir. He gave me a sovereign, and promised me another one when he went."

"Show me the letter!" roared Harris. "I never wrote it! It is a forgery! Oh, fury!"

"Yah, yah, yah! I can see a master hand in dis little lot."

"You cannot rob a moneylender," murmured Jack.

"Oh, do shut up, Jack! I know you will drive me mad if you keep on like dat!"

"He can't drive you more mad than you are!" snarled Harris. "You are deadly dangerous as it is."

"If Stanley ain't de owner ob dis house and furniture, I ain't so dangerous as he is. But what about Brough, de solicitor, Jack?"

"How do you know he was a solicitor?"

"'Cos I saw his name on de door."

"Do you remember that Stanley telephoned to someone? We don't know



to whom he sent the message. Suppose the whole thing was planned, and that message was to tell a man who was going to impersonate Brough to be at their offices and come out as the car drove up?"

"But we should hab heard him say all dat frounch de telephone."

"Quite so. He might have arranged the whole affair, and this man who pretended to be Brough might have been waiting somewhere for the message. All he would need would be the exact time to be there. He might have gone there, waited outside till he saw the car coming, then walked up the stairs, and walked down again."

Here Janet returned with the letter, and Harris looked at it in blank dismay.

"It certainly appears to be my handwriting and my signature; but I never wrote the letter. I never let my house."

"You said you were going to do so, sir."

"I know I did, woman, but I never succeeded."

"You told me you would be sure to let it, because of the shooting."

"Well, I didn't. I wasn't going to have my furniture knocked about for three pounds a week; and that was an offer made to me."

"You'm get it knocked about for less dan dat, old hoss," observed Pete. "I tought when Stanley put my dog on de top ob de polished piano dat he was a little reckless wid his furniture, and also when he fed him wid bones on de carpet. Still, I tought perhaps he did not care so much after he had giben de bill ob sale."

"Show me the bill of sale!" roared Harris.

"Eh?"

"Where is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "I expect it is with Pete's five thousand pounds. Brough—I don't know what his real name is—has taken it away for registration. However, it may all come right, because Pete is a money-lender, and you can't rob them."

Pete sighed. He thought of Gladys, but he did not sigh because of her beauty.

"Where is this manservant, John?" demanded Harris.

"De echo answers where, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "We went to bed early to watch for burglars. I tink it was his idea. And as he has had plenty ob time to escape, I wouldn't be surprised if he has done it in your motor-car, 'cos Stanley could easily hab come back for it."

"You have surely not let them use my new motor-car?" yelled Harris, turning to Janet.

"You told me to do so in that letter, sir."

"I never wrote the letter, woman!"

"Well, those were my instructions, and I obeyed them."

"What description of man was this scoundrel, Stanley Manchester? I certainly met a man in France—no, it could not have been him, because he has been with me all the time, and——"

"I suppose his name wasn't Spicer?" inquired Pete.

"No, it wasn't, you idiot! His name was Sir Henry Rice, and——"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Dat accounts for de milk in de cocoa-nut, and de monkey's face depicted thereon. Spicer is de same as Sir Henry Rice, and you won't be able to find a bigger thief on de face ob dis round earth. He tried to rob me, only——"

"You can't rob a moneylender," interposed Jack.

"Oh, do shut up, Jack!" growled Pete. "I dunno how Spicer got hold ob your signature, but——"

"He was with me for weeks, and would have had plenty of opportunities.

But he can't have had anything to do with it. He is a most respectable man. Once when I ran short of gold he cashed a cheque for me, and——"

"Yah, yah, yah! I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's cashed a lot more for himself on de top ob it. I dunno how much money you hab got in de bank, but dere ain't likely to be so much as you tink."

"I don't believe it. He owns property in the East End. He has houses in the same street as I have."

"So dat's it, is it? You'm an East End landlord. You let out a house to starving poor at about five shillings a room, and make about a hundred and fifty pounds out of a forty pound house—eh?"

"I don't want any more of your nigger's impertinence!"

"Nunno! You didn't want to be robbed ob your motor-car; and to hab your furniture smashed up, but you got it all de same—de same as you are going to get my opinion on your dealings wid de poor. I dunno weder you are one ob de regular landlords, but rader tink you are, and if so, I'm mighty glad dat you hab been robbed, 'cos it serves you right. Now, you know weder de cap fits, and if it does you can wear it."

"I'll make you pay for all the damage done here, and I will prosecute you for assaulting me."

"You may do de former, but it's mighty certain you won't do de latter."

"Get out of my house, you black beast!"

"Do you tink it is his house, and dat dis ain't a trick ob some swindler, Jack?"

"I rather think he is the owner of the house, Pete," laughed Jack.

"The only thing that makes me have any doubts is because of the utter impossibility of Stanley being able to rob a moneylender."

"Ain't it mighty awful?" growled Pete. "Here, I hab got all dese troubles on my shoulders, and you keep talking 'bout past observations ob mine dat ain't got anything to do wid de case. However, if de old hoss orders us out ob his house, I 'spect de only ting for us to do is to go. You will find dat is my address, old hoss, and if you want a claim for damages against me—why, you can apply dere, and I shall consider de matter. In de meantime, I shall be absent from dat office for de space ob as many days as my private business takes me away, and when dat private business is finished I shall return to de office. 'Nuff said! Good-bye! It's just possible you will find Spicer has wiped out your banking balance, and if you hab mentioned to him what property you own in de East End, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he has collected your rents for you. 'Noder 'nuff said!"

"Here, stop!" cried Harris. "You are not going like that! I want to know more about you!"

"Or is it more about Spicer dat you want to know?"

"I don't wish to turn you out in the middle of the night."

"Oh, we don't mind dat at all!"

"Well, I do. If you look at the whole matter you will see that your presence here is very suspicious. It is possible that you may have spoken the truth to me; in which case, for your own sakes, you will want to clear up the matter, and bring the guilty parties to justice."

"Also bring back your motor-car—eh, old hoss?"

"I can plainly see that if Sir Henry Rice, as he called himself, is a swindler, he would have had the opportunity of perpetrating this fraud. You have suffered, if what you say is true, and, therefore, it is to our mutual interest to catch him. That motor-car cost me two thousand pounds."



"How many houses hab you got in de East End, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"That has nothing to do with you."

"You let dem to poor people?"

"Do you suppose rich people would live there?"

"Nunno!"

"Poor people must live somewhere."

"I 'spect so; dough I must say I don't see how some ob de poor creatures can hab any wish to lib anywhere. But I happen to hab done some slumming, old hoss, and I know perfectly well de style ob tings dat obtains dere. De landlords lib like you lib, and de tenants lib like people would be sent to prison for if dey kept animals in de same way."

"I am not expected to keep my tenants in food."

"Nunno! And you ain't expected to take de bread out ob deir moufs by making dem pay five times de amount ob rent dey ought to. I 'spect dere's no law against it. But dat ain't de question. It's a question ob conscience, and if you are de kind ob landlord I'm mighty certain you are, den all I can say is dat you ain't got any conscience."

"And you, a dirty moneylender, to talk to me like this, fellow! You are a canting hypocrite! It is you who rob the poor. What about the poor creatures who come to you? Come, what interest do you charge?"

"Twenty-five per cent."

"Indeed! You lend a poor woman five pounds. She signs a promissory note for six pounds five if you lend it for six months, and she has to pay you back five shillings a week. Why, you silly villain, taking into consideration the money she pays you back, it is nearer cent. per cent., and with the fines for not paying promptly it would amount to much more."

"Well, supposing dat is how I work it," said Pète, fishing for information; "two wrongs don't make a right. Here, you buy a rotten old twelve-roomed house for free hundred pounds. What does de interest on dat come to, Jack?"

"At six per cent. it comes to eighteen pounds a year. There would be, say, twelve pounds ground-rent, making thirty."

"Bery well; and he lets off ebery room at five shillings a week."

"No, I don't. I never charge more than three-and-sixpence."

"You see, Jack, I hab caught him. Twelve times free-and-six?"

"Two guineas a week—a hundred and nine pounds four a year. That, beyond his ground-rent and interest, would give, say, seventy-nine pounds a year. I don't know what you would put the repairs at."

"You needn't count dem. I hab seen a bit about it, and know. Harris, you are an old scoundrel! How many wretched homes have you sold up? How many little children hab you sent to bed hungry, 'cos deir parents hab had to scrape togeder de money to pay your exorbitant rents? 'Nuff said! If we say much more I shall pull your nose, by way ob expressing my opinion!"

"And how many homes have you sold up, you black dog? How many children have you starved, when you sent the fathers to prison for not paying your shameful interest?"

"Two wrongs don't make a right."

"Then don't talk your cant to me, you rascal! I shall charge what rents I choose. A nigger is not going to preach to me—especially a moneylender! I presume your friends there find the money, and you carry on the business."

"M'yes! Jack ain't competent to carry on a business. His part ob de business is to keep account ob all de poor people I send to prison, and see how many ob de little children starve in consequence."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack.

"Can you laugh at such action, young man?" demanded Harris.

"How strange it is that the wrongs of others always seem worse than our own!" observed Jack. "According to your own admission, you make money by grinding down the poor. Listen to me, fellow! If Pete treated a poor man harshly he would be no friend of mine. If he starved a little child I would be the very first to haul him over to justice. He does more for the poor in one week of his life than you have done in the whole of your lifetime. However, I don't want to convince you, because I do not care for the opinion of such a man as you. We shall make this damage good. As regards the manner in which you have got knocked about, that was a little error of judgment. Although you may not be able to rob a moneylender——"

"You are positively sickening, Jack!"

"He may sometimes make a mistake. Pete made one when he mistook you for a burglar; but I rather fancy you will have to put up with the consequences."

"I think, under all the circumstances of the case, that it will be better for you to remain here for the present, and I shall put the police in possession of the facts."

"See here," growled Pete, "I ain't relying on bobbies. You can take what action you like. I'm going to gib chase to Stanley Manchester. He's de man I want to catch, because I rader want to get de five thousand pounds back."

"I mean to get my motor-car back!"

"M'yes! If you can, but I ain't at all sure dat you will."

"The man is an infamous scoundrel."

"Well, he ain't as honest as he ought to be; at de same time, I don't consider him such a scoundrel as you are, 'cos he only robs de rich, and you rob de poor."

"Come, my man, I don't want any more of that language. The question is how we had better act."

"We hab rader a cunning man to deal wid," observed Pete, pulling out his pipe, by way of inspiration. "You see, sending dat telegram shows some ob it. John is anoder one. Did Spicer know de exact time you were going to return, old hoss?"

"Rice—yes. We crossed together."

"Dat shows you dat Rice is at de bottom ob it, and I must say he has got a smart man in Stanley to help him, while John don't make at all a bad third party. Now, if you want us to stop here for de remainder ob de night, we are quite willing to do so. I'm going to tink ober de best way to act, so dat I can prove to Jack and Sammy dat you can't get de best ob a moneylender. I shall make a mighty big fortune in de business later on."

"It will be a lot later on," laughed Jack, "if you give your paper profits away to the poor. When a lady comes to borrow five hundred pounds, and you give away the hundred pounds odd interest she promises to pay on the same day that you make the loan, then she comes the following morning and borrows another five hundred pounds——"

"I wanted to get rid of her, Jack, before you saw her, 'cos she's mighty pretty, and I tought you might fall in lub wid her."

"Thank you! I am not going to fall in love with a lady who wants money at that rate. Then there was the poor woman who came to pay you half-a-crown off the five pounds she borrowed, and you would not take it, but tore up her promissory note, gave her two pounds a week, and



bought a cottage and furniture for her, why, I really don't see how you are going to make a mighty fortune."

Harris listened to all this, and Jack intended that he should do so.

"I would prefer your staying here to-night, and to-morrow we will all go to make the search. The better way will be for us all to go in company, as we shall then be able to identify the scoundrels. We can also put the matter in the hands of the police."

"I'll tell you what it is, Sam," exclaimed Jack, as they made their way to their respective rooms. "Harris is going to have a rough time of it if he comes it with Pete."

"Serve the brute right, if he is anything like Pete imagines, and I firmly believe he is," answered Sam. "I reckon he will deserve all he gets."

The following morning Harris was in a state of greater excitement than ever, for, on searching his house, he found that every portable article of any value had been taken. Probably John had made the final clearance.

"My desk has been burst open," he hooted, "and all the valuables are gone. The police are coming here this morning, and we cannot start until they do come."

"Bery well, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "I ain't in any particular hurry to start. I dare say Jack can convince you dat we ain't touched any ob your property, but I don't care weder he does it or not. You can charge us for de food we hab had since we hab been here, and shove it on to de bill for damage done when I took you for a burglar instead ob de ordinary robber ob de poor."

"I consider the fair way to settle the matter will be for you to find the money for the expenses of our journey," said Harris. "If you agree to that I shall not charge you for your food since you have been here."

This was not a very generous offer, for Harris had already learnt that Stanley had paid the week's bills, although they had certainly had a large quantity of game off the estate.

Pete agreed to the arrangement; and then, as they finished breakfast, a constable arrived. He asked a lot of questions, and thought a good deal, but he said very little. He did not, however, appear to be suspicious of Jack, Sam, and Pete.

At Jack's suggestion they paid a visit to Brough and Murton. Harris accompanied them, and allowed Pete to pay his first-class fare. All Jack cared about was to convince Harris that they were quite respectable, but he determined to leave Pete to act as he chose, and his methods were a trifle peculiar.

"I want to see Brough, old hoss," he said to a clerk.

"Young Mr. Brough?"

"Nunno; old Mr. Brough."

"Then you can't."

"Golly! I will."

"No, you won't."

"I won't go till I do."

"All right. Sit down there," said the clerk, going on with his work.

"Do you tink he will be engaged for long?" inquired Pete, after he had waited for ten minutes, and all the clerks were grinning at him.

"I shouldn't wonder if he is."

"Is he in de office?"

"No."

"Where is de man?"

"In Highgate Cemetery. He has been dead for five years. His son is in the firm."

"Is he 'bout fifty years of age?"

"No, about half that amount. You can wait for him, if you like."

"Well, I tink I will. He may be able to tell me something 'bout Brough. When do you tink he will be disengaged?"

"He is disengaged now. You see, he is taking a fortnight's holiday, but he will be here the week after next. You are quite welcome to wait."

"Golly! I ain't going to wait all dat time. But look here, old hoss, someone came down dese stairs and said he was Brough, and dat man is a thief."

"It couldn't have been the real Brough, because he's in his coffin. I don't hold a brief for his honesty, but I can prove an alibi."

"Dat's right, my fair-haired pretty child. You'm a smart little fellow, and your moder ought to be proud ob you. Dere's a penny for you for sweets. Good-bye, my little fellow."

This caused a roar of laughter at the clerk's expense, for Pete tossed him the penny, and left the office, while he was thinking of what reply he would make.

"I'm rader inclined to tink you are right, Jack, and dat Brough wasn't de man he said he was. Now, see here, to chase a man in a motor-car de best road is to hab a motor-car yourself. Just go and buy one, boys, while I attend to my business affairs, den meet me at de apartments dis evening, and if I can't prove to you dat it is impossible to rob a moneylender, I will prove to you dat it is mighty impossible to escape from him after you hab robbed him."

"But what's the good of a motor-car if you don't know the direction the miscreant has taken?" objected Harris.

"What's de use ob being an extortionate landlord, robbing de poor, and hoarding deir money up. And see here, old hoss, I don't particularly want you, so, if you don't want to come, you buzz off home."

"Oh, I will come with you," exclaimed Harris, who was very anxious to regain his motor-car, which was really the only thing he had lost.

"Well, I hab got a driver's license, if I ain't lost it, and so hab you, Jack, and all we need is a car. Dose are easily got. Get a good one. I mean one dat will go 'bout free hundred miles an hour. We can sell it again when we hab done wid it. You can keep it in de stables ob dat public house close by. 'Nuff said! Come along, Rory, you ain't any good in purchasing motor-cars."

Jack and Sam were quite agreeable to purchasing a motor-car; in fact, they had discussed the matter several times already. They hurried off on their errand.

Pete made his way back to his apartments, and having learnt that no one was waiting for him, he went up to his offices, where he found Jimmy wading through letters, and sorting out such as he considered worthy of replies.

"Neber mind about dose, old hoss," he said. "I ain't got time to attend to dem now. Hab dere been any callers?"

"Any amount, and I told them all that you would not be able to attend to business matters for some days."

"Has Gladys been here?"

"No."

"Well, dat's a mercy. It almost looks as dough she had giben up card-playing. Now, see here, Jimmy! I hab got some bery important business to attend to, and I may not be back till to-morrow morning. What you hab got to do is to wait till Jack and Sammy come in, and den tell dem dat I hab gone to attend to a private matter, and dat I sha'n't be back till bery late, but dat dey are to wait for me. Golly! Hark at dat!"



It was a voice on the stairs, and Pete knew that voice well.

"Don't you trouble, Mrs. Murkins. I know the way up quite well. Nice day, is it not?"

"Dat's Gladys, and I ain't seeing her," murmured Pete, creeping under the sofa. "You must get rid ob her, Jimmy."

There was not time to lock the door, for Pete had scarcely scrambled under the sofa, when Gladys, looking charming, entered the room.

"Mrs. Murkins has told me that Pete is in," she observed. "Will you please tell him that I want to see him immediately?"

"I am sorry, ma'am, but he will be unable to see you to-day."

"I feel sure he will see me. Just take my message to him."

"Ain't dis mighty nice," mused Pete, as Gladys seated herself on the sofa. "What would Jack and Sammy say if dey knew dat de moneylender was hiding under de sofa to escape his debtors?"

In a few moments Jimmy came back.

"I find his room is empty," he said. "He told me that he intended to go out, and said that he would not be back to-night."

"Then I will wait for Jack."

"Nunno, you won't, my dear," growled Pete, scrambling from beneath the sofa so precipitately that he nearly upset Gladys. She uttered a suppressed scream, and then looked indignantly at Pete, who felt remarkably small.

"How could you treat me so cruelly, Pete!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were so honest, too."

"Now, look here, my dear, I ain't going to lend you any more money."

"I only want two hundred and fifty."

"You shall hab dat——"

"Oh, thank you so much."

"When you pay me back de first thousand."

"Don't be a beast, Pete."

"Can't help dat. You'm not going to hab anoder penny."

"Do, Pete. I must have it."

"You won't get it here, my dear. Oh, you can cry as much as you please. Dat won't affect me, 'cos I know you are only crying because you can't play cards."

"I am crying because I can't pay my debts," sobbed Gladys.

"Should say it was for de people you owe de money to to do de crying part ob de business."

"You are horrid this morning. I know Jack will lend it to me. I shall wait for him."

"Can't help dat. If he's stupid enough to fall in lub wid you, he must do it."

"May I sit down?"

"Suttingly."

"When do you expect Jack to come in?"

"He might be in any moment now, my dear."

"Won't he laugh at you when he knows that you hid under the sofa to escape me. He wouldn't do that."

"I don't believe he would, my dear. Golly!"

"There he is," exclaimed Gladys, as there was a shout up the stairs.

Pete opened the door, and listened.

"Pete!"

"Hullo, dere!"

"We are going to have luncheon out, and then we shall go to the theatre. We sha'n't be back till late."

"All right, Jack," bawled Pete. "I'll sit up for you most likely. Yah, yah, yah! You can wait for Jack now if you like, my dear, only I rader spect Mrs. Murkins hab someting to say about de matter. I'm going out, and I sha'n't be back till late."

Now, Jack was at least a mile away from the place, but Gladys never doubted that what she had heard was his voice, and that it was not due to Pete's ventriloquism. She followed him downstairs, trying to induce him to change his mind, but Pete was quite determined, and when he gained the Square he bolted as hard as he could go.

"Got rid ob her," growled Pete, "and she ain't at all likely to wait for Jack. Now de first ting is to hab a good feed, and den we will consider de matter."

Pete had a very large dinner, and then he came to the conclusion that Berry might be able to give him some information concerning the whereabouts of the thieves. In fact, Pete believed that the old rascal was a receiver of stolen property, and that a lot of ruffians frequented his house for the purpose of disposing of their spoil.

If this were so, it seemed more than likely that John would make his way there to dispose of the property he had stolen from Furze Hall. He might even find Stanley and Brough there, though he scarcely thought that likely, as they would hardly bring the motor-car to London, where it would be almost sure to be traced.

For a long time Pete thought the matter over, and then a very daring scheme occurred to him. He meant to make an attempt to enter that thieves' den.

The night promised to suit his purpose well, for as it grew dark a fog arose, and it grew denser as he made his way eastwards.

Pete knew his way to Berry's house; but he wanted to gain the back of it, and he found some difficulty in doing so, for another row of miserable houses ran along at the back, and their back yards adjoined, and he did not care to run the risk of asking one of the occupants to go through his house.

At last he ventured into the street in front, trusting that no one would see him in the fog.

The front door of one of the houses was open, and Pete entered, then crept up the stairs till he gained the top of the building.

Like most of the other places in the street, with the exception of Berry's house, the houses were let off in tenements, so that, even if Pete had been seen, his appearance would have created little surprise; but he gained the top floor without meeting anyone.

If the rooms up there were let, their occupiers had evidently not yet come in. There was a trapdoor in the ceiling of the passage, and Pete could reach it from the floor.

Pushing up the trapdoor, Pete pulled himself up. He was now in complete darkness; but, after some groping, he discovered the trapdoor that led on the roof, and he climbed through this.

"Now, den, old hoss," he murmured, "you'm got five roofs to cross before you gain de correct house, and, as dose roofs are slanting, not to say slippery, you had better be careful how you go, else you are going to hurt yourself, and your moder would be sorry for dat—so would you!"

Pete, however, gained the house he wished to enter without sorrow to his mother or himself, and he entered it through the trapdoor, then stole downstairs.

There was a light in Berry's sitting-room, but the old rascal was not there. Pete entered,



There was a large, old-fashioned couch in the room, with dirty chintz covering which reached to the floor.

It would afford Pete a capital hiding-place; but, in the event of an attack, he would be in a very awkward position, and he would have preferred a safer retreat.

That, however, was the only hiding-place in the room, so he crept beneath, and now he waited.

Berry would be certain to sit in that room, and Pete hoped that others would come there, so that he might gather something from their conversation.

He could hear the voices of many men in the kitchen, and once or twice he thought he detected Berry's; but upwards of an hour passed by without anyone coming into the room.

At last there was a knock at the front door, and Berry came up to open it—at least, Pete imagined that it was the old man by his light footstep, which would be very different to the clump of those burly ruffians below.

Now Pete recognised the old man's voice distinctly, and he knew by the very first words who the other man was.

"Well, John," exclaimed Berry, "what luck?"

"Grand! We've done the thing a treat!"

"Well done! Well done indeed! Come in. They are drinking and smoking below, and that is no place for us. He, he! We can drink and smoke better alone. Shut the door, John—shut the door! We must have no interruption. Stay, I will lock it!"

The two entered the room, and Pete heard the key turn in the lock. They conversed in lowered voices, but every word was audible to Pete.

#### CHAPTER 9.

#### How Pete Gained His Clue—The Walking Sofa—Poverty is No Crime.

"AS Spicer turned up yet, mate?"

"No. Neither have I heard from him. I doubt if he will come here. Probably he will want me to go to him, and I shall be able to take the news."

"You've got good news to take him. Stanley netted the five thousand. He's got the notes in his pocket. Brough and him worked it grand!"

"Brough?"

"Parks. We called him Brough, you know."

"Yes, yes! I had not heard the name of the solicitors. And so?"

"Why, there wasn't the slightest difficulty. Mind you, Stanley is as good as Spicer himself. I believe he is better."

"Not for scheming. There is no man in London that can scheme like Spicer."

"They left in the motor-car, got clean away, and left me to clear up. I only had about an hour in the evening, because of the old housekeeper, but I didn't make a bad clearance. See here!"

"This is good, my son—very good! Of course, the five thousand pounds were the principal thing, but it would have been a pity to leave all this behind. It will be no easy matter to dispose of the car, but I dare say we can manage it. They have not written to me yet."

"They won't have had time. I doubt if they are in Devonshire yet."

"Did they tell you which part they were going to?"

"Well, Stanley said they would miss the big towns. He wanted to get on the moors. I forget what place it was he said he would have to pass through. A place with two names. He said he had stayed there once."

"Ah! Was it Bovey Tracy?"

"Yes, that was it."

"He stayed there last time."

"Yes, so he said. He spoke of a road leading over the moors. I forget the name of the place he's going to; but, as he's going to write you from there, it won't matter. Now, what is that little lot worth?"

"I think I could make it thirty pounds."

"Can't you make it forty?"

"Do they share it?"

"Yes. It all goes into the haul."

"Well, I tell you what I will do with you, John. I will make it fifteen pounds, and make you a present of fifteen sovereigns. See, you will gain."

"So will you."

"Yes. I always gain in such deals, but look at the risk!"

"They will want to see the swag, and will know you haven't given enough."

"I shall show them half of it, John. The other half I shall hide. They don't know how much you got."

"Right you are! I'm game; only mind they don't find the rest of the things, 'cos Stanley has seen them in the drawers."

"There is no fear of that," said the old miscreant, counting out the gold, as Pete knew by the jingle. "I have a secret drawer at the bottom of that couch. They will not look there, neither will anyone else. Trust me, my son, for keeping a secret; and I know you will keep it, too, for your own sake. Just turn the couch on end, so that I can get at the secret opening. Lift up the head end."

Now, this was very awkward for Pete. Above all things, he did not want to be discovered there, because even if he escaped from the place alive, they would certainly warn Stanley, and spoil his chance of catching him.

As he heard John approaching, he raised the head of the couch with his back, then, turning swiftly, danced it across the floor in a manner that would have been comical, had it not been so terrifying to the two ruffians.

They both uttered cries of terror, and John fled across the room. Then Pete, still keeping behind the heavy couch, hurled it upon the table, and smashed the oil lamp to atoms.

The room was now in total darkness, for the shutters to the windows were closed.

With two strides Pete gained the door, and, having unlocked it, took out the key, and, slipping out, closed the door, and locked it on the outside.

There was too much noise in the kitchen for the gang there to have heard the cries, and, while someone was wrenching at the sitting-room door, Pete coolly unfastened the front door, and hurried along the street, turning away from the window, in case anyone looked out, although he felt pretty confident that they would not have had time to unfasten the shutters. Even if they had, it is doubtful if they could have seen him, so dark and foggy was the night.

"Pete, old hoss," he mused, "you'm a better detective dan you are a moneylender, dough I ain't going to admit as much as dat to Jack. Nunno! Must remember de name ob de place in Devonshire. Bovey Tracy. Dat's two words; and as I can't see to write it down, because I ain't got a pencil, we will work it wid my remembering cistern. Boh to a goose—dat's for de Bo. V is a letter ob de alphabet. Tracy—well, dat's a sketch. Now, it's a funny ting, but I shall remember dat name for de rest ob my life, and—"



"Say, mate, are you scattering it to-night?" inquired a voice; and a lad stepped from the doorway. "I'm Bill, and last time you was down here you gave me a thick 'un."

"Oh, I remember you, Bill! Hab you spent dat little lot?"

"Well, that worn't all I got out of you. I made five quid. You see, I sent others. I gave mother two of 'em, and put the rest on horses, 'cos I wanted to make a bit."

"You tink dat was right, when your moder wanted de money?"

"Corse it was. Some of 'em was twenty-to-one chances!"

"More dan dat, my lad. More dan dat, poor Bill!"

"No; the cove I put it on with don't give more than twenty. He's straight, but that's his rule. I might have won sixty quid, and he would have paid!"

"I'd like to hab dat straight man and a horsewhip for free minutes!" growled Pete. "What would you hab done wid de money, Bill?"

"Given mother fifty quid. That would have kept her for two year without work."

"Golly! How many are there of you?"

"Three kids and me. Father's in quod, and will be for another year."

"And your moder?"

"Does sewing. She's at it day and night. Blest if I know how she does without sleep!"

"What do you pay for de rooms?"

"What are you getting at? We've only got one. Four bob is the price."

"Take me to dat room, Bill."

"Well, I dunno that mother will like it. Still, if I tell her you was the chap that gave me the thick 'un, she won't mind; only look here, don't you let on that I've backed the gee-gees!"

"See here, Bill, I'm afraid you are not quite honest; but, den, I don't see how you can be. Dere's two tings I want to know."

"I'll tell you straight, if you ain't going to try to harm mother and the kids."

"What's your landlord's name?"

"Giles."

"I tought it might hab been Harris."

"Well, Harris owns the houses. He owns most of 'em in this street. He may be all right, but Giles is a scorcher. He's the collector. Chucks you out if you don't pay. He chucked out two families last week, and he ain't let his rooms yet; but he's bound to do that sooner or later, and he'll chuck them out. He sells furniture of a sort. See, he collars their sticks, and sells 'em again. It ain't a bad game!"

"Suppose I find de capital, Bill, will you start de business? You can employ a man for de chucking-out purposes, you know."

"What about the mothers and little 'uns?"

"Well, I suppose dey hab got sticks. You chuck dem out de same!"

"I ain't doing it, mate—I ain't, straight. Mind you, I'm not saying some of the mothers ain't bad, but think of the kids. Think of our baby, for instance. No, I won't do it. Strike me silly if I will! I'll go up West and pick pockets for you, but I won't do that. My mother is a good woman. She's as good as some of your ladies. She starves herself for the kids."

"And for you, Bill?"

"No, she don't, and she ain't going to. I can jog along somehow, but I ain't taking food from mother and the baby. Blow me if I will!"

"Golly, golly! 'Ain't it mighty awful dat a lad like you—— 'Nuff said. What work does your moder do?"

"Tailoring, and shirting. There's lots of 'em do it about this part."

"Does she work for a man named Jeban?"

"Yus. He gives a lot of work. I think he supplies the others with slops."

"Sort ob broth?"

"Haw, haw! What are you getting at, Readies. Kicksies, and sech."

"Eh?"

"Ready-made suits and trousers. Kicksies for the costers. Mother can make eight bob a week. I've known her do ten, working best part through the night."

"And Sundays?"

"Of course."

"Show me de room."

Pete saw it. And he saw the other rooms in that house. He had plenty of money in his pocket when he went into that house. When he came out he had twopence, which he gave to a child at the door. He had to walk to Bedford Square. He had learnt a lot that night, and had made arrangements to try an experiment with Bill. Pete saw many points in Bill's character, and he saw the mother's agony of dread lest he should go like the father.

Now, things like this upset that rascally moneylender, who robbed the poor, according to Harris; but Harris forgot that if there were not rascally landlords, and rascally employers, there would not be so much need for the rascally moneylenders. At least, they take some risk. The others take none.

But when Pete reached his apartments he was quite calm. He said he did not want any supper; the fact is, the awful grinding poverty he had witnessed took away his appetite. He knew that Rory lived better than those poor wretches.

Ah, you rulers of the land, give the poor work! Force those who hate it to do it. Make every able-bodied man who has the ability, work, and find the work for him at a living wage. How is it to be done? The answer is quite plain, and known to every thinking man, should he dare to think on the subject.

"You have delayed our start," snarled Harris. "We have the motor-car. We might have caught the scoundrels up."

"I am most inclined to tink dey are fairly honest men. Dey hab only robbed dose who could afford to lose. It ain't eleven yet."

"It is a quarter to eleven."

"Bery well. We can get de motor out. Come along, boys! We start to-night."

"Be shot if we do!" snarled Harris.

"Are you ready, Jack and Sammy?"

"I am," said Jack, who understood Pete's ways."

"I reckon I am," said Sam.

"Den so is Rory. De oder dog can stay behind if he likes," said Pete.

"Dis way to London, boys!"

But that other dog did not want to stay behind. He wanted to regain his motor-car, and, seeing that the comrades were paying all expenses, it is natural that such a man should want to go.

"Now, Jack," exclaimed Pete, who took the driver's seat, "dere's a map ob de roads you used to hab. Do you happen to hab dat in your pocket?"

"Yes. I brought them all as a matter of precaution."



"Bery well. Work out de chart for Devonshire. Tink you can do dat?"

"Certainly! Only you are going east now, and you want to go west."

"Can easy bring her round. Just you work out de direction. Say, port your helm, or starboard, as de case may be, and I shall know de rest."

Pete drove through London, according to Jack's directions, and Harris felt perfectly safe. He could drive a motor-car, and he came to the conclusion that Pete was a most careful driver, as well as a skilful one.

Undoubtedly he was when there was any danger to others. The way Pete passed another vehicle made the drivers laugh at him. He always had the idea that someone might be dancing across the front of the horses, and would dance into his motor-car.

The consequence of this was. that they got along very slowly.

Jack knew the road well for some distance out, and had no need to refer to the map; all the same, he wanted to know what part of Devonshire Pete was steering for, and asked him the question.

"Can't you insult de map, Jack?" growled Pete.

"I might rub it in Harris' face," answered Jack. "But the question is, are you aiming at North Devon, or South?"

"Eh?"

"What part?" howled Jack.

"I ain't quite sure, Jack. Suppose you steer for Devonshire, and den I will tell you de name ob de place."

"But surely you know the name of the place?"

"Eh? Why, suttinly I do! De name ob dat place was—you want de name ob de— De name ob de town I want to get to first was—was— You see— M'yes! De name ob de town, de particular town was— Lemme see. Oh, yes! De name ob de town was Goosey Sketch."

"My eyes!" gasped Jack. "That's a funny name for a town. Goosey Sketch! I know they have some funny names in Devon, but I never heard of one like that, and I have travelled over a good many parts of it."

"P'r'aps you ain't been to Goosey Sketch, Jack."

"I am absolutely certain that I have not."

"I ain't quite certain dat I hab got its surname right. Was it Goosey Drawing?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I haven't been there, either."

"Seems to me, Jack, you ain't travelled much about Devonshire. But look here, just you steer for de middle ob it, and den we can run north or south as de case may be. We shall be able to ask one ob de inhabitants where Goosey Drawing is."

"You said it was Goosey Sketch."

"Well, I know it had someting to do wid de architectural line."

"Are you sure that Goosey was its Christian name?"

"Eh?"

"Oh, go on! Let's get to Devonshire, and then we shall perhaps be able to find the part you are aiming at, if we are extremely lucky. The fact of the matter is, Pete, you have been working on your remembering 'cistern,' and you haven't the slightest idea whether it was Goosey or Ducky Pulling, or Henny Shoving. Your cistern is rotten at the core."

"It don't follow because your Oxford governess didn't take you to Goosey Sketch dat dere ain't such a place, Jack. You will find it all right when you insult your map. If you don't, you will hab to find de name nearest to it, and we can go dere. Dere's one ting about de matter dat I'm certain ob, and dat is dat we shall hab to miss Exeter."

"We can do that without the slightest difficulty. Now you have got a

clear road, and as it is a moonlight night, you might put on speed with perfect safety, especially if there are no constables about."

"We can't help de bobbies, Jack. I shall tell dem dat I'm on official business. You see, we are really doing deir work widout pay."

"What makes you think the thieves have gone into Devonshire?" inquired Jack.

"Because I hab got a clue," answered Pete, putting the car at a good fifty miles an hour.

Now, although Harris could drive a motor-car, he would never have thought of driving one at that reckless pace, and he commenced to expostulate.

"Dat ain't anyting to de speed we are going directly, my poor, old fermented hoss."

"I refuse to travel at such a speed, you mad villain! It is utterly reckless."

"How can it be reckless when dere is no one in de way?"

"Think of the danger to ourselves."

"Well, I don't mind dat so long as dere's no danger to oder people."

"But I do, and I insist on your going slower."

"Look here, old hoss, you are taking a great deal too much care ob yourself, and you really ain't worf it. It ain't as dough de poor would suffer if you had your neck broken, and I really tink dat would be what you deserve."

"You are an insolent rascal."

"Funny ting dat when you tell some men de troof dat dey always get angry. Can't understand how it is, 'cos I don't mind weder a man says I'm a lubly creature or a hideous brute ob a nigger. It don't seem to take de effect dat it ought to. I 'spect dere's someting wanting in my brain-box."

"Brains, possibly," suggested Sam.

"You shut up, Sammy, and don't you be so impersonal."

"I thought you did not mind what people said of you?"

"Eh? Well, I don't mind what a man like Harris says ob me. You see, if he were honourable, or anyting like it, it might make a difference; but seeing he is de greatest scoundrel unhung, why I don't take any notice ob him. Now I'm going to increase de speed to about twenty miles an hour."

Pete increased it by twenty miles an hour, and the wind shrieked in his ears as he rushed along. So did Harris.

"If you don't like dis pace, old hoss, de next ting for you to do is to jump out and walk."

"You mad ruffian! How could you stop if a cart came along?"

"Like so!" answered Pete, jamming on his brakes with a suddenness that nearly sent them into the ditch, for he saw the light of a cart ahead, and the worst of it was that the driver was keeping in the middle of the road.

"Why don't you keep to your proper side?" he growled, pulling up his two horses.

"Seems to me that you'm got de right side and de wrong one, to say nuffin ob de middle ob de road. Don't you tink you would be able to drive dose horses a bit better if you were to keep awake? Now, gett out ob my way, 'cos I'm in a hurry."

"Then you will have to wait. I'm not going to put myself out for any dirty nigger as was ever born."

The man was cross at having been awoke so suddenly, and his horses appeared to be in no greater hurry than he was.



The leader turned across the road, and commenced to crop the grass at the side, while the carter used language to it that must have been quite incomprehensible to it; then seizing his whip, he lashed it till it plunged violently.

"Now, see here, old hoss," cried Pete, jumping out, "dat ain't de way to treat a horse."

"I'll treat you the same, if I have any of your nigger's lip," snarled the man, who was a big one.

"Don't you lash dat horse, dat's all. You can lash me as much as you like, but you ain't touching de horse."

"Won't I!" roared the man, giving it another cut.

Then Pete wrenched the whip from his hand, and the driver's yells awoke the echoes, for Pete gave him rather more than the horse had received.

"Now, den, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, who had been very busy with the whip. "Just move your horses out ob my way."

"Bust you!" roared the infuriated man, making a rush at Pete. "I'll shift you out of my way, else I'll know the reason why."

The reason why was because Pete knocked him down twice, and he did not care to come on a third time.

"You ain't fit to hab a whip," said Pete, taking out his knife, and coolly cutting the whip to pieces. "Just take de name ob his employer, Jack. I shall hab someting to say 'bout dis matter."

"Here, I don't want any bother over it," growled the man, picking himself up.

"Nunno!" answered Pete, drawing the horses to the side of the road. "But you'm going to get it all de same. Just you treat dose horses properly for de remainder ob de journey."

Then jumping into the car Pete drove on, and to make up for lost time, put the car at the greatest speed it would go.

The comrades enjoyed the journey, but Harris did not. He could not accustom himself to that speed; and although Pete was a very skilful driver, Harris was in terror the whole time.

"Golly! Dis driving makes me mighty hungry," exclaimed Pete, as day dawned.

"Never mind about your hunger," snarled Harris, who had not closed his eyes all night. "Attend to your driving."

"I can attend to bof at de same time, and I do mind 'bout de driving."

"You are not fit to drive a motor-car."

"And you ain't fit to hab houses. But I ain't broken your neck yet."

"You will if you drive in this reckless manner."

"I should say dat would be a mighty good ting for your tenants."

"You know nothing about my tenants."

"P'r'aps not, and p'r'aps I don't know anyting 'bout Giles, your rent-collector. But I will tell you a little ob what I don't know later on. Dat looks like an inn yonder, Jack. In dat case we shall need breakfast."

It was an inn, and a remarkably clean and comfortable one. The landlady received them.

"Tink we could get breakfast here, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"Certainly! What would you like? I have some nice new-laid eggs."

"M'yes! Dose will do nicely. Two-free dozen, please. I 'spect you ain't got any meat-as well?"

"Plenty of mutton. We had a sheep killed this week. We supply meat to some of the cottages. How would you like some mutton chops?"

"De bery ting! Two-free dozen ob dose."

"Coffee or tea?"

" Might hab bof."

" I won't keep you waiting more than a quarter of an hour."

Then the landlady ran to and fro, laying the cloth and attending to her cooking at the same time.

She sent up six chops for the commencement, and Pete ordered more; then, having given Rory one of them, the comrades commenced their breakfast.

" If you are so fond of the poor, what right have you give that dog a mutton-chop?" sneered Harris.

" Dat helps de poor," said Pete calmly. " I pay for de chop, Rory enjoys it, and de person who sells it gets de money. It sort ob distributes money. But I want to know dis, Harris—what right hab you to sit down to a breakfast like dis when you know dat de people who pay you four shillings a week for a room dat ain't worf a shilling are starving?"

" Mind, boys, last night I went into one ob dis scoundrel's houses, and what I saw dere—well, it is what we hab seen in oder places, Jack and Sammy, and it's a mighty scandal. Dey tell starving people to hab patience. Yes, to hab patience to go on starving!"

" How dat man can sit down and eat dis food, knowing de misery he is causing poor women and children, I dunno! Mind you, if dey don't pay him, he takes deir furniture, turns dem into de street, and sells de furniture to some oder poor wretches. I saw some ob his tenants wasting away for want ob food. Boys, I saw one poor little child dead! If it wasn't for a certain purpose I hab got in view, I would pick dat man up by de back ob his neck and de back ob his trousers and fling him frough dat window!"

" You insolent, lying rascal, you know you couldn't do it!"

" Jack and Sam don't know dat, and you don't know how near you are learning dat I could. You are a cold-blooded murderer, Harris! Talk about a moneylender robbing de poor, after what you do! Why, de worst moneylender dat eber libed ain't nearly as bad as you! You ain't fit to crawl frough dis life! Eat away, you brute beast, and I will pay for it, dough I wonder it doesn't choke you!"

" Don't you go too far with me, you insolent nigger!"

" I couldn't. If I were to flog you as hard as I feel inclined to do I couldn't go far enough! If I was to take ebery bit ob skin off your back I couldn't make you suffer as much as you make de poor suffer! And you grow rich wid deir misery!"

" They are drunken, lazy brutes!" snarled Harris.

" What can you expect dem to be? All de same, many ob dem don't spend as much on drink in a year as you do in a day. You turn dem into drunkards and thieves—you and such villains as Jeban, dat sweating tailor!"

What made Harris doubly furious was that Pete did not stop speaking when the landlady came into the room, and he even referred to her.

" You would tink dat man was a gentleman, my dear," he said, " but he's one ob de greatest scoundrels unhung! Ob course, it wouldn't do to say anything to insult de brutal creature, but dere ain't a grain ob honour in his decomposition. De only ting dat would do him any good would be to bury him! And de funny part about de matter is dat he tries to pass himself off as a gentleman. You see him guzzling dose chops—well, he's letting little children starve, while he's grinding exorbitant rents out ob deir wretched moders! He's an East End landlord ob de bery worst sort!"

" I have heard of them," said the landlady, " but I never met one before."



"I'd much rader meet a rattlesnake, 'cos you can kill dem, and it ain't lawful to kill a reptile like Harris! Dat's his name. He libs at Furze Hall, and de sooner he dies dere de better it will be for his tenants!"

"Your language is libellous, fellow! I will put you in prison for it!"

"You shall hab de opportunity, old hoss," said Pete. "I'm going to show you up. You can take proceedings against me. I'm going to show you up, 'cos I consider it is my duty to put a stop to your evil practices, whateber it costs me. I ain't telling you what I am going to do, but you will learn. Now, I tell you dis, Harris, I firmly beliebe dat you hab lost your motor-car for de present frough some ob your tenants, 'cos you'm got some mighty bad ones as well as good; and some ob de worst pay deir rents most regularly. Dat's only my opinion.

"Seems to me—and dis is for your information, Harris—dat Spicer and Stanley gained some information about you from your tenants, 'cos I don't see how dey could hab gained it elsewhere. I'm going to catch Stanley, 'cos de man has five thousand pounds ob mine; but if de oders ruin you, mind, dey will be mighty savage if I get dat money back and de motor-car—I sha'n't mind a bit. Your ruin will do good for de poor. De miserable wretch is spoiling my appetite, my dear. But dese chops are really so beautifully cooked. Eh—what do you tink about dem, Jack?"

"Why, Pete, that I have never enjoyed a breakfast more. There's a wonderful difference in cooking chops, isn't there, Mrs. Fern?"

"That is so, sir. But if you get a clear wood fire, and grill them, with plenty of turning, you can't go far wrong," said the landlady.

"I tink we will hab—say, four more, 'cos—"

"Five more, if you please, madam!" came a voice from Rory, who walked up on his hind-legs, moving his jaws, as Pete had taught him, when he supplied the voice by means of his ventriloquism. "I require another one!"

"Woohooh! Oh, dear! Yes, yes! Certainly! I'll bring them up!" exclaimed the astounded landlady, vanishing from the room; while Pete looked serious, and slightly winked at Jack.

Harris, who evidently knew more about ventriloquism than that countrified landlady, glanced from one comrade to another, and then he fixed his eyes on Pete, but lowered them when he met that worthy's steadfast gaze.

"Do you happen to have noticed a motor-car pass by here yesterday?" inquired Jack, when Mrs. Fern entered the room with the chops.

Jack had an idea that Stanley would have taken the same road, provided he had come into Devonshire, and Pete appeared to be certain on the point, although he had not told his comrades how he gained the information.

"There were a good many passed, sir. Some stopped here for petrol. We supply it. There were two stopped here for refreshments."

"A dark red car—a very valuable car," interposed Harris?

"Well, I didn't notice the cars much," said Mrs. Fern. "We get a good many."

"Did you notice de people dat stopped, my dear?" inquired Pete. "Was dere a middle-aged gentleman wid side-whiskers, and a young swell wid a fair moustache—a handsome man ob about thirty or so?"

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Fern. "There were two who stopped, and had dinner. I think it was about six o'clock. They mentioned that they were holiday-making. I noticed that they were both clean-shaven. The younger man was certainly good-looking."

"Tought you would notice dat, my dear," observed Pete. "Old and ugly ladies notice dat, and when dey are young and pretty dey notice it all de more."



"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Fern, who knew that no sane man could call her old and ugly, because she was certainly neither.

"What, neber noticed de fair, handsome young man, my dear?"

"I spoke about him to my husband, and mentioned how nice-looking he was."

"Don't get angry with Pete, Mrs. Fern," laughed Jack. "He says the most extraordinary things sometimes. I dare say you have noticed it. But it would be an easy matter for the two men to shave. But I wish you knew the colour of their car."

"I think I can find out," said Mrs. Fern, looking fixedly at Rory, as though she expected him to speak again; but he merely came up to be stroked. "He's a wonderful dog, too. I will go and ask the man what colour the car was. I expect he will remember. He knows the party, because he mentioned to me that the young man gave him half-a-crown."

"Don't tink I should hab made dat observation," observed Pete, as the landlady left the room, to return shortly with the information that it was a red car, but the man had not noticed the number.

"Well, we'm getting on all right," said Pete. "Do you happen to know a place called Swany Sketch, my dear?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "You are mixing the birds. Pete says that the place we want to get to is Goosey Tracing, or Goosey Drawing."

"I certainly never heard of any place like that."

"Perhaps it is in a part of the country dat you ain't been to, my dear?" suggested Pete.

"I think it must be."

"We are only wasting time while that fool of a nigger tries to remember the place, which any sane man would have written down," said Harris.

"Look here, old hoss," growled Pete, "if you'm in such a desperate hurry, just you go on by yourself!"

"If those are the miscreants we want, they cannot be more than twelve hours ahead of us. While you are humbugging about here they are getting still further ahead."

"Yah, yah, yah! Listen to de old hoss talking! You'm been passing de time pleasantly enough guzzling mutton-chops. You'm eaten more mutton-chops for breakfast dan all your tenants will consume in six months!"

"Are you going to start or are you not?"

"Stop your noise, Harris! You'm more trouble to take about dan some old hog! Do you suppose I am going to start before I hab paid for all dose chops you hab wolfed? If I had my way I would feed a man like you on skilly, and start you chipping stone. Stop a bit, my dear! Now I come to tink ob it, I believe I remembered de name ob dat place by de word 'goose.' M'yes! It was bo to a goose. 'Bo' was de word I wanted to remember. And de oder part ob it was 'W,' or 'X,' or one ob de letters ob de alphabet. Dere were two words, and de surname ob de place had something to do wid drawing or sketching. Might be tracing. You don't know ob a place called Bo W Drawing, or, say, Bo X Tracing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "I don't believe anyone heard of Bo X Tracing. You don't mean Bovey Tracy, I suppose?"

"Jack, you hab hit de nail on de point de first time ob guessing! Bo V Tracy was de bery name. Just you remember it, 'cos I might forget. We hab got to miss Exeter, and catch dat oder place, and we will start after we hab paid dis bill. How much is it, my dear?"

"Fifteen shillings."

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat ain't nearly enough, considering de enormous amount old Harris has yaffled. You can't hab been watching him eat! I



would rader keep an old sow for a month dan I would keep him for a week! I shall make de charge two pounds, and dat includes attendance. I am inclined to tink dat you ought to charge extra for habing Harris in your house. Now, seeing dat de horrible creature has done gorging, I tink we will hab a quiet smoke, and den we will decide how fast we ought to go to catch up de fugitives."

Harris wanted to start at once, but he was quite unable to shift Pete. That worthy seated himself in the easy-chair, closed his eyes, and commenced to snore.

Harris awoke him twice, but the third time that he tried to do so he received a blow in the chest that knocked him head-over-heels into the fireplace. After that he tried no more, merely threatening that he would summon Pete for assault.

Having had no sleep the previous night, Pete needed some now, and he took it, too, in spite of Harris, who was remarkably anxious to get a start.

#### CHAPTER 10.

##### An Exciting Journey—Harris Is Unlucky—Pete Becomes Poetical.

**J**ACK and Sam, who had been able to get some sleep in the motor-car, were not so tired; Harris was too anxious to go to sleep, and as Pete snored away, Harris strode up and down the room, fuming at the delay.

"I nearly dozed off dat time!" exclaimed Pete, waking at about twelve o'clock.

"Nearly dozed off, be hanged!" snarled Harris. "You have been snoring like a pig for the last three hours!"

"Look at dat, now! Why didn't you wake me up, and tell me how late it was?"

"Perdition! I did try to do so, and you knocked me into the fireplace."

"M'yes! I remember something about dat."

"So do I."

"Ah, you would do dat, old hoss. I was just tinking, boys, dat as it is so near lunch-time dat we had better save time by habing lunch here."

"It is perfectly ridiculous!" grumbled Harris. "How can we possibly capture the ruffians when you fool about this?"

"How do you 'spect we can do dat, Sammy?"

"I give it up, but as we were certain you would not start before lunch, why Jack and I ordered it for one o'clock."

"Well, dat's all right. Suppose we come for a stroll so as to get an appetite for dinner?"

Jack and Sam agreed, but Harris was in such a bad temper that he remained in the little sitting-room, pacing to and fro.

They came in a quarter of an hour late for lunch, and Pete took a frightfully long time over the meal; then he insisted on smoking a pipe.

"Oh, do be quiet, Harris," he growled at last. "You hab said dey will escape about forty times. I don't see de sense in spoiling my indigestion by starting directly after a meal."

"It isn't directly after. It is more than half an hour."

"Well, stop your bodering, and wait here till I bring de car round. It is in de stable now."

Pete left the room, and ten minutes elapsed, but no car made its appearance.

"We had better come to the stables and see what the silly villain is doing," fumed Harris.

"All right," exclaimed Jack. "Perhaps something has gone wrong with the car."

"They all made their way to the stables, and were met by a grinning man.

"Where's that villain of a nigger?" snarled Harris.

"In the hay-loft, sir," answered the man. "You can hear him if you listen."

There was no need to listen, for Pete's snores were so well pronounced that they were distinctly audible in the stable below.

"Upon my word, this is scandalous!" roared Harris. "The brute has gone to sleep again."

"Ha ha, ha! Pete always goes to sleep after lunch when he gets the chance," cried Jack.

"But hang the fellow! While he is snoring like—like no earthly thing, those miscreants are escaping. Look here, what is the sense of waiting for him? I don't believe he knows where the miscreants have gone any more than we do."

"You can start without him, if you choose," said Jack coldly. "We shall not."

"Can I have the car?"

"Certainly not! What should make it likely?"

"How can I start without the car?"

"I don't know, and I don't care, but I am confident that you will find it easier to start without it than with it, for we are not going to lend it to you."

"Go and wake the brute up."

"Not I," laughed Jack. "You can go and have a try if you like, but if you take my advice you will do nothing of the sort. Pete might mistake you for a burglar, and start punching your head."

They did not make the start until four o'clock in the afternoon, and then it was raining heavily. This made Harris all the more furious, because Pete insisted on his sitting beside him. It was a small car, with a hood, that protected Jack and Sam from the rain. Harris had an umbrella, which he most unwisely put up, and it protected him fairly well at the start.

"Now, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, when they had proceeded about a mile, "de road seems nice and clear, so we will go at a respectable pace. Dere's one ting 'bout dis car. It ain't bery large, but it's mighty swift. I tink t must hab been built for racing purposes. Hold tight!"

The car leapt forward, and Harris's umbrella was blown into his face, when the rush of wind swept it sideways, and if it had not been for Pete seizing Harris by the coat, the probabilities are he would have gone out. He toppled sideways, and his umbrella was turned inside out and ripped o pieces. Then he released it, and that umbrella was lost in the distance.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Here, you sit on de seat, old hoss. You will hurt yourself if you try to fall out like dat. Don't laugh at him, oys. Yah, yah, yah! You will want a new brelly, and from what I can see ob de weather, you are likely to get wet before you will be able to dry one."

"Ruffian! I will make you pay for that umbrella," howled Harris. "It as gold-mounted. Stop the motor-car, and go back."

"Eh?" exclaimed Pete, still dashing on at his wild pace.

"Stop the motor-car, I say! That was a very valuable umbrella."

"Well, I must say, it didn't look worf much when it left your hands.

Il de same, if you say de stick was valuable, and if you want to get ob course it won't be any trouble for me to stop de car."

"Stop it, then. you silly brute!"



"Suppose we wait till we get to de top ob dis hill," said Pete. "I want to see if de car can travel uphill at anything like a decent pace, and we sha'n't be able to see if I stop at de bottom. I don't tink it is bery long."

By the time they pulled up the umbrella was at a considerable distance, though they could still see it lying in the road. Harris did not feel like walking so far through the pouring rain, especially as he did not feel at all sure that Pete would not run on, and leave him in the lurch.

"Run the car back," ordered Harris.

"Now, look here, old boss," exclaimed Pete, "I ain't going to do anything ob de sort. If you like to walk back you can do so."

"It won't take you any time to run back."

"I know dat, 'cos I ain't going to try. Here comes a gentleman along de road. P'r'aps if you offer him something he will fetch it for you."

The party in question carried an ash-plant. He was smoking a short clay pipe, and he glanced at Harris out of the corners of his eyes as he passed.

"You see that umbrella in the road, my man," exclaimed Harris.

"Yus!"

"I'll give you threepence if you fetch it for me."

"Right!" exclaimed the worthy, quickening his pace a little.

Having reached the damaged umbrella, he carelessly picked it up, and came back in a very leisurely manner.

He had got comparatively close to the motor-car when it appeared as though he took a sudden interest in that damaged umbrella. There was a good deal of gold about the handle, and it was hall-marked. The worthy evidently knew gold when he saw it, for he snapped the stick across his knee close to the handle, shoved the handle in a capacious pocket, and, having pushed through a gap in the hedge, strode across the fields.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "De man evidently prefers gold to coppers."

"Come back, you ruffian!" roared Harris.

"No fear, mate," retorted the honest soul.

"I'm hanged if I will be robbed like that!" cried Harris, springing from the car and giving chase.

The man went on at a jog-trot. He was making for a copse, but ere he reached it Harris caught him up. Then he turned and sprang on his pursuer with a suddenness that caused them both to fall to the ground.

The struggle there was very fierce, but it was of short duration. Pete and the comrades sprang out to lend their aid, but they had scarcely got through the hedge, when the gipsy, or whatever he was, tore himself away, and fled towards the copse, at a very different pace to that at which he had fled from Harris.

That worthy looked considerably the worse for wear. His collar was burst, his coat torn, and he had a bad black eye.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "You didn't get de best ob dat little encounter, old hoss."

"The miscreant took me by surprise," snarled Harris, struggling to his feet, and holding his handkerchief to his eye.

"M'yes! I noticed he did all that."

"He sprang at me when I was unprepared for it, and when I was down he hit me in the eye."

"So I see, old hoss," answered Pete calmly. "Still, dese little tings will happen, and I ain't a bit sorry for you, 'cos I'm tinkin' ob dat little dead child in your house."

"Fool, what had I to do with that?"

"I was only tinkering dat if you had charged de moder a fair rent, de few shillings difference would hab bought enough milk to properly feed dat child. Why don't you start tinkering of dat? De poor moder was free-parts starved."

"Why didn't you give her food, then?"

"Spect it must be 'cos I'm a moneylender. We all know dat money-lenders must be scoundrels. I'm proving dat to Jack."

"Pete is going to prove that a moneylender never loses money. That you can't rob them," observed Jack.

"The nigger is a canting hypocrite. Here he goes interfering with my affairs, and insults me for charging what he is pleased to term exorbitant rents. He says he found some of my tenants starving. Well, why didn't he help them? Why did he not buy them food?"

"Ah, dat's where he is, old hoss," exclaimed Pete. "I keep telling you dat two wrongs don't make a right."

"You admit you did not buy them food?"

"Yes. I neber bought dem anything."

"Pete gave them money," said Jack. "It amounts to the same thing— or better. He gave that poor woman a handful of gold."

"That's what he tells you, I suppose."

"He has told me no more than he has told you," said Jack quietly.

"I know it, because I know Pete. I know that he never left that house without helping those in distress. You don't understand such a nature, Harris. It is not likely that you should do so."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Who wants you to do so? Certainly not Pete."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Yah, yah, yah! Didn't you wear a old watch and chain, Harris? Yah, yah, yah!"

"Perdition!" yelled Harris, leaping into the air, and stamping about in manner that nearly convulsed Pete. His watch and chain were gone.

"My watch—chain! Gone!"

"Yah, yah, yah! M'yes! Dat man knows where dey are gone to, but en he ain't going to tell."

"Fury! He must be caught. They were worth over a hundred pounds. He shall be caught, I say! I won't be robbed like this!"

Pete refilled his pipe, and while he did so every now and then he burst into roars of laughter, for Harris was raving more like a maniac than man in his senses.

"Help me to catch him!" he hooted at last.

"I reckon you won't catch him in a hurry," said Sam. "He evidently knows these woods too well for that. Do you think it is any use searching, Jack?"

"Not the slightest. While we were doing so he might come back and steal our motor-car."

"Dat man ain't as honest as he ought to be, old hoss," said Pete. "Still, t's come on and see if we can recapture your motor-car. It's no good sing dat as well as your watch and chain. You see what comes ob your ziness?"

"You black beast! It was all your fault. In fact, I do not feel at all re that the robbery of the car was not your fault."

"Well, my poor denuded old hoss, I don't mind dat at all," said Pete. "I'm mighty certain dat you will deserve ten times more dan you will get dis life. Yah, yah, yah! Dance to dis tune, old hoss:—"



"De night was falling fast, de stars began to blink,  
When straight along de country road, a man wid hurried footsteps strode—

A man who had no chink.  
Quoth dat man, 'I'm badly in need ob some,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum!

Quoth a robber ob de poor, to him just mentioned before:  
'Free coppers my dear fellow, for yonder umberella.

Go fetch it, good fellow, and den back come,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum!

But de generous man was sold, on de broly dere was gold.

'Nicks!' quoth de gipsy man; and wid it away he ran.

'Chase me as fast as you like to come,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum!

De robber gabe chase to de thief, and caught him by skin ob his teef,  
But he ran off again, frough de storm and de rain,

And Harris was minus his gold watch and chain.

Wid dat gold watch and chain he will make tings hum,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum!"

"You insensate fool!" howled Harris, as Pete sang his beautiful poem.  
"You stupid black scoundrel! Do you think you are clever?"

"Nunno, old hoss! Yah, yah, yah! And I'm mighty certain you ain't, eider. Yah, yah, yah! You do make me laugh wid your stupidity. I tought dat man was running mighty slow. Now, come along, 'cos if you want to chase dat gipsy-man you will hab to do it by yourself. We are going to drive on."

Harris would have liked to chase him, but not alone, so he followed the comrades to the motor-car, and once more at the same break-neck speed.

Jack and Sam lay back on the cushions, and tried to get some sleep. Sam found it impossible, and every now and then the refrain to Pete's doggerel kept running through his brain. It kept time to the whir of the motor. He kept repeating to himself:

"Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum."

He did not speak to Jack, because he thought that that worthy slept. Sam shifted his position, and made a mental vow that he would repeat the nonsense no more. Then he heard Jack murmur:

"Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum."

"What are you talking about?" growled Sam.

"It's that beastly refrain," growled Jack. "It will keep time to the whir of this car. I've said it a hundred times, I believe. I can't get the rot out of my brain. Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum, seems to keep time to the motor's hum. Hang it! I'm getting poetical myself."

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Sam. "You have put the beastly thing into my head again. I was just trying to forget it."

"I say, Jack!" bawled Pete, just as that worthy was dropping off to sleep. "I hab opened her out and am making her hum."

"Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum," murmured Jack. "Alter your pace, bother it! Make her go faster—or slower. Anything, only alter your pace, unless you want utter idiots in your car."

"Seems to me dat I hab got two ob dem inside, and de one outside already. I don't want any more. Here's Harris grumbling all de way. He's worrying ober his lost watch. I tink I shall hab to extend dat poem."

"No, don't! I want to forget it."

"But Harris must hab someting to comfort him, Jack. He's as wet as a water-rat, and as cross as a stirred rattlesnake. I tink I shall chuck him inside."

"We don't want him in here. I say! What are you trying to do?"  
The motor-car was going at a reasonable pace now, because Pete had run into a dense fog. It was a lucky thing that he had slackened pace, for, in the darkness, he had missed the road, and had run on to badly undulating ground.

Now, the Devonshire moors are very beautiful in their rugged grandeur; but they are scarcely fitted to run a motor-car over on a black and foggy night.

To Jack and Sam it appeared as though they were in a heavy seaway. To Harris it appeared that he would be dashed to pieces, and he howled for Pete to stop.

"We'm strayed from de beaten track, old hoss," said Pete. "We must go on till we find de road again."

"We shall be killed!"

"Well, you ain't improving matters by making dat yowling. Dere's a man. I'll follow him. Hallo, you dere! Which is de correct way to de road?"

Pete received no answer, and he quickened the pace of the motor-car, with a view to catching up the man.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "I tink it must be de man who borrowed your watch and chain, old hoss, 'cos de quicker I go, de quicker he goes. Still, I'm determined to catch him."

Pete was just able to keep the form in sight, but, in doing so, he nearly wrecked the motor-car. Once or twice it was nearly overturned, then suddenly it dashed down a steep ravine, the off wheels leapt over a large piece of rock, and the motor-car fell on its side with a crash.

Pete was hurled on the top of Harris, and nearly crushed the breath out of his body.

"I told you de gipsy would make tings hum,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum,"

growled Pete. "Are you hurt, boys?"

They answered in the negative. And as Rory came up to his master it was evident that he was not hurt.

"Get off, you villain!" howled Harris. "I am hurt!"

"Oh, I don't mind about you, old hoss! You deserve to be hurt," declared Pete, rising. "Just grope about for my pipe, while I go and look for de man. Hi, golly! It ain't a man at all. It's an old cow! We'm been chasing a cow for de last two-free miles. It's nuffin to laugh t, Jack and Sammy. I'm ashamed ob you guffawing like dat at our accident. You don't hear Harris laughing; and you ain't got de right to do it. Now, I tink de first best ting for us to do will be to put de car on its four wheels, den we will wait till de fog rolls by."

"I am injured," declared Harris.

"Well, I dunno dat dat matters," observed Pete calmly. "We can run you to de nearest hospital, and get you killed or cured dere. I dunno oder it wouldn't be a good plan to turn de man out to grass a week or so. Get out ob de way, old hoss, else you will get injured more when de wheels ob dis car drop on your chest."

"You miserable brute of a nigger, you ought to be hanged!"

"Dat ain't de question we hab got to consider," said Pete, filling another pipe, because there was very little chance of finding the one he had lost, in de darkness. "De first consideration is to right de car. It wouldn't be no good trying to right you, 'cos you are so dead wrong. Now, den, out!"

Harris wisely did so, for the three comrades were wrenching at the car



in a manner that looked dangerous. With some considerable difficulty they righted it, and then Jack made an examination; but apparently the car had suffered no damage beyond a few scratches, about which Pete cared nothing.

Pete was the only one who slept much that night. Neither fog nor rain kept him awake. He refused to get inside the car, neither would he allow Harris to do so.

"I tell you, Jack and Sammy wid Rory are going to sleep dere, old hoss. We'm going to sleep outside."

"How can I sleep in this rain, you silly villain? I am already drenched to the skin."

"Den it stands to reason dat you can't get any wetter. Jack and Sammy are dry, so it's no good all getting wet. Now, stop your grumbling and go to sleep."

"How can I go to sleep in this state?"

"Den keep awake. I don't see dat it matters much. Dere are many poor women in London toiling away all night to get de money togeder for your rents. 'Nuff said!"

Harris did not appear to think so, but as soon as Pete commenced to snore, it was quite useless to say anything else.

As may be imagined, Harris passed a most uncomfortable night. It is true that Pete suffered the same discomforts, but as as he slept through them, it did not matter.

Towards morning the rain ceased, but a dense fog still hung over the moors. Pete got the motor-car up the ravine without accident, though it nearly toppled over on two or three occasions. After that he proceeded cautiously, in the hope of finding the road, but it was not till the fog cleared that he was able to do so, and then it was quite late in the day.

"Now, Jack, just you direct me to dat place wid de awkward name, den p'raps we shall learn someting ob de fugitives."

"What chance is there of catching them now that you have lost all this time?" snarled Harris. "I sincerely wish I had never come with you."

"I must say I wish de same, old hoss. I feel about as comfortable in your presence as I should in de presence of a murderer, or say a hangman. But it can't be helped. We shall hab to keep de old scoundrel for de present, and I suppose he must be fed, seeing dat was part ob de bargain."

It was not till six o'clock that they reached the town, and Pete made his way to an hotel, then he commenced to make inquiries of the waiter.

"Well, there was a red motor-car stopped here this afternoon," answered that worthy. "There were two gentlemen in it. One of them was a fair, handsome young fellow; the other, middle-aged."

"Did dey address each oder by name?"

"I don't think they did—at least, I didn't hear them. The young one mentioned that they were going through Manaton, and he asked a few questions about the hills."

"Did you notice the number of the car?"

"No, sir. I only saw it through the window; but I noticed it was a very handsome car, and that it was painted red."

"M'yes! It was a handsome car," observed Pete. "You see, dis old hoss—his name is Harris—bought it, and he spared no expense. He robbed de poor ob de money—"

"That is shameful!" roared Harris.

"So it is, old hoss; but it's your nature, and I 'spect you can't help being a rogue and a vagabond. He keeps a lot ob slum houses, waiter, and makes de poor people pay about twice as much rent as dey ought to. I am going to bring him in, but if you hab got any valuables lying about,

you had better keep dem out ob his way. We will hab dinner as quickly as you can get it, 'cos we want to obertake dat oder car."

"We must go at once," declared Harris. "It is our only chance of overtaking them. We can take some food with us."

"You come in and hab your dinner, old hoss," said Pete, gripping him by the arm. "I ain't going any longer widout food for all de thieves in de world."

Harris did not resist, because he knew perfectly well that if he did so there would be a scene, and he did not like anything like that.

They were shown into a room where there were several other people, and the waiter said that they should be served at once.

"Sorry to bring dis man into your presence, ladies and gentlemen," said Pete. "His name is Harris, and he is a robber ob de poor."

"I hope not!" exclaimed an elderly, benevolent-looking lady, fixing her eyes on Harris. "I take a deep interest in the poor."

"Eber been into de East End ob London, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"I live there, young man," answered the lady. "My husband is a clergyman there."

"Den dis man—I tink, I mentioned his name is Harris—is one ob dose slum-landlords. I dessay you know dem?"

"Indeed I do!" exclaimed the lady. "Oh, sir," she added, turning to Harris, with tears in her eyes, "consider the great wrong you are doing! I cannot speak to you as I would like, but my husband will be here directly. But stay! Are you the—the gentleman who gave away a lot of money to the poor in the street the other night?"

"No, my dear, I ain't a gentleman at all. I'm de nigger Pete, and dese two are Jack and Sammy. Dat's Rory dere."

"This is indeed remarkable, and shows how small the world is. Many on whom I called spoke of their deep gratitude to you. Here comes my husband, Mr. Forbes."

An elderly clergyman entered the room, and when Mrs. Forbes mentioned the comrades' names, he grasped Pete's hand.

"My lad!" he exclaimed. "I am proud to meet such a man—such men, I should say," he added, shaking hands with Jack and Sam. "I have heard of the help you have given in my parish, which, as you will know, is a very poor one."

"Waiter, dis lady and gentleman will hab dinner wid us," said Pete. "It's a mighty funny ting dat we should be known here."

"We are taking a week's holiday," explained Mr. Forbes.

"Well, you may be ob some sort ob use to me, old hoss. You see, I'm a moneylender. You don't want to borrow any money at about fifty per cent. interest? Nunno! Well, I gib all de profits away to de poor, and it would save me a lot ob trouble if you could do de distribution part ob de business, 'cos I don't know who wants it most. My experience so far, and dat extends for about a week, is dat dey all want it most. I'm sorry to ask you to sit at table wid a thief, but dat man Harris is one. He is a slum-landlord. I was mentioning dat to your wife. I tink you might gib him a talking to when he has had his dinner, dough I'm most afraid it won't do any good. He's been robbed himself. Yah, yah, yah! He got dat black eye trying to recover his property, and lost some more."

"This man is an utter scoundrel!" cried Harris, springing to his feet.

"Sit down, old hoss!" cried Pete, giving him a shove that sent him into the chair.

"I shall not remain in your company."

"You will do what I tell you, old hoss, else I shall tie you into that chair."



"You may be making a mistake, my lad!" exclaimed the astounded clergyman. "I never heard the gentleman's name."

"P'r'aps you hab heard de name ob his agent, Giles?"

"Indeed, I have!"

"Den dat's de creature who runs de show. Still, we don't want to talk about Harris."

"I shall bring an action for libel against you," declared Harris. "I have witnesses!"

"M'yes! I am going to gib you some more, 'cos I tink you are a sort ob legalised murderer. But here comes de dinner. Now, I would like to contribute a hundred pounds to one ob your funds, my dear—one dat benefits de children. I tink you will find 'bout a hundred pounds dere. I shall easy make dose profits."

"You surely cannot make profits like that?" exclaimed Mr. Forbes.

"Well, I lent five thousand pounds to a man named Stanley, and he has to pay ober a thousand pounds' interest. Dat's good profit, ain't it?"

"I don't like it at all, my lad. It is wrong."

"Well, dat case was rader wrong, 'cos he's bolted wid de money, and he got it by pretending Harris's furniture belonged to him."

"Then how can you make any profit?"

"Well, I lent a thousand pounds to a lady, and she wants more."

"How much has she paid you back?"

"Nuffin; but I'm sure to get it, 'cos you can't rob a moneylender. Look here, old hoss, I'm going to get dose five thousand pounds back directly I hab had dinner, and I shall gib dem to you for de poor."

Mr. Forbes motioned Jack aside, and spoke seriously to him.

"It is perfectly right, Mr. Forbes!" laughed Jack. "Pete is enormously wealthy, and he is never happy unless giving money to the poor—at least, I won't say that, because he is always happy, except when he goes among the poor. He is one of the best-hearted men that ever lived. We have been all over the world together, and chance brought us a vast fortune. You need not have the slightest hesitation in accepting all he offers on behalf of your poor."

"But he does not know me. I might be an impostor, for all he knows to the contrary."

"Ah, there is no fear of that!" exclaimed Jack, smiling. "I only hope he recovers those five thousand pounds, for the sake of the poor. He will insist on your taking the money. Are you remaining here long?"

"For a week."

"Then we shall know where to find you," said Jack, exchanging cards.

"I may tell you that Pete's idea of moneylending is about as extraordinary as most of his other ideas. He counts his profits before he gets back a penny. There was only one woman who offered to pay back half-a-crown. He had lent her five pounds. He tore up the promissory note, bought her a cottage and furniture, and allows her two pounds a week for making clothes. That is what he supposes she is going to do, although I don't believe for a moment he will allow her to do any work."

The result of this conversation was that Mr. and Mrs. Forbes formed a very good opinion of the comrades.

Harris was the only one who did not enjoy that dinner, because Pete kept referring to his iniquities, and Harris was nearly maddened when Mr. Forbes lectured him severely.

Mrs. Forbes had an earnest conversation with Pete, and told him all the good she would be able to do with his munificent gift; and then they parted the best of friends, while Pete caught hold of Harris's arm and

led him from the room as though he had been a prisoner, and Pete a detective.

Jack had made some inquiries as to the direction to take, and directly they got into the road that led over the moors Pete put his engine at full speed.

The heavens were cloudy, but the night was moonlight at times, and, although the road was very narrow in places, Pete was able to go at top speed most of the way.

The pace at which the car ascended the steep hill was surprising. The engine was a very powerful one for such a small car, and, although the vibration was something more than comfortable, Pete was perfectly satisfied. All he cared for was speed, and he certainly attained that.

Harris was in a state of terror the whole way; but as they rushed onwards he forgot his fears, for, far across the moors, where the road wound round, he saw a motor-car, which had apparently broken down, for two men were tinkering at it.

"It is my car!" cried Harris. "I know it even at this distance!"

"Well, dat's all right, old hoss; and I don't tink we shall hab to extend las boom, unless— M'yes! Dey seem to hab done deir repairs, 'cos dey are getting into de car again. Well, we hab a steep hill to descend, and dey hab a steeper one to ascend. Seeing dat your car is a lot heavier lan ours, we ought to be able to obertake dem. Hold tight! I'm going to make her move!"

The road was perfectly clear, and the pace at which Pete went down that hill was terrific. Harris could scarcely draw his breath, and the car swayed from side to side in a manner that threatened instant destruction.

"Remember that if we had a smash up we should lose them!" shouted Jack.

"Dat's all right, Jack," answered Pete cheerfully. "We ain't going to hab anything like a smash-up—at least, I don't tink so. I am perfectly satisfied wid de speed ob dis car."

"You reckless maniac!" howled Harris. "If we had a smash-up, it would mean instant death to all of us!"

"Not necessarily, old hoss! You might get chucked into de tops ob lose trees yonder, and dat wouldn't be at all likely to hurt you. You are bound to take a few risks in dis life, and dis is one ob dem!"

The fugitive car was struggling up the hill, and Pete was rapidly over-aking it. Barring accidents, it was certain that he would be up with it efore it gained the top of the hill.

But then it seemed to be only too probable that there would be an accident. The road, although fairly good, was not at all suited to the enormous speed at which Pete was driving the car.

At lightning speed they dashed along the bottom of the hill; then up they went, and the speed scarcely seemed to diminish.

The other car was near the top of the hill; but now it stopped, and Pete slackened speed, for the clouds were hiding the moonlight now, and he was anxious not to have an upset just at the last moment.

"We have caught them!" cried Harris. "It is my car, and that is the thief and his confederate! I'll make him smart for this!"

As Pete pulled up, Harris leapt out; then, rushing towards the chauffeur, he seized him round the neck, and wrenched him from the car.

For some moments they both sprawled on the ground; then, springing to their feet, they went for one another in a manner that looked painful.

"It will do Harris good to get a thrashing," said Pete. "We can



prevent dem from going any farder. Dis way to London, please! Yah, yah, yah! Dat was a nasty smack between de eyes, Harris, and I don't believe it will improve your black eye!"

The blow referred to knocked Harris head over heels.

"Why, dis ain't Stanley!" exclaimed Pete, gazing at the young fellow who had delivered that blow.

He was a slim, fair young man, with a very calm expression. His companion was considerably older, but he was nothing like Brough.

"You'm made a slight mistake, Harris, old hoss!" said Peté, "You'm caught de wrong party. Are you sure dis car is yours?"

"Perdition! You silly vagabond of a nigger, you told me it was!"

"Yah, yah, yah! I neber said anyting ob de sort. You said it was your car, and you ought to be de likeliest one to know. Sorry! De old hoss has made a slight mistake; you can see dat if you look at his eyes. Someone has stolen his car. Still, dere's no harm done!"

"Oh, I don't mind if he doesn't!" said the young fellow. "I'm rather fond of boxing."

"Yah, yah, yah! I tought you were by de manner you hit out!"

"Well, it wasn't my fault. He assaulted me first."

"Suttinly, it wasn't your fault. Harris is only one of those slum landlords, and I'm remarkably glad you had punched his head. He had got a black eye already, now he's got anoder one to match it."

"I suppose you think you are funny, you black beast!"

"Well, I tink you look de funniest, just at de moment. Yah, yah, yah! You caught a tartar dat time. We will put de last verse on de poem:

"Harris caught de wrong martyr and found him a tartar,  
Who blackened his eyes, and now de man lies  
On de ground, while his car is still bery far,  
And Harris received a terrible one,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum."

Jack explained the state of affairs to the young fellow, who appeared to treat the matter as a huge joke.

"I don't mind a bit, my dear fellow," he exclaimed. "I'm sorry if I've hurt that fellow; but, you see, I had to hit him."

"You need not concern yourself over that," laughed Jack. "He is a great rascal, and deserves all he has got. Do you happen to have seen another red car pass you lately?"

"Yes, there was one, and I remarked that it was exactly the same build as this. They were going at a great pace. A young man was driving. He had rather a heavy, fair moustache, and wore goggles."

"We will hab anoder try," said Pete. "Only dis time you had better make sure, Harris, before you go for de owner ob de car. You see, you might get your nose broken next time."

"I want your name and address, young man," snarled Harris.

"Absurd nonsense!" exclaimed Jack. "You owe him an apology for your outrageous conduct. Of course, it was a mistake; but as you have got the worst of it, there is nothing more to be said. I don't suppose the gentleman will trouble to prosecute you for the assault."

"Not a bit of it," laughed the stranger. "I am perfectly satisfied. Now, I will have another try to get up the hill."

They got up all right, then Pete passed them, and went on at full speed.

## CHAPTER II.

**Pete's Nocturnal Adventure—The Flight—Against Long Odds—  
The Surprise.**

THEY had proceeded some considerable distance when a sharp bend in the road being manipulated with safety they came in sight of another car.

The moon was shining more brightly now, and they had a full view not only of the car, but of its occupants, both of whom were turning as though to look at their pursuers.

"I tink you will be safe in punching de heads ob dese two, old hoss," said Pete. "Dey look to me remarkably like de men we want; not only dat, but dey hab quickened deir pace, and dat looks as dough dey didn't want to be overtaken."

"Can you overtake them?" growled Harris.

"Well, dat remains to be seen. I tink I shall be able to obertake dem going uphill, 'cos dis car is much lighter, and it has got such a mighty powerful engine for its size. Here goes for de try."

Once more the car rushed on at its greatest speed. This time Harris held to the side, and hoped for the best. He knew from past experience that it would be quite useless to ask Pete to go slower.

They were gaining on the fugitives, and they gained still more when they had to ascend a steepish hill.

The scenery through which they were now passing was some of the most beautiful in Devon; and as the moonlight streamed upon it, Jack turned his eyes from the fleeing car and gazed around in mute admiration.

Pete kept his eyes fixed on the road over which they were rushing. He had no chance of admiring the scenery. With firm hands he grasped the steering-wheel, well knowing that the slightest error would dash them upon the rocks at the side of the moorland road.

At times the car leapt into the air as it dashed over some unlevel portion, then it swayed in a most alarming manner, but Pete never slackened his speed.

Harris's face was deathly white, and from time to time his lips moved as though he were speaking; but if he did say anything, Pete never heard his words.

They had to ascend another hill, and now Pete drew so close that he no longer had any doubt as to the identity of the two men.

"It is my car," muttered Harris. "I can see the number."

"Dere are Stanley and Brough," said Pete. "I rader tink dey are going to fire at us."

He had scarcely uttered the words when Brough—or, rather, Parks, as his real name was—levelled a revolver, and taking as steady an aim as the jolting of the car would allow, he fired at Pete.

The aim was so true that Pete heard the whiz of the bullet as it passed his ear. Harris was no good under fire. He uttered a cry of terror and crouched down in the front of the car.

"Give up the chase!" he cried. "We cannot face armed men!"

"I dunno 'bout dat, dough I must say it seems as dough you couldn't face dem so mighty well."

Jack had got the hood of the car down, and, leaning forward, he said:

"Mind the miscreant does not shoot you, Pete."

"I shall mind if he does shoot me, Jack; not if he doesn't. Just look at Harris. Ain't he mighty brave."

"Give up the chase, you reckless maniac!"



"I shall gib up de chase if he shoots me," answered Pete. "But I ain't going to gib it up before. Dere goes anoder shot, and he's missed again."

"I believe he is aiming at the tyres, and if he hits them we shall be dashed to pieces at this mad rate," said Harris.

"He ain't doing anyting ob de sort," growled Pete. "He's aiming at my head, and he ain't so far off hitting it wid his first two shots. P'r'aps de next one will go a bit nearer to you, Harris. Someting is going to happen widin de next five minutes, 'cos we shall hab overhauled dem before dat time.

The worst of it was, that the nearer Pete drew, the easier a mark he became. Each time that Parks levelled his revolver, it seemed certain that he must hit his mark, because the cars were now so close; but the swaying of his motor-car, owing to its terrific speed, greatly upset his aim. One of the bullets pierced Pete's sleeve, but it just missed his flesh.

The two cars had gained the top of the hill now, and now a steep descent lay before them. Pete glanced along the narrow road, and saw that there was a sharp bend at the bottom where it passed a deep ravine.

His car being the lighter, he knew that he would be able to slacken the speed quicker than the fugitives.

As far as he could judge they made no attempt to slacken speed, and they went down that hill at a pace that was utterly reckless.

"Well, dey ain't going to gain on us," growled Pete, "even if we are to hab a smash up. Hold tight, all. From what I can see ob it our speed is going to increase."

It did increase. The two cars flew over the ground. They were nearing the bend. Pete shut off his engine, and held himself in readiness to put on the brake.

The front car gained the bend, then it skidded across the road, and the next moment there was a terrific crash as it dashed against the rocks, which formed one side of the road.

The two miscreants went flying into the ravine, while the car was shivered to splinters. Pete applied his brakes cautiously. He knew that if he attempted to stop quickly a similar fate would await him as that which Stanley and Parks had met.

It was impossible for him to stop in time, and the next instant the car dashed over the wreckage.

It was thrown on two wheels, but Jack and Sam flung their weight to the other side, and as Pete cleared the wreckage and the bend, the car righted itself with a crash, while now he jammed on the brakes, and brought it up.

Harris lay motionless as death along the front of the car.

His face was livid, his eyes closed. He had fainted with terror.

"Golly! Ain't de man a mighty coward!" exclaimed Pete, lifting him out, and placing him at the side of the road. "We mustn't let dose two men escape us. Bring one ob de lamps, Jack. We will make a search. He's coming to, now."

The side of the ravine, which was very steep, was covered with bushes, and there were also a number of trees there. So dense were the bushes that the comrades found it no easy matter to descend; but they were well accustomed to that sort of work, and Sam knew the exact direction to search for the two miscreants.

"I reckon one of them dropped here," he exclaimed, pointing to some crushed bushes.

"And as the fellow is not here now, it looks as though he did not meet his death," said Jack.

"P'r'aps we can find de oder one," exclaimed Pete, searching about with

le lamp, for there was not much light from the moon beneath the trees. Dis looks like de spot, and de oder man ain't here, eider. What do you ank 'bout following dem up, boys?"

"I reckon that will be no easy matter," answered Sam. "Of course, they an't be very far, but it would be almost impossible to trail them in this ght. However, we will make a search as far as we can."

They searched for a quarter of an hour or more, but could not find the lightest trace of the missing men, and then they returned to the spot here the accident had happened.

Harris had quite recovered from his swoon, and he was raving over the reckage.

"It was entirely your fault!" he shouted at Pete. "I told you to stop. ook at my motor-car!"

"Yah, yah, yah! Which part ob it do you want me to look at, old hoss? would take me some time to look at all dose pieces. I cau plainly see at you want some glue on de job. Golly! I neber saw a motor-car worse attered in all my life."

"I tell you that it was your fault."

"M'yes! Dat's what you tell me, but it don't follow dat I'm bound to elieve you."

"I told you to stop."

"Seems to me dat you would hab done better to hab told dem to stop. ey were de party who met wid de accident."

"You will have to pay for that car."

"Yah, yah, yah! I'm mighty likely to do dat wid such a man as you. unno, Harris, you paid for de car, so I'm not going to pay for it again."

"It is completely ruined!"

"It certainly don't look much improved. De matter is quite clear to my ind. You hab done no good in de chase, 'cos all you hab done is to lose a umbrella, and gold watch and chain, and a full-sized motor-car, and I you hab gained are two black eyes, which you are likely to keep for ee-four days."

"You shall pay. I'll put you in court. You caused the accident."

"Well, dat's a ting you would hab to prove. You see, I hab got Jack and Sammy as witnesses. It is mighty certain if I had stopped when you led me to, dat you would hab lost your motor-car. Now, I should say dat ou hab practically lost it now, so I ain't altered de state ob affairs. Den gain, it is natural dat I should want to catch a man who had robbed me ob five thousand pounds, and I hab a perfect right to do so. Ob course, if tries to escape in a motor-car, he's answerable for any damage he does it, and not his pursuer. I dunno much about de law, but I know enough to be sure you'm in de wrong; and all you can do now is to grin and bear it."

I dunno weder you are going to take away de pieces ob dat car, and ob dem collected for mending purposes; but if it was my case, I shouldn't oder more about dem. Yah, yah, yah! What's de sense ob making dat w, and jumping about like a chased flea. Dat ain't going to mend your r."

"Well, at any rate, you will have to pay some of the damage."

"Can't see dat at all. If I was answerable for some ob de damage it hands to reason dat I would be answerable for it all."

"You see, Harris," exclaimed Jack, "you can't rob a moneylender."

"You be quiet about dat, Jack. We ain't talking about dat matter. We e talking about de end ob dis chase; and, seeing dat I hab put de first part it into a beautiful poem, it seems to me a pity not to make de ting comete. Silence for de last verse, please!"



“On went dat wild chase at a bery great pace.  
 Poor Harris wid terror turned white in de face.  
 Fearing a spill down a bery steep hill,  
 He raved in his fright, and couldn't keep still.  
 Den turning a corner by a tree called an ash,  
 De motor burst up wid a mighty big crash,  
 Like de sound ob loud cymbals when clashed wid a drum,  
 Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum.”

Pete's doggerel with its absurd refrain appeared to enrage Harris even more than his words. He stormed and raved, and threatened to punch Pete's head and kick him. In fact, he threatened all sorts of things, but as nothing came of them it did not matter.

“Are you going back, you raving maniac?” snarled Harris at last. “You ought to be lynched! A creature like you has no right outside a lunatic asylum!”

“Look at dat, now! De man doesn't appreciate good poetry. Don't you like de poem, Jack?”

“Ha, ha, ha! I don't like the refrain. There's too much sameness about it, and too little sense. Besides, the beastly thing will run through my brain.”

“It wouldn't hab much difficulty in running frough dat, Jack.”

“Well, we don't want any more verses. Harris does not like them. Now, what is to be done next?”

“Should say we had best clear de pieces ob motor-car out ob de road for de start. If any horses were to come dis way it might make dem stumble. Suppose we make a heap ob dem just here. We will make a nice tidy one, and Harris can sit on it. Yah, yah, yah! I can't help laughing when I look at all dat was left ob de motor-car.”

“I reckon we had better stay here till break of day,” said Sam, “and then we will have a search for those ruffians.”

“I am not going to stop here all night,” said Harris, who had not now so much interest in catching the fugitives; all the same, he badly wanted vengeance.

“In dat case you will hab to walk home, old hoss; and, seeing the time it took us to come here, and de pace at which we came, I should say you would hab a mighty long journey. Howeber, dat ain't got anything to do wid us.”

“You will have to take me to the hotel.”

“Dat's about de unlikeliest ting on de face ob dis planet,” observed Pete. “If you want to go dere in dis car, you will hab to wait till we are ready to start, and dat won't be for a long time to come yet.”

It was arranged that the comrades should sleep in the motor-car, but Pete insisted on sleeping outside with Harris, who, when he found that it was quite impossible to induce the comrades to take him to the hotel, elected to remain with them.

Pete had got an idea in his head, and he waited until his comrades were asleep, then once more made his way into the ravine. It occurred to him that the ruffians must be injured by their fall, or, at any rate, they would be badly shaken, and it was not at all probable that they would travel very far that night.

His idea was to roam about the place as silently as he could, with a hope of either hearing their voices, or else their movements amongst the bushes.

Rory had remained in the car with Jack and Sam, and if Harris had noticed Pete go, he had said nothing about the matter.

For upwards of an hour Pete wandered about the place, then he made his way across it, and as he neared the further side, he saw the glow of a camp-fire.

"Golly!" he murmured. "I believe I hab caught dem, and if dat is dese, I shall be able to laugh at Jack and Sammy. De moneylending ain't been such a great success as I tought it was going to be, specially if I ose dese five thousand pounds. It would take me a mighty long time to make up de amount wid clients like Jane and Gladys. Dat young lady s a splendid borrower, but I'm inclined to tink dat she ain't much ob a payer."

Pete moved as silently as he would have done had he been in an African forest, but the fire was much farther than he imagined, and when he got a view of it through the bushes, he saw that it was a gipsy encampment, on the borders of the moor.

There were half a dozen vans, and a large number of men and women were seated round the fire, over which a large cauldron was seething.

Pete was wondering how it was that they had their supper so late, for it was past eleven, when he heard two men pushing through the bushes, and they appeared to be coming in his direction.

"Now, then, Snowball," exclaimed one of them, "we've been following you, and we want to know what you are prowling about here for?"

"Golly! I neber heard you following!" exclaimed Pete.

"No, and we didn't mean you should. What are you doing here?"

"'Spect I hab got as much right as you hab."

"Well, p'raps you have; but it don't foller that you have the right to go away jest yet. Jest you come this way."

"Well, I dunno dat dere's any harm in dat," observed Pete. He had an idea Stanley and Parks might have sought refuge there, and have sent the two gipsies to keep watch. Believing that he would be able to make his escape, should he be attacked, he determined to go to the encampment.

He was wearing a gold watch and chain, and he had a large sum of money in his pockets, but he did not care much for the gipsies, supposing they carried no firearms.

"You ain't seen a couple ob men dat fell out ob a motor-car?" inquired Pete, placing his back against one of the caravans.

"Never you mind about two men in a motor-car," sneered the gipsy, "we are dealing with a nigger out of a motor-car. You have a gold watch and chain there, and a lot of money in your pockets."

"So dat's it, is it?" exclaimed Pete. "You seem to know a good deal about me, old hoss, and I hab an idea where you learnt it from. Now, I had an idea also dat de two men I'm looking for are in one ob dese caravans, and if you choose to gib dem up, I shall make it worf your while. If you don't gib dem up I shall just put de police on your track, cos I can't bery well fight you all."

"You hand over your gold watch and chain, and every penny you have on you, then we will talk about the other matter."

"You will hab to guess again, old hoss. I'm going to fight for dat property, and I rader tink you will find dat I make a good fight ob it. 'Nuff said! Come on, as soon as you like, and some ob you will wish you had not."

"Here, you'd best have sense. You can't tackle the lot of us. You are surrounded, and these women will fight as well as a good many men."

"We will tear his clothes off his back, and send him home without any!" declared one old hag.

"Golly! Ain't dis mighty awful!" mused Pete. "I don't mind fighting



de men, but I can't fight women. Still, I ain't being robbed if I can help it.

"See here, old hosses," said Pete aloud, "I 'spect you are fond ob a bit ob sport. Now, I'll fight any free ob you, and if you beat me fairly, I will make you a present ob all de money I hab in my pocket."

"We ain't going to do anything of the sort. What's the use of three of us fighting you when there's all this gang to do the job? Fork out now!"

"Bery well, if you want to fight, come on!" cried Pete, springing forwards and delivering a blow between the gipsy's eyes that sent him to the ground; then Pete made a dash through the men, striking out right and left, while he put his whole strength into the blows.

He had made a dash in the direction of the moors, and now he raced across them with the whole gang in hot pursuit; but Pete had only men to deal with now, and he cared little for them.

"I'll gib dem a run for deir money," he mused, "and den when dey come up wid me—and dere won't be so many who do dat—dey will hab a mighty rough time ob it, one way and anoder."

Had he chosen, he could easily have outdistanced them, but this was not his object. In the first place, he wanted to lead them away from his comrades, for the three would have had little chance against so many, especially as most, if not all of them, would be armed with knives.

Pete was now in the full moonlight, and, when he turned, he saw that about a dozen men followed him, and they were coming at a pace that proved them to be good runners.

Sometimes Pete would slacken his pace till he heard the beat of feet quite close to him, and then he would put on a spurt. He was going all up-hill, and in many parts through thick bracken, so that the running was very heavy, added to which he did not know the ground at all, while in all probability they would know it perfectly. But he felt confident that he could beat the swiftest runner amongst them, both for speed and distance.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared, when he found they were slackening speed. "Why don't you come on, old hosses? Getting sort ob tired? I dare say Stanley has told you dat I hab a lot of money in my pocket. Well, you'm got a good baker's dozen against me, and you ought to be able to take it."

"You daren't stop and fight like a man, you black cur!" panted one of the ruffians.

"I don't mind fighting two-free ob you, but I ain't fighting de lot—not just yet, at any rate," added Pete, beneath his breath.

Pete knew by the slackening pace of his pursuers that they had nearly had enough of it; but by slackening his own pace, he enticed them on, and they had covered miles, when suddenly he turned, and with one terrific blow struck down the foremost man, and in an instant he was amongst the rest.

His action was so daring, and so utterly unexpected, that the gang were taken completely by surprise; then, again, they were all in an exhausted condition, while Pete, who was always in perfect trim, notwithstanding his large appetite, lashed out at them right and left.

One or two drew knives, but each man seemed to be chary of using such a weapon, and Pete gave them no breathing time. One of the gang, who got behind him, smashed a thick stick over his head, but Pete's head will stand a fearful lot of hammering, and the blow seemed to make no effect on him.

Right and left he struck out, and right and left men went down; for Pete's blow, when he puts his whole strength in it, is like the kick of a horse.

He received two or three stabs in the arm, but the miscreants who gave



hem paid dearly for their vile deeds. They did not understand such fighting as they were now experiencing, for there was no surrender for them. Pete neither asked nor gave it. He did not even attempt to guard blows, merely lashing out right and left. And as he fought thus furiously he worked his way round so that he got between them and their encampment.

Except that Pete is utterly reckless when he lets himself go in a fight, he is a grand general, and, being remarkably lucky, perhaps because he is utterly fearless, he generally gives a good account of himself.

"Are you dere, boys?" shouted Pete.

Half a dozen answering shouts appeared to come from the back of the ipsis gang, and then a distant voice rang out:

"Shall we open fire on them?"

It was only Pete's ventriloquism, for Jack and Sam were miles away, but the gang thought they had other foes to contend with.

"Well, boys," shouted Pete, in his natural voice, "don't open fire wid our revolvers till I gib de word. Dey are harmless enough, and I can tackle de lot ob dem. I shall keep on knocking dem down till dey give up deir knives, like so—and—"

"There's my knife," growled one of the gang, as Pete rushed at him. He flung the weapon towards Pete, and darted aside to avoid the blow.

"Well, dat's all right, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, closing the blade by pressing the spring at the back, and shoving the knife in his pocket. Now, I take it you hab all had enough running for one night, and as my mighty certain you won't get past me to your encampment widout getting badly hurt, it stands to reason dat you had better hand ober our weapons. I want to show you dat you ain't got de strength to fight e. P'r'aps dat slap across de cheek will show you dat I can hit hard hen I like."

As Pete spoke, he sprang at one of the gang and slapped him across the face. There was a sharp crack, and the man went down sideways.

"Dat's all right as far as it goes," cried Pete, drawing up his magnificent arm to its full height. "You hab stabbed me in de arm more dan once, but I ain't sending you to prison. De men who choose to come forward and hand ober deir knives can do so one at a time. Dose who don't come forward will know de reason why. Stop dat! I want no arrangements. I'm going to settle dis matter in my own way. I may just tell you dat I hab been a strong man in a circus, and dat I hab trained wild beasts. I'm also a boxer, if you ain't noticed dat. Bery well, I could kill any an amongst you wid one blow, if I chose to land it on one ob free spots. 'uff said!"

"Shall we open fire, Pete?" came a distant voice.

"Nunno—not till I gib de word, Jack! Mind, one at a time comes forward. If more come, I shall go for you again."

"We ain't fighting no more!" growled one of the gipsies, stepping forward and handing his knife. Pete took it, and felt about the ruffian to make sure that he had no more weapons.

"Now den," he cried, "go to de back ob de orders, and send anoder man forward."

Pete flashed a knife in the moonlight now, and no six of the gang would have dared to face him, although, as a matter of fact, he would never have needed that knife. He disarmed them all. Three of them carried sticks as well as knives, and Pete took the sticks from them, snapping them across his knee; but he retained one ashplant—one with plenty of spring in it. As he disarmed each man he ordered them back, and all of them seated themselves amongst the heather, for they were still fagged out with their



long run; and perhaps they thought it safer to be on the ground, in case there should be any firing from the rear.

"Now den, you men—if you tink you can call yourselves men after allowing a common nigger to conquer de lot ob you—I wish to say just two-free words. I'm all alone here."

"You have got men armed with revolvers!" growled one. "You've led us into a trap."

"Nunno, I ain't!" said Pete. "Dere's no one here to help me. Only when I'm dealing wid men like you—if you can possibly be called men—I take ebery advantage. You hab got to consider de stabs in de arm you gabe me, and dey might hab been frough my heart for all you cared, except for de danger to yourselves. Now den, I ain't going back to your encampment, because I ain't like you, and can't fight wid women. I hab an idea two men I want to catch are in your caravans. I want to catch dem for a purpose which I ain't telling you, and I mean to catch dem, just to show Jack and Sammy dat a moneylender can't be robbed, if he happens to be lucky. Well, like de donkey, dere's a tale attached to dat, but you ain't going to learn it. 'Nuff said! Form yourselves into a sort ob gang. I hab an ashplant here. P'r'aps it came off de tree I placed at a certain spot to make a rhyme for de sake ob one ob de most beautiful poems you neber heard. Dat ain't got anything to do wid you. When a poet wants to rhyme wid 'clash,' de only tree he can possibly place in de correct position is 'ash,' 'cos if he put a horse-chestnut dere it would ruin his poem. I tink we will put a sort ob postscript to de poem in dis fashion:

"Den all form fours, and down de moors  
You will march by de larch.  
You will easily see dere's anoder tree,  
I hab placed in time for sake ob my rhyme.  
I'm going first, but we'll all do a burst  
Down de hill.

And we'll sing de refrain, Jack shall hear it again;  
And as we approach him, his head shall hum,  
Wid a lardi-dardi-diddle-de-dum."

The gipsies did not understand Pete's meaning at all, but they understood it better when he commenced to use that springy ashplant.

He lashed them into a group, of which each man tried to be the centre, and failed. They wanted to make straight for the encampment. Pete's intentions were quite different; he was thinking of the women, and their awful threat, and what Jack and Sam would say if they executed it.

He took them considerably out of their way, and used the stick with a freedom that made them furious; but they were completely quelled. There was not one amongst their number who dared attack him, and he took particular care that every one of them received a good share of the stick.

By the time they reached the spot where the motor-car was they were tired out, and all of them were smarting badly. Once or twice some of their number made bolts for freedom, but Pete always overtook them with the greatest ease, and they had such a rough time of it, that the same man never made a second attempt.

Like a flock of sheep, Pete drove them to the car, and when Jack and Sam saw the strange party arrive they burst into roars of laughter.

"What ever are you doing now, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"I'm dribbing dese sheep to de slaughter-house, Jack. Dey hab been gibing me a lot ob trouble one way and anoder. You see, I went to look for de two excaped prisoners, and tumbled into a gipsy encampment. Now,

I hab an idea dat our excaped prisoners are hiding in one ob de caravans— at least, dey were. I 'spect dey hab bolted again, and we shall hab a furder chase. All de same, I mean to catch dem."

"Shall we go to the encampment?" inquired Jack.

"Nunno! I ain't going widin a good many miles ob dat of my own free accord. You see, dese men wanted to rob me, and de women made some awful threats."

"What did they threaten?"

"Neber you mind dat, Jack. Dat ain't part ob de story. All de same, I would rader lose our excaped prisoners dan go near dose women, 'cos, mind you, dere's a lot ob dem, and dey ain't at all safe. Den, again, dere's not much chance ob de prisoners remaining dere till we get back. I hab collected all de knives from dese beauties."

"Your arm is bleeding!" exclaimed Jack, as Pete drew near the lamp to hand in the knives.

"M'yes! Dat's where dey stabbed me."

"You hand us our knives, and we will go away quiet!" growled one of the party.

"Yah, yah, yah! You ain't going away anyting like quiet," retorted Pete, keeping his eyes on the gang, "and you ain't habing your knives again. I'm going to confiscate dose, 'cos men like you are much safer widout dem. I consider you deserve rader severe punishment, 'cos dere ain't a doubt dat you would hab taken my life if I had giben you de chance. Now den, dis is de sort ob punishment you are going to receive."

Then the way in which Pete flogged the gang caused them to rush howling along the road, while Pete followed them up, getting in some cuts that they were likely to remember. They wisely scattered directly they got the chance, but ere they did so every man received a most severe thrashing.

"I'm inclined to tink dat de best ting we can do is to follow de road back to London. Dere ain't de slightest chance ob dose men remaining in dis part after dey know dat we are on deir track, and it seems to me dat London is de likeliest place for dem to hide in. And I hab an idea dat I know where Stanley will go if he does go to London, and dat's Berry's place."

"Well," exclaimed Jack, "we will just have a look at the gipsy encampment! It might be well to keep watch there."

"I shall continue the search no further," declared Harris.

"I reckon you will have to do what we tell you," said Sam.

"Do you dare to say that you will take me against my will?"

"Not at all; but you will have the choice of coming with us or walking, and you had better decide sharp, because we are going to start."

"If I come with you, will you put me down at my house?"

"Yes, we can do that," answered Jack. "It will not be very much out of our way."

"Then I will come with you!" exclaimed Harris, coolly making an attempt to enter the inside of the car. But Pete caught him by the collar and pulled him out.

"You come out ob dat, old hoss!" he said. "Dat ain't de place for you. My dog, and Jack, and Sammy are going in dere, and dere ain't room for you. What you hab got to do is to come outside wid me."

"I have had no sleep for two nights."

"Dat's all de more reason why you will be able to sleep well on de third one. Now, stop your nonsense, and get up, if you are coming, else you will get left alone on de cold wilds ob Devonshire, and someone will get mistaking you for a man, de same as I mistook de cow for a man."



The road led the comrades several miles out of their way, but it eventually wound round by the moors, bringing them to the spot where Pete had seen the gipsy encampment.

Now, to his surprise, every van had disappeared, and the only signs of the encampment was the smouldering fire.

"'Spect dey tought we were going to put de police on dem," observed Pete. "Still, I'm glad dey are gone, 'cos I don't want any trouble wid dese women."

Feeling confident that the fugitives would not remain in Devonshire, the comrades took the road back to London, and Pete insisted on rather more stoppages on the way than Harris approved of.

It was nearly ten o'clock when they reached an inn about five miles from Harris's house, and here the comrades arranged to stay the night, as they found they would be able to get beds.

"Now, look here, boys," exclaimed Pete, "we don't want Harris any mora! De man is neider use nor ornament, and if he got stealing anything from de landlady, she would expect us to make it good, wouldn't you, my dear?"

"You insolent, black scoundrel!" snarled Harris.

"Dere's no telling what a slum landlord will do," continued Pete. "De only ting I would trust him wid would be a full-sized chunk ob dynamite, 'cos dere would be de chance ob him blowing himself up wid dat. But I was wondering weder it would be better to let him walk to Furze Hall, or weder I should run him ober. Dere's no sense in all ob us coming. You can be ordering de supper, 'cos it won't take me many minutes to do ten miles. We don't want to pay for Harris's supper. You can take care ob Rory, and I shall be back by de time supper is ready."

Jack and Sam raised no objection to this arrangement, so Pete started off with the indignant Harris, who wanted to stop for some refreshments, but Pete would not listen to it.

"You can get all you want to eat when you get home, old hoss. Too much food ain't at all good for a man who helps oder people to hab too little. I don't 'spect dat we shall meet much again, Harris—p'r'aps we never may on dis earth—but remember dis, all de luxury you enjoy now, all de gold you are hoarding up at de cost ob de starving poor, won't help you on your death-bed. When dat time comes, and come it must, when de doctor says dese words all dread to hear, 'Dere is no hope,' and you feel his words are true, den perhaps you will tink ob de words a common nigger uttered to you. You'm got de time to alter now, you will hab no time den."

"You canting, brutal beast of a nigger, I hate the very sight of you, and the sound of your habbling voice! Ah—ah!"

They had turned a bend, and above the trees saw a ruddy tinge upon the heavens. Pete opened her out, and the car leapt forward till the night wind howled in his ears. They had been going slowly, because he had needed time to speak seriously to Harris, in the vain hope that it would make him see the error of his ways.

Now they were flying along, for that flickering light was over Furze Hall.

"Might be a haystack," muttered Pete.

"Idiot, there is no haystack near! It is my house! It is on fire! Perdition! This is ruin!"

"Should hab tought a man like you would hab been insured."

"Thought! Silly scoundrel! How could a creature like you think?"

"Seems to me you ain't been tinkin much, else you would hab insured your house and furniture. Ain't de house insured, eider?"

"Fury, no! Nothing is insured!"

"Den you'm going to hab a pretty big loss, 'specially if de house is your own property."

"It is my own property. Why, I shall lose thousands of pounds!"

"What about de housekeeper?" exclaimed Pete, putting the car at its utmost speed.

"The loss will be terrible!" moaned Harris. "Thousands of pounds! It is ruin—absolute ruin!"

"You are a drefful scoundrel, Harris!" exclaimed Pete, bringing the car up sharp close to the burning building. "I don't believe you care for de life ob anyone on dis earth, so long as you get all you want."

Pete sprang from the motor-car, which he had stopped to windward of the burning building, and at a spot where the flames could not reach it.

The front door was open; flames were pouring from it, and roaring horribly. But the fire raged fiercest at the back of the building.

Pete's only thought was for the aged housekeeper.

"If she's in dat building she's doomed!" cried Pete. "No man could enter it. Least, if he did, he could not leave it alive."

"My furniture, my books—everything is lost!" moaned Harris.

"Do you want me to shake de life out ob your body?" cried Pete, seizing him by the collar and shaking him till his teeth chattered.

Then suddenly Pete released his hold.

A shriek rang out. It was a cry that he would be likely to remember for long.

Glancing upwards, he saw Janet's terrified face at the upper window.

Above the roar of the fire Pete's voice arose.

"Stay exactly where you are!" he shouted. "I shall come up to fetch you out."

"There is one picture in the hall—it is worth thousands! Save it!" cried Harris.

Pete looked positively fierce as he glanced at the frantic man for an instant; then he leapt up the stone steps, which were hot and crackling. A rush of fire and smoke drove him back, and he went down the steps with one bound; then, taking a long breath, he sprang up once more, and dashed into the raging fire.

The floor had not yet fallen. A strong wind was blowing from the back of the house, and this swept the fire through it with a roar like a blast furnace. The stairs were blazing fiercely, but Pete dashed up them, holding his breath, for it was impossible to breathe in such terrible heat.

His flesh was scorched, and halfway up the stairs he fell; but he was up in an instant. There was one turn—he knew it well, and then, with a few more bounds, he gained the upper floor, and as he did so, the lower staircase fell with a crash, and the roar of the fire grew fiercer, while myriads of sparks leapt upwards.

Pete dashed his fist through the window on the landing, then took several deep breaths. Then he hurled himself against the door of the room in which he knew Janet was.

It flew inwards, and striding across the room he stood beside the old woman, although she would scarcely have known him, so scorched was he by the fire.

Janet was in such a state of terror that she was in a half-fainting condition. She was fully dressed, and clung to the side of the window looking at Pete with a dazed expression in her eyes.

"All right, Janet!" he exclaimed, taking the sheets off the bed, and ripping them lengthwise. "Don't you be frightened, 'cos dere ain't de slightest cause for alarm. We can't go down de staircase, but you can



easy escape. All you hab got to do is to keep quiet and leabe de rest to me."

While he was speaking he formed the broad strips of sheeting into a twisted rope, firmly knotting the ends together, then he fastened a blanket round the poor old woman, and having made his improvised rope secure, he stepped to the window.

There were two in the room, but both were so low that it would have been impossible to get Janet beneath the sashes. Pete grasped the framework, placed his knee against the wall in front of the window, and tore the sashes out. Few men could have performed such a feat of strength, but the roar of the flames was in Pete's ears, the heat of the fire, and the smoke in the room. He did not know how soon the fire might come pouring through the floor, and then—well, he and the woman he was striving so hard to save, would fall through into the raging flames beneath. His every movement was wonderfully rapid, and yet he was perfectly calm, although he found it hard to bear the pain he suffered from his burns.

As he lifted the old woman through the window, he saw a tax-cart dash up, and out of it sprang a young man and woman, and the latter shrieked with terror.

"Mother! Oh, my mother!"

"Dat's all right, my dear!" shouted Pete, cautiously lowering the now fainting Janet. "Your moder will be wid you in two-free seconds."

"You have got her over the area," shouted the young fellow. "It's death to fall. Let me get down."

Pete sighed. He knew his rope was not long enough, nor was it possible for him to swing her clear of the area. The young man dropped into the area, and got immediately beneath Janet.

"Be careful dere," shouted Pete. "I hab got to de end ob my rope. How far is she from you?"

"Ten feet—more."

"I'm going to let go ob de rope. Tink you can catch her?"

"Yes. But how will you escape?"

"I ain't considered dat matter yet. Now, I shall count free; and den let go. Are you ready?"

"I am."

"One—two—free! Go!"

The young man was of powerful build, and he caught her in his arms, but the impact knocked him down; however, he fell beneath Janet, who was uninjured.

"Mother's quite safe, Bess!" he cried, carrying her up the area steps.

"Oh, Fred!" sobbed his wife. "What of that brave man who has given his life for mother? He has no rope now."

"Bess, he's saved your mother, and I'll go. I'll go, lassie, if——"

"Stand back dere!" shouted Pete. "Dere's no entrance to dis house, and if dere was, I wouldn't need any saving. Listen to me. De stairs hab fallen. Flames are bursting frough dis floor. I ain't going to get burnt, 'cos dere's no sense in dat. Fred and Bessie, I'm only a nigger; but I don't want to disappear off de face ob dis earth widout two men knowing it. I'm going to escape if I can. If I don't escape, I want you to go to de Plough Inn to-morrow morning, and ask for Jack and Sammy. Just tell dem dat I died doing my duty. You need not mention anything 'bout my dog Rory, 'cos he'll be cared for. 'Nuff said!"

Then Pete climbed on the window-sill, and flames leaped past him, as the strong wind swept them through the window. For an instant he stood there, with his face turned towards the heavens, revealed in the red

glow of the fire. Then he leapt into space, and Bessie shrieked as his body swept down.

Once he turned in the air, and that professional turn appeared to check his downward course for an instant, then on he rushed, and clearing the area, he dropped into a large clump of rhododendrons, at which he had leapt.

To the spectators it seemed that he had gone to certain death, and they were absolutely amazed when he struggled from the bushes, pulled out a pipe, and commenced to fill it.

Bessie quite forgot herself. Flinging herself on her knees, she clasped her hands, and tears streamed down her cheeks.

"May Heaven bless you!" she murmured.

"Golly! Stop dat! Don't you dare to cry!" said Pete, who could see her tears in the firelight, and could hear the sob in her voice. "I won't hab it. Take de old lady home, Fred. She ain't hurt, is she?"

"Not so much as a scratch," answered Fred, lifting her into his trap in front, while Pete lifted Bessie in at the back.

Fred just grasped Pete's hand, and then, springing up, he drove off.

"Did you save that picture?" groaned Harris.

"Yah, yah, yah!"

"You brutal beast! Do you dare to laugh at me? I am ruined!"

"Yah, yah, yah! If you don't deserve it I dunno de man who does. Tink ob de people you hab turned into de streets. Tink ob dat little dead child I saw. P'r'aps de shillings a week you overcharged de moder for her wretched rooms would hab kept dat child alive, and if dat's de case you are a murderer ob de worst sort. How do you expect me to be sorry for you. Why, eben wid your old housekeeper you did not care weder she was burnt to death or not so long as your picture was saved. No, I did not save your picture, and I would not hab saved it if I could."

"I am homeless and ruined! The loss is greater than any man knows. Fury! After a life struggle I am ruined!"

"What sort ob struggle. A struggle wid starving men and starving women and starving little children. Well, what can you expect when you get your money dat way. I ain't one bit sorry for you, Harris. I'm glad. It serves you right."

"You dog! I'll have your life if you talk to me like that!"

"Well, suppose you try to take it now?" said Pete, drawing himself up.

"Suppose you attack me? Golly! Don't I wish you would!"

"I must get to the inn. I shall have to sleep there to-night."

"In dat case, you will walk dere. You ain't coming in my car. 'Nuff said!"

Then Pete sprang into the car and drove off, leaving Harris gazing blankly at the burning building.

He knew that it might be a long time yet before an engine arrived, and even if it came now nothing could be saved, for at that moment the roof fell in, and the heat grew so fierce that he had to move away.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Pete's Medicine—An Interview with the Solicitors—On the Trail Once More—Tracked Down.

PETE left his car in the coach-house, and entered the inn by the back door. The comrades were waiting supper for him, and the landlady uttered a cry as Pete came in. He would have looked far worse had he been a white man, because his flesh was scorched and blackened, and his hair was all singed off. He had not the slightest idea how extraordinary he looked.



"Whatever have you been doing, Pete?" inquired Jack.

"Seeing Harris home. Yah, yah, yah! Dere's been a bit ob a fire at his place. Golly! I'm too tired for supper. Shall hab it wid my breakfast to-morrow morning. Good-night, boys!"

"What's to be done next, Jack?" exclaimed Sam.

"He is badly burnt," said Jack. "It is useless questioning him. I shall send for a doctor. Where is the nearest one, Mrs. Bell?"

"About three miles from here, sir," answered the landlady. "Our man could go with you to show you the way. Dr. Barker is the doctor's name."

Dr. Barker's practice was not a large one, and late though it was he had not the slightest objection to visiting a patient at that time of night, especially as Jack offered to drive him there and back.

The doctor was a short, fussy little man. No one ever sent for him but what he found the case serious, and one that would require the greatest care, and even when he got them through, he hung on to them as though he loved them. The poor fellow had to do this to support his wife and family, and even then he frequently got a summons for taxes. Some people thought that he was a Passive Resister, but he knew better. Had he had the power, he would have passed a law that tax-collectors should wait three or four years for their money, the same as he had to do sometimes.

"A burn is always a serious matter," observed the doctor, bustling about. "Does he appear to be in much pain?"

"I fear he is. He is not a man to speak about it; in fact, he went to bed immediately."

"Ah, that is not a good sign! I will mix a lotion to relieve the pain."

"I fear you will find him a very troublesome patient, doctor. He will not like my having called you in. He is a negro, and one of the finest-hearted men I have ever met. I don't know what has happened, but there must have been a fire somewhere, and probably he got burnt in trying to save life."

"A fire! I have not heard of it. We never have fires here, but perhaps I shall be hearing from the postman to-morrow—or the next day. Just one minute while I write the directions on the bottle. This will ease the pain, and it can be applied when it comes on. Now, let me see. I will mix him a draught—a composing draught. He is certain to be feverish."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Jack. "And look here, doctor, I fear you will have a deal of trouble with your patient, and I doubt whether you shall be able to make him obey your orders. I am a stranger to you, so shall be glad if you will kindly accept this ten-pound note on account of your fees. I know you will give him the very best attention, however unruly he may be. He will address you as 'old hoss,' and talk to you like a father, but you won't mind that?"

"My dear sir, I am accustomed to attending the children of ladies, and poor people. The latter are very difficult to deal with, though not nearly so difficult as their mothers. I thank you very much for your liberality, and in fairness to myself, assure you that he should have had the very best attention had I thought my fees would never have been paid. Now, let us come. I shall call again in the morning, and possibly change the medicine, but this lotion and composing-draught will certainly prove beneficial."

Arrived at the inn Jack decided on letting the doctor bear the brunt of it, because he knew perfectly well that Pete would strongly object to having a doctor at all.

"Look here, doctor," exclaimed Jack, as they stood outside the bedroom door, "if you happen to be attending a little child—a poor one by preference—he would certainly become interested, and want to see you

again even if it were only to know how the child is getting on. In some things Pete is only a child himself, in others he is a very keen and observant man.

"It so happens that I am attending a cottager's little girl who got scalded. It is a serious case, too."

"Mention it to Pete!" whispered Jack, as the doctor entered the room.

Pete had not undressed. He was lying on his bed, smoking vigorously, and he was wide awake—a sure sign that he suffered considerable pain.

"I am Dr. Barker, Pete!" exclaimed the little man. "Your friend wished me to see you professionally."

"Golly! Did you eber hear such nonsense! I ain't habing any medicated men buzzing around me!"

"But you are burnt!"

"What ob dat? Buzz off home, old hoss, and don't you dare to come here again!"

"You see, Pete, a burn is a serious matter, especially when it is as severe as I can see your burns are. I am attending a poor little child who was scalded, and her case is very serious. Of course, she is very young, and——"

"I 'speat she will get all right!" exclaimed Pete, sitting up in bed, and swinging his legs over the side of it. "Are her parents poor?"

"Very. Her father is a farm labourer, and only gets about ten shillings a week. But, see here, Pete, your friend has told me what was the matter with you, so I have brought some lotion and a soothing draught. It will relieve the pain, and——"

"Put dem down dere, old hoss. See here, 'bout dat little child. I consider it is a case where dere should be proper nourishment and dat sort ob ting. You might gib dese five pounds to de moder, and tell her to get whateber you order. Don't say who gabe dem, but say de same party is going to pay your bill, and den you can send it in to me at dis address. I'm a moneylender."

"My dear fellow, I can see how you are burnt. How did it happen?"

"Harris's house is burnt down. He wanted a picture saved."

"You never got burnt like that to save a picture?"

"Yah, yah, yah! De picture is burnt."

"Did his housekeeper escape?"

"M'yes! She escaped all right. Now 'bout dat little girl. She will want some grapes, and tings like dat. Are dere any grapes about dis part?"

"Yes. She shall have all she requires, thanks to your generosity."

"What do you charge for your visits?"

"In her case, I shall charge the father eighteenpence."

"And what would you charge in a case like mine?"

"Say five shillings, because I have reason to know that you are in a good position."

"It's mighty awful!" growled Pete. "Here's a little child who needs ten times de amount ob care, and she only gets eighteenpence worf ob medicated attention, while I get five shillings' worf, and dere ain't anyting de matter wid me. You ought to charge de rich five times de amount, and de poor nuffin."

"I should starve, Pete. The rich would not employ me. But concerning your case——"

"Neber you mind 'bout my case. I'm tinking ob dat suffering child. Has Jack paid you anyting for coming here?"

"Yes, ten pounds. But you would have had the same attention had he paid my ordinary fees."



"Bery well. I'm going to pay ten pounds for de attention to dat child. 'Nuff said. I ain't arguing de point. Stuff dose two notes into your pocket."

"In neither case would my fees come to anything like such an amount."  
 "Can't help dat. I'm not going to hab more paid for me dan dat child is. Clear out ob dis room, and you can come to-morrow morning to tell me how de little girl is."

"Don't forget the medicine, Pete."

"Nunno! Good-night!"

The following morning, when the doctor called at about eleven, he found that Pete had been out, and had purchased all the hothouse grapes he could procure. Someone in the neighbourhood grew grapes for the market, and Pete had bought a huge basketful. He had got enough grapes to have supplied a children's hospital.

"You ought not to have gone out, Pete!" said the doctor sternly. "It was most unwise, and——"

"I wanted to get some grapes."

"How is your appetite?"

"I dunno yet, 'cos I ain't had de opportunity ob trying it. I had some difficulty in finding de place where de grapes grow, and den dere was trouble wid de man. He wanted payment in advance, to begin wid; and when I had overcome dat little difficulty, he started picking out all de worst bunches he could find. Howeber, while he was doing dat I started de oder end picking out all de best ones."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "Did he mind?"

"You'm guessed de first time, Jack. Dat man started minding in de loudest way he possibly could. Said I spoilt his vines, and tings like dat. Den he got so savage dat he started punching my head. So I took him outside and dropped him into de water-butt. After dat he cooled down, He's going to bring two-free actions for damages against me. Hab you had breakfast yet, boys?"

"No; we didn't get up very early."

"Yah, yah, yah! Should say you didn't, considering dat it's past eleven."

"Still, we have ordered breakfast, and it is all ready now."

"You had better stay, doctor, den you will be able to watch de pulse ob my appetite, and see if you find I'm suffering from inundation, or any ob dose pulmonary complaints. I ain't at all sure dat I ain't got a slight touch ob hypochondrakolorum, wid de hydecephalous hannimaxuagulum frown in. I'm rader doubtful if dose complaints won't spoil my appetite, but you will be able to judge if I eat enough to sustain de optic organs ob de ornifogolum. Ain't it wonderful where I learn all dese medicated terms?"

"Marvellous!" exclaimed the doctor. "I had a light breakfast before starting out, but shall be very pleased to join you in another."

They had cold fowls and eggs-and-bacon. Jack, knowing the size of Pete's appetite, had also suggested a ham, as the landlady mentioned that she had one in the house.

"I really think cold fowl would be better for you!" gasped the doctor, as Pete consumed rasher after rasher of bacon and fried eggs.

"You tink dat is preferable for de billiary chicks?"

"I think you mean ducts," laughed Jack.

"Was it ducks, Jack? I thought it was chicks. Still, dere's a sameness 'bout dem. Why, here comes Harris! Yah, yah, yah! De man looks as miserable as a moulting chicken."

Harris looked longingly at the breakfast; then, placing a chair at the table, he seated himself in it.

Pete picked him up, chair and all, carried him across the room, and shot him into the coalscuttle, which he overturned as he fell to the floor. After that Pete came back to the table with a calmness that rendered it a very difficult matter for the doctor to keep serious.

"You ain't habing breakfast wid us, old hoss!" said Pete. "I don't like rascally slum landlords. You ain't fit to sit in de company of respectable men."

"You insolent scoundrel!" roared Harris. "You have assaulted me!"

"Well, I will assault you again if you like!"

"Dr. Barker," cried Harris, "you have heard this infamous ruffian libel me, and you have seen him assault me!"

"I wish to have nothing to do with the matter."

"But you shall have something to do with it, sir!"

"I only said dat you were one ob de greatest scoundrels unhung," observed Pete, helping himself to half a fowl. "Just watch my appetite, doctor, and see if you tink it is failing."

"I am watching it, Pete!" exclaimed the doctor, smiling. "I see no signs of failure. But you called Pete a scoundrel, Mr. Harris."

"So he is a scoundrel."

"That is not my opinion at all."

"No," sneered Harris, "because you believe in his boasting of having saved my housekeeper's life! You believe in his miserable, bragging lies!"

"He has never mentioned a word about the matter. I knew your house was burnt down last night, but I did not know that Pete saved Janet's life until you yourself told me so."

"I don't believe you."

"After that, there is nothing more to be said!" exclaimed the doctor, turning his back on the angry man.

"Now, hold your row, Harris!" exclaimed Pete. "If you make any more noise I shall stuff you up de chimbley, and you will find dat a rader uncomfortable position."

After that threat Harris thought it wiser to subside. He ordered breakfast on his own account. And all the time Pete told of his iniquities. It was news to the doctor—he had never known how Harris got his money; and it maddened Harris, because he knew that he would be disgraced in the neighbourhood.

At last he left the inn, with fury in his heart, and vowing vengeance against Pete.

The comrades remained there for several days, for although Pete seemed little the worse for his experience, Jack did not feel at all at ease concerning the matter.

However, Pete got on all right, and then Jack handed the grateful doctor a cheque, and the comrades made their way to London.

"Now, you see, boys," exclaimed Pete, "I hab an idea dat de surest place to catch Spicer and Stanley is in Berry's house, and dat's where I tink we ought to go to-night. Neber mind de letters, Jimmy. Gib dem to Mrs. Murkins to light her fire wid."

"But there's a summons here for you," said Fergus. "It was left by the solicitors yesterday. It is for assault. They say they are also going to serve you with a writ for libel; and they spoke about a claim for damage to furniture. The clerk who came here said it would be better for you to call on the solicitors to arrange the matter."

"But I dunno de solicitor's names."



"Brough and Murton."

"Yah, yah, yah! Funny ting he should hab gone dere. 'Spect he wanted to find out if our story was true, Jack. So he tinks I ought to go dere, does he? Well, I dunno dat I sha'n't go. But stop a bit! I shall be back directly, boys. I want to make a few purchases."

Pete was absent for about half an hour, and his comrades imagined that he had been to pay the solicitors a visit by himself, although they soon discovered such was not the case.

"Now, boys," exclaimed Pete, "let's come and see dose solicitors, 'cos I don't want any actions brought against me. Dey might cost money, and if I get all dese expenses piled on de top ob my office expenses, dere ain't going to be quite as much profit in dis money-lending business as I imagined. Now, dis way to London! Nunno, Rory, you can't come dis journey! You might bite de solicitors, and dat would mean anoder action for damages."

Pete entered the lawyers' offices, and the clerks laughed at him, for he still had a very singed appearance.

"Here's your own particular nigger, Willie!" exclaimed one of them; and the facetious clerk who had previously given him information concerning the lifeless Brough came up smiling.

"Why, someone has been singeing the blackbird!" he exclaimed. "He's been singed before he is plucked, which is rather reversing the order of things, don't you know?"

"Ha, ha! Not bad, that, Willie!" exclaimed one of the clerks. "But I don't think the partners would appreciate that part of your joke that refers to the plucking."

"Don't look so black at me, my worthy nigger," said Willie. And he raised another laugh, for he was the wit of the office, and he did occasionally say funny things.

Then Pete vaulted over the counter, seated himself on a chair, and the unwise and most unfortunate Willie on his knee.

"Now, my dear lad," exclaimed Pete, holding him in that position with the greatest of ease, "I'm going to amuse you for two-free minutes, 'cos I like little children. You see——"

"Kiss me, Pete," came a voice from Willie, and so exactly like his own voice that the other clerks stopped laughing for a moment to gaze at Willie in blank amazement.

"Certainly, my child," said Pete, in his natural voice, and it sounded exactly as though Pete complied with the extraordinary request. "I like little boys to be affectionate. Let you go. Nunno, Willie; you must not run away from your auntie like dat, my dear."

By this time there were roars of laughter in the office, and as Willie struggled and turned red with passion, Pete made a noise like a crying child appear to come from his lips. Suddenly the laughter ceased, though not the crying. Mr. Murton, a tall, stern-looking gentleman, entered the office, and the expression of blank astonishment on his face nearly convulsed the comrades. The crying grew louder than ever, while the unfortunate Willie's face was blood-red.

"Fellow! I am Mr. Murton!" cried that worthy, in a voice that was intended to quell Pete.

"Glad to hear it, my dear old hoss. I dunno what to do wid dis naughty boy. Dere he goes again."

Pete did the crying so well that even Murton was deceived.

"Don't make that ridiculous noise, Price," he said sternly.

"Dere's no pleasing de child," observed Pete. "Here I hab bought him

dese toys, and yet he won't be a good boy. Now, run away, Willie, and try to behave better in future. I tink you want to speak to me, old hoss?"

"My name is Mr. Murton."

"So you hab already told me, my dear old kloss."

The great man stuck an eyeglass in his eye, and gazed at Pete in a manner that ought to have scorched him worse than ever.

"What has he done, Price?" demanded Murton.

"He has assaulted me, sir."

"Did the ruffian strike you?"

"No, sir. He—he has injured my back severely."

"I shall injure it a bit more if you tell dose stories, you naughty boy," said the irrepressible Pete.

"Let this laughter cease," cried Mr. Murton. "I see nothing to laugh at."

"Quite right, too, old hoss," said Pete. "Dey are only encouraging Willie in his naughtiness. Come dis way, Murton. I see dis is your room by de name on de door; and do take dat ridiculous eyeglass out ob your eye, 'cos it makes you look a bigger idiot dan you really are."

Then Pete coolly marched into the great man's room, and seating himself in the chair from which Murton had impressed many a trembling defendant, Pete relighted his clay pipe.

"Is the fellow a raving maniac?" gasped Murton.

"He has assaulted me, sir," murmured Willie, "and——"

"Get on with your work!" snarled Murton. "I suppose you have been trying to be funny, and this is the result of it. Come in, young men."

The latter was to Jack and Sam, so they followed into the room.

"That is my chair, fellow," said Murton.

"Golly!" cried Pete, leaping out of it. "I shall get burnt again if I ain't careful. Am I alight at de back, boys?"

Murton focussed his burning gaze on Pete with his eyeglass once more, then, taking up a piece of foolscap and a pen, he dipped the latter into the ink.

"My client, Mr. Harris, has instructed me to issue a writ against you for one thousand pounds damage done to his furniture," he said. "I have already sent you a written notice of my intention of doing so."

"Dat will be amongst de oder letters, my dear old hoss. I hab ordered dem to be burnt, 'cos I don't get time to open my correspondence always. Howeber, seems to me dat de best ting for you to do is to issue it, I will wait for it if you like."

"My client will be here in a few minutes," observed Murton, consulting a gold watch.

"Well, I will wait for him, if you like. I tink de swindling old scoundrel——"

"That is libel."

"But I ain't published it, you see. I'm only telling you in sort ob confidence what he is."

Murton touched his bell. Willie answered it.

"Has Mr. Harris arrived?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," answered Willie, glaring at Pete in a terrific manner. "He has just this moment come in."

"Show him in here, and leave my door open, so that my clerks can hear what transpires. Tell a shorthand-clerk to take it all down."

"Well, my old bag ob monkey tricks," exclaimed Pete, as Harris entered the room, "so you hab come up to persecute me, eh? Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself ober de job. I was just telling dis long-nosed lawyer,



who is trying to aid you in your swindling schemes, what an utter old scoundrel you are. I was going to tell him dat you are a slum-landlord, and ain't far removed from a murderer. Got dat down, Mr. Shorthand-writer? Just you tell me if I go too fast for you.

"I should say dat a legalised man who would hab you for a client ought to be shoved into a sack wid you, and de pair drowned like a couple ob plague-infected rats. You can underline dat, shorthand-writer. I wouldn't mind so much, Harris, if you robbed de rich, but you rob de poor, and frough dose robberies you cause de death ob little children. It ain't nuffin to you dat women and little children starve, so long as you get your rents. I consider you are de worst sort ob thief on de face ob dis round spear. Put dat down, shorthand-writer, 'cos it is rader poetical, and just add dat I consider your master is also a rogue and a vagabond to hab anything to do wid de ruffian, knowing his component parts. If you don't know how to spell dat word, ask Jack. Now, de damage occurred to certain furniture in Harris's house—mind you, dis part is important, so mind you get it down correctly. I say de damage done did not come to many pounds, but for de sake ob euphony—'noder good word dere—we will say it came to five hundred pounds—"

"Are you prepared to pay five hundred pounds?" demanded Harris.

"Yes. Dat is de amount I shall pay. I said dat I would pay it and I will. But I am going to pay dat amount to your tenants. I am going to find out your houses, and hand dat sum in shares amongst dose starving people—de women and children—not de men. 'Nuff said!"

"You admit that you damaged Mr. Harris's furniture?" said Murton, making a sign to his client to remain silent.

"Eh?"

"You say you damaged his furniture?"

"Don't remember habing said dat."

"But you did damage it."

"Who says so?"

"Mr. Harris."

"My poor old denuded horse, you must not believe one word dat man says. He is de worst liar dat was eber born. Little more underlining dere, please, specially under de principal word."

"You have called my client a thief and a liar."

"Not an ordinary thief, old hoss. A sort ob murderous thief. See! I don't always do and say what I consider I ought to do and say, 'cos dere are times when I let myself go. Should do so now wid Harris, if de man was not frightened ob me. All I'm going to do wid him is to gib my private opinion ob his character. You'm got it. De furniture dat was damaged was subsequently burnt, and I dunno enough 'bout de law to say weder he is liable for de damage he helped do to de furniture. He struggled wid dis child, and some furniture was smashed. Why dat struggle occurred, I ain't discussing, but I do know dat Harris deserves to be hung. I know such a man ain't fit to lib on dis earth. 'Nuff said! As for you, Willie, I may hab been rader hard on you, but I hope it will be a lesson to you not to try to be too funny at de expense ob a man who neber harmed you, eben dough he is a nigger. Put dat ten-pound note into your pocket, and remember dat you ain't cleverer dan de rest ob de inhabitants on dis globe, dough you may be as clever as de general average, and dat ain't saying much for you."

Did Willie take that money? Well, he was not anything like a perfect fool. His fellow-clerks could not possibly laugh at him after that, for Pete stepped forward, and placed two crisp fivers in Willie's hand; the

next instant they were in that astute lad's pocket, and it is very doubtful whether he would have returned them had his employer so commanded. As a matter of fact, Murton was not the sort of man to command anyone to return money. He commenced his observations, and Pete walked coolly from the office as those observations were proceeding. Jack and Sam followed him, laughing as they went, and Murton actually came after them in the vain attempt to induce them to return.

"Tink dere will be a law case ober dis, Jack?" inquired Pete.

"Ha, ha, ha! No, I do not. I don't think Harris will go to law because you told him that he was a scoundrel, and I don't think that Murton will advise him to do so about the furniture. You see, if they were to do so they would have to prove the damage done, and that could never come to anything like what you have assessed it at. They might tackle us for trespass, but then again it seems to me that they would be bound to fail. It appears to have been a lucky thing that the house was burnt down."

"For Harris, Jack?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not exactly. For us. Are you sure he was not insured? It seems funny that such a man should not have been."

"Well, Jack, dat's what he told me, and I should say by de man's manner dat it was absolutely certain. Now, suppose we come to my offices, and discuss how we are going to get dose five thousand pounds back? I particularly want to get dem, because de money is promised to de poor ob Forbes' parish, supposing it is recovered."

"All right, Pete!" exclaimed Jack. "Sam and I will help you in every way we can, won't we, Sam?"

"I reckon so, but I really don't see how we are going to start on the job."

"Why, de first operation is to get into Berry's house, 'cos I feel mighty certain dat it is de secret hiding-place for de gang. Spicer goes dere sometimes, and you can be certain dat Stanley will go dere, too. You see, dat money was in notes, and it stands to reason dat dey will want to change dem. I can get into de house widout de slightest trouble, den I will open de door to you. Now, my impression is dat we had best go in de middle ob de night, and spring a sort ob surprise on Berry when he comes down in de morning. It stands to reason dat he won't let us in if we go to de back door, and for dat reason we shall hab to let ourselves in. 'Nuff said!"

As a result of this conversation, the comrades, after a hearty supper, made their way to the East End.

It was past midnight when they reached the street, but a light was still burning in Berry's house. However, all was quiet there, and Pete felt confident that the usual party had either gone, or that they had not been there that night.

He determined to gain an entry in the same manner in which he had done so on the previous occasion, but now he found the front door of the empty house closed. It was only fastened with the latch, however, and placing his shoulder against it, he sent it flying open, then, having entered, he drew the bolt on the inside.

Climbing along the roof as before, he gained the old miscreant's house, then noiselessly descended the stairs. He knew his way better this time, nor did he care very much if Berry should hear him.

A lamp was burning in the passage, and, opening the front door, Pete admitted his comrades, who were waiting a little way along the street, then, having bolted the door, he entered the sitting-room, and lighted another lamp which was on the table.



"Dis light won't show from de outside," observed Pete, "'cos de shutters are closed. Now, I'm inclined to tink dat de oder lamp is left as a sort ob signal, 'cos Berry ain't de style ob man to waste his oil. Bery well, we will leave it burning, 'cos it may be a signal for dem to come in, and dat's exactly what we want dem to do. If you wait here for someting less dan five minutes, I will go and fetch Berry. May as well hab a candle, but I 'spect we shall find one in dis cupboard."

Pete found the candle all right; then, at Jack's instigation, they searched the lower portion of the house, but the usual company had gone. A few empty spirit bottles and some beer cans were the only signs that they had been there.

"Well, dat's all right!" exclaimed Pete. "You just wait in de sitting-room while I go and tell Berry dat he's wanted."

Pete went to the first floor. One of the doors was locked, and, putting his shoulder against it, he smashed the lock.

Berry had been lying on his bed fully dressed, and he leapt to his feet as Pete entered the room.

"Nice sort ob day for de time ob night, ain't it, old hoss?" observed Pete, catching hold of the old man by his right arm.

"Have you come to rob me?"

"Nunno! I sha'n't relieve you ob a single penny. Suppose you come downstairs and talk matters ober quietly. Tank you, dis way to London, if you please! Got a revolver dere? M'yes! I will borrow dat for de time being, 'cos you might get sort ob excited and use it. 'Nuff said."

#### CHAPTER 13.

#### A Big Surprise—Pete Reads the Riot Act—Getting Back His Own— The Mysterious Stranger.

**A**S Pete led Berry into the room, he gazed at the comrades in blank surprise, and there was an expression of terror in his eyes, for he recognised them at once.

"You are trespassers in my house," he muttered. "I believe you have come here to commit a robbery. Well, I cannot contend with you, for I am an old man, and you are but cowards to attack me."

"We ain't attacking you, old hoss, and we ain't going to do so. Den again, we ain't come to rob you."

"Then what have you come for? If for vengeance, it was not my fault that those men attacked you. I thought they were honest."

"We hab come to catch a man named Spicer, and one named Stanley Manchester. I don't know deir real names, and don't want to; but dere's anoder man named Brough, whose real name is Parks, and as we want him also, we will catch de free birds wid one worm, and you'm de worm. Dere's just one ting I want to impress on you, and dat is dat you ain't got to make a sound. If you dare to do so I shall be compelled to gag you. I will go and wait in the passage."

It must have been three o'clock in the morning before Pete heard stealthy footsteps outside, then stepping to the sitting-room, he made a sign to Sam to prevent Berry giving any warning, and the next moment there was a gentle knock at the door. It was given three times in quick succession, then after a pause there was another knock.

Pete trod lightly along the passage, much as the old man would have done.

"Come in, my sons!" he exclaimed, in a voice exactly like the old man's. "Stay! I will extinguish my lamp in the passage. Now you are safe. Come in. Go into my room while I shut the door."

Three men entered, and Pete quickly closed and locked the door, placing the key in his pocket.

It was pitch black in the passage, and the men strode straight forward without even glancing in the direction of Pete, though even had they done so it would have been impossible for them to have seen him.

As they entered the room they uttered exclamations of dismay, and turned to flee, but they found Pete standing in the doorway with a levelled revolver. Neither of the three ruffians offered the slightest resistance.

"Dat's right, boys!" exclaimed Pete, when Jack and Sam had taken a revolver from each of them. "I can easy name dem. Spicer, for de start, Stanley to go on wid, and Brough for de finish. Dere's Burger and a few more missing, but dat is a job for de police, and one dat don't concern us at all. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if dese precious scoundrels set fire to Harris's house to hab vengeance. It's a sort ob trick dat Stanley would play. 'Scuse me, Stanley, I am going to sort ob secure you, but I will first ob all lock dis door, 'cos we don't want you to hab any chance ob escaping. You are nicely got up, but you ain't disguised sufficiently."

"What do you want, Pete?" exclaimed Stanley, who saw that concealment was in vain.

"I want you wid your arms tied behind your back for de start."

Pete soon had them bound, and then he seated himself on the couch, pulled out his pipe, and commenced to fill it.

"I want to know, Jack and Sammy," he exclaimed, "weder you hab eber seen four bigger scoundrels dan dat little lot?"

"I reckon not," answered Sam, highly amused at Pete's coolness.

"Listen to me," said Stanley. "We have no money in our possession. At least, we have a few sovereigns, but nothing more. Now, I am willing, if my friends here agree, to make a compact with you. You shall have a thousand pounds, and we will go free. You see the advantage this will be to you. If you give us in custody, assuming that you have the power to do so, you would get no money. You do not suppose for a moment that the police would believe a fairy story that a nigger chose to tell them? Any money they found in our possession they would hold until we had cleared ourselves—a very easy matter."

"Then why are you paying a thousand pounds to go free, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"We don't want any bother."

"You won't hab de slightest boder de way I shall work de matter. I ain't taking a thousand pounds."

"Well, two thousand?"

"I ain't taking anyting less dan four thousand nine hundred and ninety-ten pounds," said Pete, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and feeling in Jack's pocket for a box of matches, though he had got about a dozen boxes in his own pockets. "Nine hundred and ninety-ten equals a thousand, doesn't it, Jack?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Well, don't laugh at it. I'm going to take dat money before I hand you ober to de police, my misguided old hosses. De police ain't going to take care ob my money for me. I can do dat fairly well myself. I'm going to let you off de interest, Stanley, 'cos you'm sort ob simple. You are de first man I shall search, and if I don't find it on you, or de oders, why, I shall keep you prisoners here till more ob your gang turn up, dough I'm mighty certain dat de money is in your possession. I may tell you dat it is giben away to de poor, so dat I'm bound to get it back somehow, 'cos it



ain't my money, dough I am sort ob responsible for it. Now, just come dis way, Stanley."

"I will not submit to this impertinence, fellow!"

"Well, I don't see how you are going to help it," said Pete, seizing him. "Oh, if you kick my shins like dat, I shall slap you ober de face so, and so, noder one to follow. Got tired ob de kicking? Well, I ain't got nearly tired ob de slapping."

"Stop it, you fiend!" yelled Stanley, as Pete continued to slap first one side of his face and then the other.

"Bery well, but don't you start de kicking again, 'cos it hurts. If you do, I shall start de slapdashing. Just examined de property I turn out, Jack. I only want five thousand pounds; but I shall turn out all de property on de table, and den we can sort it out. Cigars here. Den a card-case. Someting lumpy underneaf de waistcoat. M'yes! Pocket-book dere. See if dere's anyting in dat for de start, Jack."

There were many banknotes, and Jack counted them carefully.

"How much do you make it, Jack?" inquired Pete, as he went over them a second time.

"One thousand six hundred and sixty-five pounds."

"Eh?"

"Are you deaf or only stupid?" laughed Jack.

"I tink Sammy must be deaf, and you stupid, Jack. Stop a moment. Multiply dat amount by free. What does dat come to?"

"Er—three fives—fifteen—nineteen—nineteen— Why, it comes to four thousand nine hundred and ninety-five pounds."

"How much short ob five thousand pounds is dat, Jack?"

"Five pounds, naturally."

"Well, it is lucky it ain't unnaturally. But it seems to me, boys, dat dese free beauties hab divided de money between dem pretty correctly, and dat we shall find de oder notes on de oder men. Now, let's hab anoder search for de odd money. 'Spect dere will be some in de trouser-pockets. M'yes! Silver and coppers in dis one. Count dat little lot, Jack. Stop a bit. Dere's some more here. Free pounds dis time. Can you make up five pounds, Jack?"

"Five pounds two and fourpence."

"We'm getting on. Push de two and fourpence on one side. I had an idea dat we shall discover de same amount ob notes in de pockets ob Spicer and Parks."

Pete was quite right; and when he had got his five thousand pounds back, he relinquished the search, then coolly placed the notes in his pocket.

"Jack, I'm bound to admit dat you can rob a moneylender, so I'm going to gib up de business. I'm going to sort ob retire."

"On the profits?" inquired Jack, winking at Sam.

"You shut up, Jack, and just remember dat it is mighty vulgar to wink. Now, one ob you go for the police. Bring in two full-sized bobbies. You can bof go, 'cos I can manage four bound men."

Jack and Sam were back within a quarter of an hour, and two stalwart constables accompanied them. Pete told just as much of the story as suited his purpose. There was one thing that he did not want, and that was to be called upon to send men to prison, especially an old man like Berry; all the same, he did not consider it right to allow such scheming scoundrels to escape.

"You see, constable," explained Pete, "I don't want to be put to any trouble 'bout de matter. You will hab to work de case out yourselves."

"Spicer, as you call him, has been wanted by the police for a long time," observed one of the constables. "You say he poses as Sir Henry Rice. Well, he's wanted; and a party named Harris has told us all about him. Is this their property on the table?"

"M'yes! But we ain't thoroughly searched dem."

"The nigger has robbed us!" cried Stanley.

"Anything you say I may use in evidence against you," observed the constable.

"He has robbed us of a large sum of money. I give him in custody."

"Oh, you do, do you! Well, it isn't at all necessary, because he has given you in charge. We have had our eye on Berry for some time."

"Pity you didn't put de two eyes, old hoss," observed Pete. "Still, you know most ob de facts ob de case. Now, you hab got to work out de rest. You can take dose men to prison, or not, just as you choose. My depression ob dem is dat dey deserve a good sentence, and you can tell de judge dat I said so. Tell him I say dey are guilty, an dat he has got to do his duty; but as I ain't got anyting to do wid dat, come 'long, boys!"

"You see, boys," observed Pete, stopping when he felt sure there was no chance of capture, "I ain't habing de police take possession ob dat money."

"But they would hand it over to you again, Pete," laughed Jack.

"Maybe, in about free months, when de winter has passed, and de pressing needs ob de poor ain't so keen as dey are now. Nunno! De poor want dat money straight away. It is deirs. I hab promised it to dem—to Forbes—which is de same ting."

"I don't doubt that for a moment."

"Den tink a little more, and don't talk so much. Now den, Jack, you got Forbes's London address, and he will be back now. Show de way to his establishment, 'cos I want to speak to de old hoss."

"We can't possibly see him at this time of the morning!" exclaimed Jack. "We must wait till, say, eight or nine."

"Bery well, Jack," exclaimed Pete, "we will walk about and wait till eight. And, see here, I am going to start Jimmy in some business. He's a mighty honest fellow, and he ain't going to lose because I am closing my money-lending business. Dat man will make his way if he gets a start. Honest men, if dey hab got a bit ob sense, are 'most bound to do dat. I shall find him de capital, and he will hab to do de rest. 'Nuff said! Get close to de old hoss's house by eight o'clock."

Mr. and Mrs. Forbes were at breakfast when their servant—a small, scrupulously-clean-looking girl—announced Jack, Sam, and Pete, who were at once shown into the little sitting-room. The breakfast consisted of bread-and-butter and toast only.

"I am delighted to see you, my friends! You will join us. Pete, you must sit next to my wife. You are a hero in her eyes, you know."

"Den she ought to wear glasses, old hoss! You sit still, my dear, 'cos I can look after myself."

"Why, Pete, how did you get your hair burnt like that?" exclaimed Mrs. Forbes; for Pete's singeing still showed.

"Got into a bit ob a fire, my dear. Yah, yah, yah! Scorched de wool. Tank you—brem-butter, please. I like de bread rader thick. Now, 'bout dat money—I mean de five thousand pounds. We hab caught de thief, or, rader, de free ob dem, and I 'spect de bobbies will gib dem some ob what dey deserve."

Mrs. Forbes was busy cutting bread-and-butter. She knew how large Pete's appetite was, and regretted that they had not had a more substantial breakfast that morning.



"Well, my dear, we recovered de money, and here it is. I want you and de old hoss to use it just as you tink fit. Burnt yourself wid de tea, my dear?"

"It is rather hot, Pete!" exclaimed Mrs. Forbes, smiling, though tears were in her eyes. "I am thinking of the poor women and the hungry little children that your munificent gift will benefit. It is such an enormous sum."

In a few earnest words the worthy couple expressed their thanks on behalf of their poor. Then there was a ring at the bell, and a handsome, gentlemanly-looking man was shown into the room.

The comrades had said good-bye to the clergyman and his wife; but Pete, who had been standing close to the girl when she brought in the stranger's name, stared hard at him.

"A friend of mine, Pete," exclaimed Mr. Forbes, "who, like yourself, takes a great interest in the poor."

"Should rader like to know a bit more ob you, old hoss," said Pete, fixing his eyes on the stranger.

"Well, there is my card!" he exclaimed, smiling. "Mr. Forbes is a very old friend of mine."

"Still, you ain't so mighty old yourself," observed Pete. "Got any brudders or sisters?"

"No."

"Den it can't be de same. Good-bye, old hoss! I may come to see you one day, 'specially as you don't lib so very far from where we hab got apartments. We'm in Bedford Square, and you'm in Russell Square. 'Nuff said! It's just one ob de laws ob chance. How do you like de name ob Gladys for a young lady?"

The stranger's handsome face turned deathly white, and his lips twitched, while he looked at Pete in amazement. He seemed to be about to speak, but Pete did not give him time. He hurriedly left the house.

#### CHAPTER 14.

##### Oil on the Troubled Waters—A Happy Evening.

SOME two hours later Pete sprang out of a taxi-cab and entered a private house in Russell Square.

The front door of the house was open, and walking in, he entered a sitting-room. No one was in it, so he tried another, and there he saw the stranger whom he had met at Mr. Forbes's place.

"Well, Jimmy," exclaimed Pete, "I ain't been long in calling, you see! Got much to do just at present?"

"I haven't got anything to do, Pete," he answered. "Mr. Forbes told me how good you had been to the poor, and if I can be of any service to you, you may command me."

"Den get your hat on, 'cos I want to ask your advice. Full speed back, driver! We'm only going as far as my apartments. Now den, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, when they reached the house, "just you follow me upstairs, 'cos I want your opinion on a certain subject. I'll dismiss de driver first, 'cos we may not want him just at present. Here we are, now! Mind de stairs! Dere are several ob dem, and one is above de oder."

"They generally are, Pete, are they not?"

"Well, when you are coming down dem, one is below de oder. Now, dese are my offices. I hab got de door locked. Dis way to London! Now den, Jimmy, dere's your wife. Gladys, dere's your gargoyle."

"I see that you have guessed my secret," said James Trehearn—for such was his name. "But do you think this kind?"

"I knew nothing about it," said Gladys. "I did not know that he had ever met you."

"Now, see here, Jimmy and Gladys," growled Pete, lighting his pipe without asking permission, "you are nuffin but a couple ob idiots! Dere's been faults on bof sides."

"There has been no fault on my husband's side," said Gladys. "He was kinder to me than I ever deserved, and——"

"No, he wasn't. I believe he's a good man, because he helps de poor, but he ain't a good man to leave you to gamble yourself into a place not meant for pretty girls. Your fault was de gambling part ob de business. Now, I happen to know dat Jimmie is mighty fond ob you, 'cos when I mentioned your name suddenly to him he turned as white as a sheet ob paper, and a man wouldn't do dat if he had forgotten. When I heard his name I tought you must be some sort ob relations, and I tought I would try to find out. Now den, Jimmy, I know Gladys lubs you, 'cos she flew into such a mighty temper when I asked her how she could lub a man wid a face like a gargole. She pulled a locket from her neck, and showed me your portrait, not knowing dat I had eber seen you. Bery well, a girl don't carry about a man's portrait unless she's fond ob him. For de rest, Gladys came to me to borrow some money, and to-day she came to pay it back. Dere it lies. I ain't going to take it; but dat doesn't matter. Well, widout my asking, she told me dat she would neber touch cards again. Bery well, we shall suppose dat is so, but weder she does or not, you ain't got de right to separate ober such a matter."

"I ruined him, Pete!" sobbed Gladys.

"Shoo, my dear!" growled Pete. "Stop dat at once! I can't stand crying; it makes me want to join in, and if I did I should make such a mighty row dat it would frighten Jack and Sammy into fits. 'Nuff said! I'm going to lock you two in dis room while I order dinner, and you two hab got to dine wid Jack, Sam, and Pete. 'Nuff said!"

Pete was as good as his word. He locked the door, and left the foolish couple to settle matters between them. The amusing part of the matter was, that he left them there for quite an hour, and he gave the most elaborate orders for dinner.

Then he went in to his prisoners, and found Trehearn with his arm round his wife's waist.

"'Nuff said!" exclaimed Pete. "You hab got to stay to dinner. Den we will hab a little entertainment afterwards. I will show you some ob Rory's tricks."

That was a happy evening for the comrades and for James and Gladys. Pete made Rory perform his tricks, and then he gave them some songs, selecting such as he thought appropriate to the occasion.

And thus the story ends.

THE END.

**NOW ON SALE!**

Nos. 77 & 78, "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY.

**No. 77: "WITH PICK AND LAMP,"**

A Splendid Complete Tale of Colliery Life, by DAVID GOODWIN.

**No. 78: "PLUCK WILL TELL!"**

A Thrilling Story of a Young Scotch Boy's Adventures in London, by ALAN BLAIR.

NOTE!—Ask for "THE BOYS' FRIEND" COMPLETE LIBRARY.

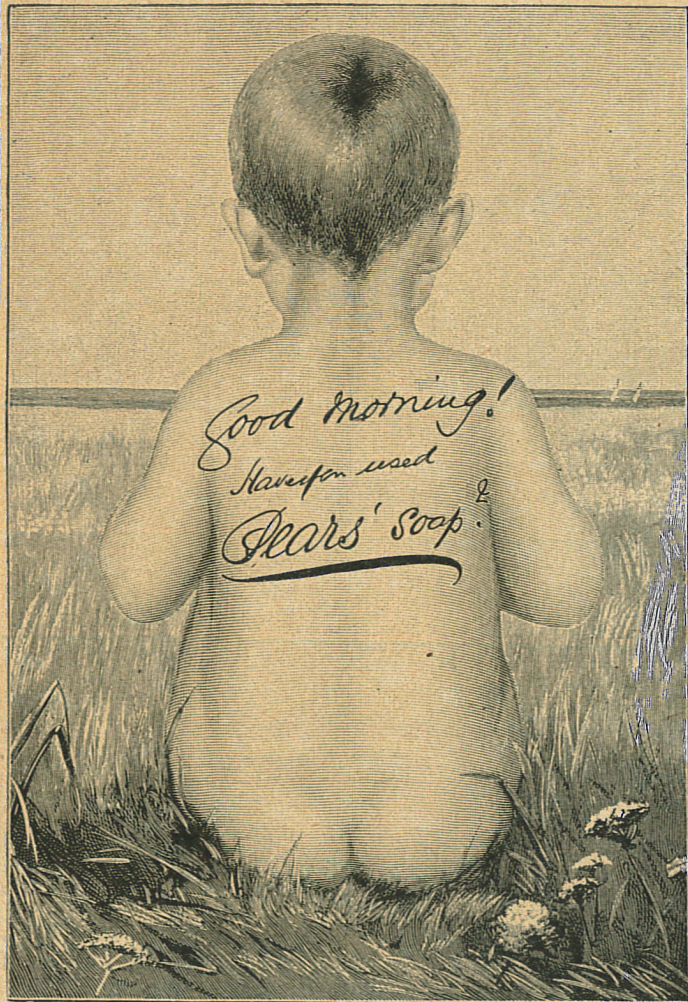


Your Newsagent will be able to get you any of the following numbers of

## “THE BOYS’ FRIEND”

### 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY.

- |                                   |                                       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| No. 7 SHUNNED BY THE<br>SCHOOL.   | No. 51 EXPELLED FROM HIS<br>SCHOOL.   |
| „ 8 THE ROAD TO FAME.             | „ 52 STRONGBOLD THE<br>GLADIATOR.     |
| „ 9 PETE AT EIGHTEEN.             | „ 53 CHUMS OF WYCLIFFE.               |
| „ 11 THE PRIDE OF THE<br>SCHOOL.  | „ 54 TILLER AND TIDEWAY.              |
| „ 12 GUY PRESCOT'S TRUST.         | „ 55 BOB REDDING'S<br>SCHOOLDAYS.     |
| „ 13 ONLY A PITBOY.               | „ 56 KING OF SCOUTS.                  |
| „ 14 CARRINGTON'S LAST<br>CHANCE. | „ 57 SEXTON BLAKE, CLERK.             |
| „ 16 THE SILVER DWARF.            | „ 58 BOB REDDING AFLOAT.              |
| „ 25 THE STOLEN<br>SUBMARINE.     | „ 64 THE UNKNOWN SEA.                 |
| „ 26 PETE, DETECTIVE.             | „ 65 VISCOUNT DICK'S<br>SCHOOLDAYS.   |
| „ 31 THE RIVAL FORTS.             | „ 66 HARRY BRANDON,<br>ACTOR.         |
| „ 34 NELSON LEE'S RIVAL.          | „ 67 THE SECRET OF ST.<br>WINIFRED'S. |
| „ 35 PETE'S CHRISTMAS.            | „ 68 SEXTON BLAKE'S TRUST.            |
| „ 37 MAN TO MAN.                  | „ 69 A LANCASHIRE LAD.                |
| „ 42 THE IRON WAY.                | „ 70 THE CAPTAIN OF<br>ABBOTSCRAG.    |
| „ 43 BROOKS OF RAVENSCAR.         | „ 71 THE BOY BARGE-<br>OWNERS.        |
| „ 44 NED KELLY.                   | „ 72 THE COSTER KING.                 |
| „ 45 TROOPER AND<br>BUSHRANGER.   | „ 73 LARRY & CO.                      |
| „ 46 THE RIVALS OF ST.<br>KIT'S.  | „ 74 THE AIRSHIPS QUEST.              |
| „ 47 GILBERT NAMELESS.            | „ 75 THE TERROR OF THE<br>REMOVE.     |
| „ 48 BLACK ENGLAND.               |                                       |
| „ 49 THE SLEEPWALKER.             |                                       |
| „ 50 BOYS OF BARROWBY.            |                                       |



[All rights reserved.]