

"Tom Sayers' First Match."

No.

262.

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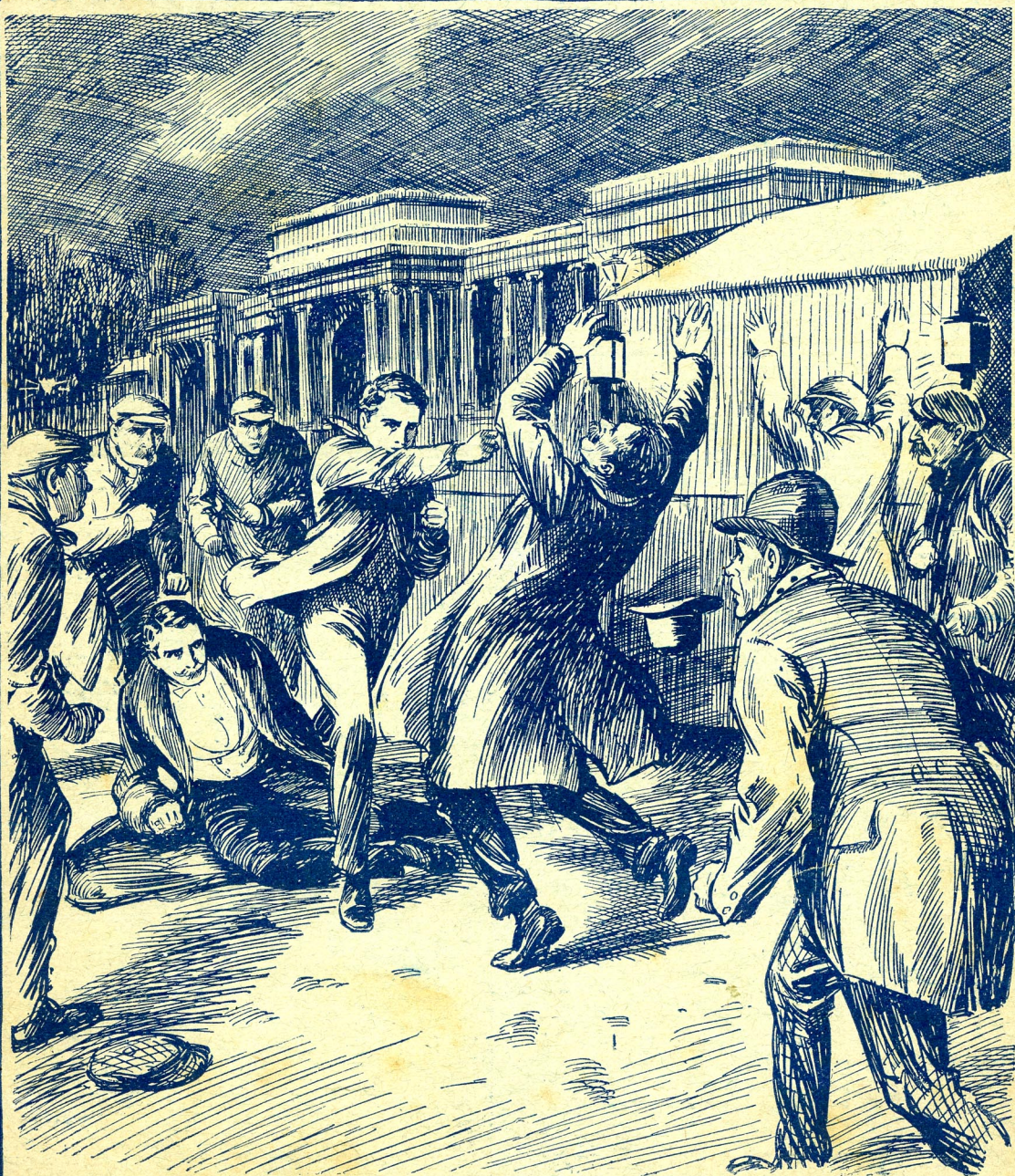
By Arthur S. Hardy.

THE
MARVEL

1^d.

THE DISAPPEARANCE
OF JACK AND SAM.

By S. Clarke Hook.

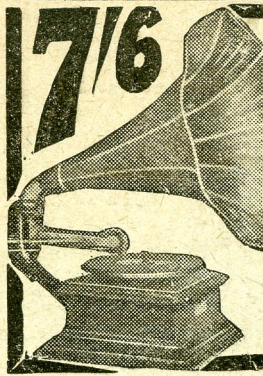


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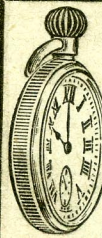

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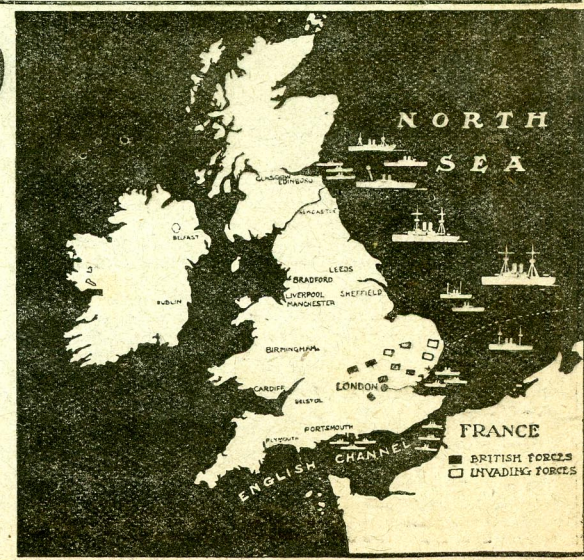
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CHAPTER I.

The Mysterious Letter—The Detective's Advice—Pete has Trouble with his Landlady—Shadowed.

PETE'S landlady, Janet, was seated in earnest conversation with a gentleman named Sims. He was a heavily built man, with very keen eyes, and a smarter man than Sims—in his own estimation—it would have been hard to find.

Janet had never met him before, but she could not help liking him. He was so attentive and polite. He did not mention the fact that he was a detective, otherwise she might not have been so amiable.

"I feel sure you will pardon my having called, madam," he said; "but this friend of mine who writes to me about these three comrades, informs me that they owe him money, and even hints that there is a more serious charge against them; and, seeing what a lot of crimes have lately been committed, I thought it my duty to warn you in the strictest confidence."

"I am sure it is very kind of you, Mr. Sims. I am not at all satisfied with that negro, Pete."

"Which proves your wisdom. You see, their movements are most mysterious. I presume they have letters addressed here?"

"There has only been one, and that came this morning."

"Exactly! That proves that there is something they are concealing from the world. If they were honest men, they would naturally have more letters than that."

"I do not even know their names, and the letter is addressed only 'Pete.' My name is not on the envelope, only my address."

"Of course, you are young and inexperienced. I am older, and have naturally seen more of life. But were it my case, I should certainly feel it my duty to make myself acquainted with the contents of that letter."

Now, Sims was at least a good ten years younger than Janet. She must have noticed that, however inexperienced she may have been. Pete had not found her at all inexperienced. Quite otherwise in fact, so far as money matters

were concerned. Sims' remark regarding their respective ages, however, caused her no annoyance.

"It is so hard for me to face the world alone."

"Ah, but with your beauty, and, if you will pardon my saying so, charm of personality, that is a matter that will not endure."

Janet must have met a good many liars in her time, but Sims was the first one she had ever met who told her she was beautiful. Even that gave her no offence.

"I should not feel justified in opening Pete's letter," she observed; "besides, he would know I had done so."

"Not at all. In a case like this, I think it is your duty to society to do so, and if you will bring me a small basin of boiling water, I will show you how to open the letter and close it up again, without the slightest fear of detection. You see, the man might be a murderer, for all we know; and if I can help you in any way, oh, indeed, I will."

"I do not know why you should be so kind to me."

"Ah! That is not strange. I, too, am alone in the world, and my sympathy naturally extends to others similarly placed."

"Then you have lost your wife?" queried Janet, becoming deeply interested.

"I have never married. I do not believe in marrying for money. No; when I ask a woman to be my wife, it will be one whom I love. One who can sympathise with me, and I with her. Now, as regards the letter?"

Janet had lost interest in the letter; however, she produced it, and Sims looked very serious as he examined the outside.

"This only confirms my suspicions," he said, looking remarkably wise. He did not tell her why the envelope confirmed his suspicions; but there is not a doubt that a man who could find it in his conscience to tell her she was beautiful, would be able to find a reason for his suspicions. Sims was a man with a wonderfully vivid imagination.

"It is our duty, madam," he said. "If you will kindly bring a small basin—er—boiling water, if you please."

"I am very particular with letters—indeed, I never read them when they are opened—but in a serious case like this. You understand me? If through any neglect on my part something terrible happened to you, ah! I should feel like a murderer. Never would I know a moment's peace for the rest of my life. Pardon me if I speak warmly on such a short acquaintance. I dare not say all I feel, madam. I— You would think me mad. You shall not run this risk."

"I never have opened a letter; but if you are quite sure he will not know—"

"Perfectly! Let me show you."

The water was brought. Pete's letter steamed and opened, and this is what the wily detective read:

"Meet me to-night at eleven in the small copse behind the house. Lights will be out early. Come along the river, as you are not likely to be seen that way. Bring Jack and Sam."

"Sims read the letter twice, then, replacing it in the envelope, stuck it up again quite to Janet's satisfaction.

"Don't say a word to them!" exclaimed Sims. "Leave everything to me. The police will be there to arrest them. You are saved from all harm. Farewell! We shall meet again. Not one word, as you value your life."

Then taking Janet's hand in both of his, he pressed it tenderly, and bowed himself out.

Janet smiled at herself in the glass.

"A most fascinating man," she murmured.

Sims was nothing of the sort; but when a lady reaches Janet's time of life, she is apt to view most men as very fascinating.

At six o'clock Jack, Sam, and Pete turned up. They were a little earlier than usual. Janet received them coldly, as was her wont.

She commenced to lay the cloth for tea, and several times glanced at the letter on the mantelpiece, hoping that Pete would see it without her calling his attention to it.

"We'm bery hungry, my dear," he ventured.

"I am getting your tea as fast as I can. There is a letter for you on the mantelshelf," observed Janet.

"A letter for me?" exclaimed Pete, picking it up.

"Where is it, my dear?"

"In your hands!"

"M'yes! But I mean where does it come from?"

"How should I know?"

"How do you tink Janet ought to know dat, Sammy?"

"I reckon she ought not to know," answered Sam, and he said it in all innocence.

"Funny ting," murmured Pete. "I don't seem to recollect de handwriting. Let's hab a look at de postmark. Looks like—almost like a sort ob smudge. De man who postmarked dis letter ought to be postmarked himself. How does he 'spect people to know where deir letters come from, if he don't mark dem? Now, let me see! I ain't written to anyone, 'cos I don't like writing, and 'cos I ain't got anyone to write to. Can you guess who it is from, Jack?"

"I really cannot."

"I suppose you didn't ask de postman who it was from, my dear?" inquired Pete, gazing blankly at Janet.

"Of course, I did not! How could he tell?"

"How do you tink he would be able to tell, Sammy?"

"I really can't say."

"Sammy can't say, my dear. I dunno weder he wants to keep it a secret or not, or weder he doesn't know de answer to your question; at de same time, it is no good worrying ourselves 'bout Sammy, 'cos if he had made up his mind not to tell de answer, you can depend on it he won't. Now, I wonder how I shall be able to find out who dis letter is from? Can you tell me how to do dat, Janet?"

"Why, open it, of course!"

"Golly! Ain't she a wonderful woman! She's almost as good as she's beautiful. Don't you tink so, Jack?"

"Here, you open your letter, Pete!" exclaimed Jack.

"I don't wish for a nigger's compliments," snarled Janet, who had heard Pete say she reminded him of a mopstick.

"I was only getting Jack's opinion ob you, my dear," said Pete. "He don't seem inclined to gib it, eider. De fact ob de matter is, I 'spect de man is rader like me, and a little bashful in de company ob girls."

"My eyes!" gasped Sam.

"Did you make a remark to me, sir?" demanded Janet, turning so fiercely on Sam that he started back.

"No! Oh, dear, no!"

"Sammy, I won't hab you calling Janet dear."

"I did nothing of the sort."

"You certainly said, 'Oh, dear, no!' It's all bery well for a nigger who is old enough to be her moder calling her 'dear.' But I was just tinkin ob de wonderful acumen ob women. What do you tink ob dat little word, Jack? I got it from Freddy."

"It's all right. But why don't you open your letter?"

"Well, you see, Jack, I dunno. I want to guess what is inside it. Might be a five-pound note."

"The best way to see what is inside it is to open it," said Janet, who wanted to watch Pete's face when he did so.

"All right, my dear! You buzz off and get de tea. Did you order de four new loaves ob bread?"

"Yes."

"And you hab cooked de six bloaters?"

"Yes."

"Den trot dem up, my dear. Trot dem up. You know bloaters can't walk up a flight ob stairs after dey are cooked, and de same remarks apply to new loaves. Tank you, my dear. Good-afternoon!"

Janet shut the door with a violent slam.

"It's bery funny who dis letter can be from!" exclaimed Pete, going across the room on tip-toe, and, by means of his ventriloquism, making his voice appear to come from the fireplace. Then he suddenly opened the door, and caught Janet listening at the keyhole.

"Nice afternoon, ain't it, my dear? You won't forget de bloaters and de new bread, will you? I hope you won't catch cold in dat ear. I don't like seeing a young lady going about wid a mop-cap stuck on de top ob her noddle, and her ears stuffed wid half a pint ob cotton-wool."

"Insolent creature!" sniffed Janet, tossing her head, and hurrying away. Pete had caught her in the act, so that argument was useless.

By the time she had returned with the tray, Pete had opened his letter. He read it over twice, then consigned it to the flames, without telling its contents to Jack.

Of that they thought nothing, for Pete dearly loved to be mysterious.

"Now, den, boys!" he exclaimed. "Let's start on de tea. New bread is much nicer dan old bread. Old bread is all right for dose dat like it—de same as old women, but—"

Jack made signs towards the door.

"But, as you say, Jack, Janet ain't anything like old. I don't suppose de woman is much more dan fifty-free or four. Dere's some work for us to do to-night."

"I reckon you haven't done much to-day," said Sam.

"I hab been timing de men at de powder-mill, Sammy, and dat's a most dreadful job. Dey are so bad-tempered if you make dem wait to find deir names. Dat Janet gets on my nerves in de most frightful manner. She won't be amiable. It doesn't matter what I call her, she turns up dat nose, wid a sniff of contempt. De woman doesn't like me."

"I reckon she is listening to every word you are saying," whispered Sam.

Pete picked up the teapot, which was a large one, and, while his comrades went on talking, he crept to the door, put the spout of the teapot in the keyhole, and sopped a lot of its contents through.

A wild yell followed his action, and Pete was back in his place, cutting huge slices of bread and butter before Janet dashed into the room, with fury and hot tea on her face.

"You villain of a man!" she cried, shaking her fist at Sam, who was seated opposite to the teapot. "How dare you play your tricks on a defenceless lady!"

"You are in error, madam," gasped Sam. "I assure—"

"In error, you scoundrel? Do you think I do not know when half a pint of scalding tea is poured into my ear?"

"Golly! I forgot it was hot!" exclaimed Pete.

"So it was you, was it?" yelled the frantic lady. "How dare you behave in this manner in my house!"

"Look at dat, now. How was I to know dat you would be listening at de keyhole?"

"No such thing! I was stooping down to pick a piece of fluff off the mat. And I suppose I have a right to do that in my own house?"

"Suttinly, my dear! I tought you were stooping down to pick up a piece of news."

"I'd scorn the action!"

"Quite right! I'm glad to hear dat you are so honourable. Good-afternoon!"

"I shall go when I choose."

"Suttinly, my dear, but don't you tink you could manage to choose now? You see, I-hab got some important matters ob business to attend to, and I know ladies don't like to hear business matters discussed."

"I consider your conduct most impertinent."

"Look at dat, now! Funny old kipper!"

"Fellow!"

"Woohoo! You will gib me pulpitation ob de left ventricle ob de heart if you yell at me like dat, my dear."

"Don't you dare to call me an old kipper!"

"I was addressing de bloater, my dear. It's got a sad expression in its face."

"The head is cut off!"

"Den de expression must be in its tail."

"And it is not a kipper."

"Well, you ain't got de right to blame de herring for dat. It can't help its faults, and I ain't expected to understand all about natural history. If you want a lodger like dat, you had better apply to Jack. What he don't know about natural history would fill books. Dere's some for you, Rory, and just you mind de bones, and don't upspill your food on Janet's carpet, 'cos she don't like dat; and although she is a nice, amiable girl, you must not go too far wid her. I wish she would go a little farder wid herself," added Pete, in a muttering voice that was quite audible to the irate lady.

"You shall be punished for this infamous conduct," she cried. "Mark me—"

"I ain't got any indelible marking-ink, my dear; but you buzz off, and you can listen at de keyhole for as long as you like, 'cos dere won't be any more hot tea come frough. Yah, yah, yah! I tink she has gone dis time, and I'm mighty glad ob it. Now, boys, how would you like to come for a walk to-night?"

"Not at all," answered Jack. "It's too cold; besides, I have got some writing to do."

"What about you, Sammy?"

"I'll stay with Jack, to keep the fire warm by the time you come back."

"I neber came across such mighty laziness in all my life!" growled Pete. "However, if you won't come, den it stands to reason dat you are going to lose a good deal ob fun, and you won't hab de right to blame me 'bout de matter."

"I cannot come!" declared Jack. "Business must be attended to. I have a lot of accounts to make out; in fact, I ought to have stopped at the powder-mill, only I thought I would be able to do the work just as well at home, provided you didn't babble too much."

"Just listen to dat!" exclaimed Pete, helping himself to a second bloater. "I tink I will take de top ob dis loaf, so as to save de trouble ob cutting so much brem-butter. I'll leave Rory wid you for de evening, and if you want to go to bed before I return, you can tell Janet to sit up, dough I would much rader let myself in wid de latch-key. You might hint to her dat I will see de lights are out, and dat I'm a particularly careful man in dat respect."

"I am not going to tell such an abominable falsehood!" laughed Jack. "It would be difficult to find a respect in which you are careful; but you would certainly not be careful with respect to a thing like putting out the lights."

Pete took a very long time over his tea. They always enjoyed that meal, and as their circumstances were getting very much better, they could well afford a few luxuries.

When the bloaters were finished Pete started on jam, and he consumed a potful; then, having used all the hot water, and finished up with very weak tea, he rang the bell, and, lighting his pipe, seated himself in an easy chair.

Janet bullied him the whole time she was clearing, but Pete lay back with his eyes closed, and every now and then he murmured:

"Look at dat, now!"

It was obvious that he was not taking the slightest interest in the conversation, and the landlady went out of the room in a towering passion. They could hear her slamming the things about in the kitchen.

"Well, boys," exclaimed Pete, at last, "I tink I will go for my walk now, and you can expect me back de moment I come. 'Nuff said!"

Pete made his way to the old powder-mill, and then he kept along the tow-path. Once or twice he stopped to listen, for he thought he heard footsteps, and he particularly wanted no one to see him that night.

The night was too dark to enable him to see far, and it would have been an easy matter for anyone to follow him by the sound of his footsteps, and as he did not want this, he commenced to sing a comic song; then, stepping behind a clump of bushes, he waited while his voice appeared to get farther and farther away.

But now he heard the footsteps more distinctly. They were drawing nearer and nearer, and presently he saw a man, who very nearly leapt into the river as Pete suddenly sprang from his place of concealment.

The man was Sims, and by his breathless voice it was evident that Pete had scared him.

"Nice sort ob evening, ain't it, old hoss?"

"Co—very cold!"

"Why, so it is! Almost too cold to take a walk for pleasure. I thought you were following me."

"Oh, dear, no! Not at all. What should make dat likely?"

"I thought you stopped when I did."

"I did stop once to look at the river."

"Ah, pretty sight dat. Well, suppose you go on, and I will go de oder way. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" answered Sims, striding on, and rather glad

to get away from Pete, who looked an awkward customer to tackle single-handed.

Pete waited until he could no longer hear his footsteps, and then, turning to the right, he struck across country.

He knew his way well, but the night was so dark that he found it no easy matter to keep in the right direction; besides this, there were several hedges that he had to get over.

It was about ten o'clock when he arrived at the appointed place. It was not at all a pleasant night for waiting, and fearful that he would be discovered, he did not care to console himself with a pipe.

Leaning against the trunk of a large tree, he waited patiently, listening to every sound.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unexpected Attack—Pete Against Long Odds—What He Discovered on the Lawn—The Disappearance of His Comrades.

AS the time passed slowly by the wind rose until it howled mournfully through the leafless trees. Pete tried to shelter himself from it, but it appeared to blow from every side, and before he had been there a quarter of an hour he was half-frozen.

Presently he heard a slight rustling in the bushes, then he saw a light, and he could now hear men's voices.

"Seems as dough I hab got to do dis job by myself, to-night," mused Pete. "Well, I'm badly in need ob some warm work, but I'll lie low for de present."

Doubtless this was a wise resolution, but unfortunately for all parties, Pete could not carry it out, for the men were shining their lanterns on the ground, and were probably following his trail through the grass. At any rate, they came straight towards the spot where he stood, and the next moment the light from the lantern dazzled his eyes.

This light was turned off immediately, and now he only heard the rustling of the bushes.

He was peering round the trunk of the tree at a form that was stealthily approaching him, when he received a blow on the head that sent him staggering forwards. It would undoubtedly have stunned a white man, but Pete's skull was of abnormal thickness, and although dazed by the blow, he sprang at the only one of his assailants whom he could see.

Pete struck out with all his strength, but he had three very powerful men to contend with, and two of them attacked him from behind.

"All right, old hosses!" he growled, as he received a second blow on the head. "I can plainly see dat dere's going to be a fight here, so now you hab it."

With another forward spring, Pete landed between the eyes of one of the men, and he went down like a log; then Pete turned, and the manner in which he dashed at the other two must have surprised them.

It seemed to Pete that they were armed with life preservers, and he took particular care to dodge the blows dealt with these formidable weapons, although he had already received two.

These blows had so dazed him that at first he was greatly handicapped, but he soon recovered from them, and then he went in with all his strength.

Right and left he struck out, and in a few moments he floored a second man, but the first one was at him again.

"Golly! I don't call dis a fair fight. Come on de lot ob you, and I'll show you how Pete, de nigger, fights long odds."

Pete did. He struck with all his great strength, and now his assailants went down at every blow. He floored the three, and as they lay on the ground, he stood gazing at them with arms folded across his broad breast.

"Yah, yah, yah! You didn't quite like dat, did you, old hosses?" exclaimed Pete. "Get up and hab anoder round. I'm pretty prepared for half a dozen more."

The men did get up, but they slunk away into the bushes, and Pete, in spite of his words, did not feel inclined to follow them, for the blows on his head had been very severe ones.

He only waited till he could no longer hear the rustling in the bushes, and then he made his way through the copse until he gained the grounds of a fine old mansion.

"Now, I wonder why Freddy has not turned up!" mused Pete, gazing at the building, in which no lights appeared.

"It ain't at all likely dat he would bring me all dis way for de fun ob de ting. Must go and find out. I hope de boy didn't meet dose ruffians. Freddy is a good fighter, but he ain't got de strength to tackle free men like dat."

Pete crossed the grounds, but suddenly he stopped. A form was lying on the ground. It was his young employer, whom he always called Freddy.

The young man was quite unconscious, and Pete drew a deep breath, for he believed that he was dead.

Gently he raised him in his arms, and then he made his way to the mansion, the front door of which was open, and the housekeeper stood there with a lamp in her hand.

"Oh, Pete!" she gasped. "The young master is—"
"Is all right, Mary. Ob course he's all right. Golly! It wouldn't be well wid fifty men if dey had made him all wrong. Merely stunned, my dear. I'm mighty certain it is nuffin' worse. Upstairs, please! Just show me de light. Might send for Dr. Thorn afterwards, just to make quite sure."

"You are deceiving me, Pete!" sobbed Mary. "I held him in my arms as an infant."

"You will hold him in your arms as an infant many times again, my dear—at least, I don't mean dat, but I mean if he was an infant you could do it. Now, dere we are. He ain't hurt, Mary. I'm certain Freddy will be all right just directly. You can see dat yourself."

Mary placed her hand over the unconscious man's heart. "He is living Pete. I thank Heaven! I thought that—that the worst had happened. Bathe his temples."

"Take a candle, my dear. Stop. I will light it for you. Now, Mary, you'm a brave woman, and what's better, a mighty sensible one. You know what to do, and so do I. We shall hab Freddy right by de morning."

Mary hurried from the room, and Pete bathed the temples of the unconscious man with cold water. An hour must have passed before Dr. Thorn arrived, and yet he had lost no time, nor had the groom, who had galloped to fetch him, and bring him back in the dogcart, but then, Dr. Thorn lived at a considerable distance from the mansion.

Pete stood aside now, and he and Mary scrutinised the young doctor's face, but they could not read his thoughts, only there was blood upon the pillow, and Freddy looked very near to death.

"Do you know how this occurred, Pete?" demanded the doctor, after he had dressed the wound which was at the back of Freddy's head.

"I ain't got de slightest idea," answered Pete. "Freddy arranged wid me to capture some poachers to-night. He sent me a letter to dat effect, and I was to hab brought Jack and Sammy, but dey had some work to do, so I came alone. I was attacked by free ob de poachers, and dey got knocked about above a bit; den, when I was coming towards de house, I found poor Freddy lying on de lawn."

"It would appear as though the miscreants had attacked him from behind," said Dr. Thorn. "He is seriously injured, but I trust, and believe, that there is no fracture of the skull."

"Den you tink he will get all right, old hoss?"

"I trust so. He must be kept absolutely quiet. I shall call very early to-morrow morning."

"You don't tink you ought to stay wid him all night?" whispered Pete.

"It would be useless. I see no chance of his regaining consciousness for some time to come, and I shall leave full instructions with Mrs. Hall, and you can send for me should any change take place. I suppose you will come here in the morning?"

"M'yes. Will stay all night if you tink it better."

"No. Mrs. Hall has had considerable experience in sick nursing, and he will receive the best attention at her hands. To-morrow I will bring a trained nurse to relieve her."

"Freddy won't like dat at all," growled Pete, as the doctor took his leave. "Dis is a bad job, too. Poor Freddy! I'm mighty sorry for him. Golly! If eber I come across dat poacher who struck him down, it won't go well wid de scoundrel. In dat case, I shall let myself go, and dere will be trouble in de world. Well, it might hab been worse, 'cos I feel sure dat Freddy will get all right. I only wish I could meet dat man to-night."

Perhaps it was just as well that Pete met no one on his way back, otherwise he might have attacked him under the impression that he was a poacher; but when he reached his apartments, another surprise awaited him. Jack and Sam were not there, and Janet, who appeared to be in a very excited state, did not appear disposed to give him any information.

"But you must know where dey hab gone, my dear. You say dey ain't here, and will neber come here again; well, where are dey, and why didn't Rory go wid dem?"

"I'm sure I wish the dog had gone. I require a week's rent from you in lieu of notice."

"But I ain't giben you notice."

"You and your friends are going to leave to-night, and you will pay me the money you owe, also a week's rent—then you can go."

"How do you suppose I am going to find apartments dis time ob night, Janet?"

"That has nothing to do with me."

"Nunno; but it has something to do wid me. If you choose to gib us a week's notice, dat's all right; but I ain't gibing you one, and it's mighty certain I ain't paying you for de accommodation ob being turned out into de street at dis time ob night."

"You thieving villain, you shall pay me!"

"You may be right, my dear, but I hab de feeling dat you are perfectly wrong. However, we will see about dat. Now, just you understand dis. We ain't going to leave at a moment's notice to suit your convenience. I 'spect you hab got oder lodgers who you tink will pay you better dan we do; but you'm got to recollect dat dey can't possibly pay you wid more regularity."

"I have other lodgers, and—"

"Den you ain't going to turn me out to oblige dem, my dear. I expect a week's notice, and de arrangement you suggest dat I should turn out at midnight to oblige your new lodgers, and pay you a week's rent for being turned out somehow doesn't seem to fall in line wid my ideas ob what is right and wrong."

"Who cares for a nigger's ideas, you insolent creature?"

"You must wait till Sammy comes back to ask dat one, my dear. I dunno de answer to it. But, you see, dis is a case where you will hab to bring your ideas concerning right and wrong to suit my ideas. I dunno weder Jack and Sammy hab been stupid enough to be turned out, but I should hardly tink so. At de same time, seeing dat you won't gib me any information concerning dem, why, I shall wait till de morning, and den go in search ob dem. 'Nuff said."

"Where are you going?"

"To bed, my dear. I'm rader tired, habing had a long day's work—least, dere wasn't much work about it, but den dere neber is much work attached to de situation I hab got."

"No, you thief of a nigger!" cried Janet. "But you will get plenty of work before you are so much older, and so I tell you! There is a gentleman in your room. He is my brother James, and—"

"Den your brudder James is coming out ob dat room a lot faster dan he went into it," observed Pete, lighting a candle and going upstairs.

His bed-room door was open, and a big man, who had only partially undressed, was lying on his bed. Possibly he had been asleep; but the yells Janet uttered as she followed Pete upstairs, would have awoke the heaviest sleeper.

"Now, den, James, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but you'm in my bed, and you hab got to come out ob it. You can sleep in de coal-hole or de dust-bin, if you like, but you ain't sleeping in my bed, considering dat I hab paid for dat accommodation."

"Now, listen to me, you evil brute of a nigger," growled James. "I'm not having my sister badly treated by an African savage. She has ordered you out of this house, and if you don't go of your own free will, I'll throw you out!"

"Well, I can't help dat!" growled Pete. "Dis room is hired by me, and it's paid for by me, now it's going to be slept in by me, else I'll know de reason why."

"The reason is because I'm in this bed, and there are no two living men—let alone a nigger—who could turn me out."

"I dunno 'bout de white men," observed Pete, "but I'm mighty certain dat dere is one nigger who is going to hab a good try. If he ain't successful, you can go on sleeping in dat bed; but don't you start on de job till de nigger has had his try, 'cos you might hurt yourself if you fell on de floor in your sleep. Dis way to London, please."

Pete seized the would-be sleeper round the body, and, wrenching him from the bed, sent him sprawling across the room.

"I hope you ain't hurt yourself, Janet's brudder," exclaimed Pete, getting into bed with his boots on. "We may as well cover ourself ober before we hab our final pipe."

James picked himself up and made a furious rush at Pete, who received him with one in the chest that sent him to the floor again, and he sat there gasping for breath, and gazing at Pete in a manner that gave the impression he did not know where he was.

"You had much better sit where you are, old hoss, for de remainder ob de night," said Pete, filling his pipe. "You see, if you come near me again, I may hit you really hard, and dat would be most bound to hurt you."

"Why, the black villain is actually going to smoke in bed!" shrieked Janet. "I never heard of such frightful villainy!"

"I always smoke in bed each night, my dear!" exclaimed Pete, lighting his pipe, while James seemed to be considering what he should do next. "It's a habit I hab got, and after all, it is a nice, harmless little habit, if you don't happen to set de bed on fire. Now, if you will sit on de floor beside James, I'll tell you all about a certain nigger I knew, who did once set de bed on fire by smoking in it. You see—"

"James, even if he kills you, it is your duty to turn the black brute out of that bed!"

This was all very well, but James did not want to get killed.

"I think this is a case where we should send for the police," growled James. "I always act according to law, and I'm not certain that it would be lawful under the peculiar circumstances of the case, for me to throw the nigger out of window. I prefer the police taking all responsibility in the matter."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are frightened of a nigger?"

Now, this is exactly what James did not mean to tell her; neither did he want her to find that fact out.

"Haw, haw, haw! Frightened of a nigger!" cried James. "I'll have you know, Janet, that I ain't frightened of forty niggers!"

"Then turn that brute out of the house!"

"I am not sure that I legally have the power!"

"A lot you care about the law, don't you?" sneered his amiable sister. "Why don't you say that you are afraid of him, and have done with it?"

"Because I am not such a liar as to say anything so untruthful," declared James.

"You coward! To let a nigger knock you down, and not to retaliate! Oh, I wish I was a man!"

"I wish you were, my dear," growled Pete, "cos I would gib you and James de most awful thrashing you hab eber had in your lives to teach you de difference between honesty and thieving, and dat is a ting dat you don't seem to know."

"Listen to me, James!" yelled Janet. "After that insult, if you don't turn the brute out of the house, you yourself shall go, never to enter it again!"

"I refuse to act illegally, whatever harm it may do me! I can go! I dare say I shall find somewhere to lay my head. As for you, well, if the nigger murders you, you must not blame me!"

"He sha'n't smoke in bed," declared Janet, climbing down a little. "It is a thing I set my face against! I won't allow it under any circumstances! Do you think I want to be burnt to a cinder?"

"I can fetch the police to stop him. It's the proper way to act."

"Suppose he murders me while you are gone?"

"Then I'll never rest till he's hung for it."

Janet did not seem to be satisfied with this assurance. However, she knew perfectly well that her brother was not to be goaded into attacking Pete again, and so she let James go.

He returned in about half an hour's time to inform her that he had only been able to find one constable, who refused to interfere in the matter because he had no warrant to enter the house and arrest Pete. Janet went upstairs to try a little threatening, but Pete had already taken precautions.

The head of his bed was against the closed door, and he had jammed furniture between the wall and the foot of the bedstead, so that it would be quite impossible to open the door without doubling up the bedstead.

"Go away, my dear," growled Pete, who was enjoying his second pipe. "I want to get to sleep."

"You shall not sleep here, and smoke in bed!"

"I am inclined to tink you are right as regards de sleeping part ob de business, my dear," growled Pete. "I don't see how anyone could possibly sleep while you are making dat caterwauling outside de door. But you are wrong about de smoking part ob be business, 'cos I am smoking, and as I hab a mighty good supply ob tobacco and matches, why, dere's nuffin short ob sudden death dat will be able to stop me smoking as much as I like. You can shove at de door all night if you like, but you can't possibly get into dis room; and don't you forget dat I shall want breakfast to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. I ain't going early as usual, 'cos I ain't going to do any work to-morrow, after de hard day's work I hab done to-day. 'Nuff said. Go to bed, my dear, and if you take my advice, you will kick James out ob de house. He's a useless sort ob loafer to hab about de place."

"You black wretch, you shall not smoke!"

"I'll consider de matter, my dear."

"You are smoking now!"

"Eh?"

"I say you are smoking, you villain!"

"But dat is only till I hab finished considering weder I am going to smoke or not."

"Put your pipe out immediately!"

Pete was refilling it, and she heard him strike the match to relight it.

"If you don't put that pipe out, I will call the police!"

"I wish she would," growled Pete. "I would rader face six bobbies dan one Janet. De woman is too awful for words. It's a mercy for her husband dat she ain't married."

Janet was determined not to let matters end here. She

banged at the door with her fist, and yelled out all the insults that she thought would be most telling.

After about a quarter of an hour of it, Pete began to get accustomed to the row, and his eyes closed; then suddenly his snore burst forth, and Janet went away to give her unfortunate brother the remainder of her views.

"I'll go and drown myself!" he groaned at last. "I'd rather be dead than live in the same house as you! The nigger is in the right, and you are in the wrong, and you know it!"

"You vulgar monster! I will tell my future husband what you say!"

"Your future husband can go and hang himself!" growled James. "If you mean Sims, I don't believe he means to marry you! He's not such a silly idiot, unless it's for the bit of money you've got, and that isn't much."

"You soon squandered your share, didn't you, you reprobate!"

"I haven't asked you for any of yours, have I?"

"No, you haven't, and you wouldn't get it if you did!"

"I know that jolly well, and that's why I haven't asked you. If Sims is such a fool as to marry you, there will be a coroner's inquest before you've been his wife a year. You'll have to identify the corpse."

James was getting desperate. He was annoyed with himself for allowing Pete to turn him out of bed."

She let him have her views for half an hour. She vowed that his heartless conduct had brought their parents in sorrow to the grave, although she must have known that it was something far more spirited that brought her father to that end some twenty years before his allotted time.

The worm turned at last. James could stand it no longer, and although not a rapid thinker, a brilliant idea occurred to him at last. It effectually closed Janet's mouth.

"Who's this Sims? I would like to know!" he cried, striking the table with his fist.

"You wicked creature!" shrieked Janet. "He is a most estimable gentleman."

"According to your talk, he seems to have fallen in love with you mighty sharp."

"I have known him for a considerable time."

"So you say. But listen to this, Janet. If he's such a mighty good man, and I'm such a scoundrel, I'm going to reform. I'm going to do my duty by him. Next time he calls I am going to tell him my age, and I'm going to tell him that you are seven years older. It's my duty to him, and I'll do it. Then I'll just mention that you have got a temper like a tigress that won't lose its pet cub, and if he marries you after that little lot, he'll deserve all he gets."

This was too much for Janet. She uttered a shriek, and fell gracefully to the floor, where she lay kicking and screaming. James went upstairs, and having locked himself in the room where Jack and Sam should have been sleeping, he got to bed.

But meantime Janet's shrieks had subsided, while she followed her brother's example.

CHAPTER 3.

Pete's Escape from Justice—A Stern Chase—No News of Jack and Sam.

PETE was up before it was light the following morning, but Janet and James, the latter much against his inclination, were both up before him. James went out for the police, and he returned with four constables, who remained outside.

When Pete went downstairs and looked out of window, he saw these officers of the law marching up and down, and then it occurred to him that all was not right.

"Can't make dis out at all," he mused. "Still, de first ting to be done is to find Jack and Sammy, who are most bound to be at de mill. I tink I will take de liberty ob locking de front door, in case dese gentlemen ob de law feel disposed to come in here and arrest me, den we will leave de premises by anoder way. 'Nuff said, Rory! De rest is all action. We'm going into de kitchen for breakfast."

When Pete left early, and that was nearly every morning, he invariably had his breakfast in the kitchen, and here he found it already prepared for him, much to his surprise.

Janet had cooked four rashers of bacon, because she knew Pete would require at least that amount, but she was so amiable that Pete's suspicions were at once aroused.

He had not a doubt in the world that the men of law were waiting for him to go out, and he believed that they were going to arrest him over the unfortunate affair with Freddy—possibly as a suspected poacher.

He knew that Dr. Thorn could at once clear him from the charge—if such it were—but he had no intention of

being placed in gaol until his name was cleared, so he determined to lie low until such time as Freddy had recovered.

"Do you tink you can remember where Jack and Sammy are dis morning, my dear?" inquired Pete.

"I know nothing about them!" snarled Janet, glaring at him. "How should I know?"

It has been stated that she was amiable, but that must only be construed to the extent that she did not show much temper, and that she had prepared Pete's breakfast.

"I dunno dat one, my dear," said Pete, starting on his breakfast; "and, you see, de worst ob it is dat Sammy ain't here to ask. If you don't mind, I will put some ob dis food in my pocket, 'cos dere's no telling but what I may need it in de course ob de next day or so. Now den, Janet, do I understand dat you wish me to leave dese lodgings?"

"You will pay me first."

"I shall pay you up to dis morning, but I ain't paying for a week's rent in advance."

"You shall!"

"Well, we won't argue de matter. I notice dere are some bobbies standing outside. I dunno what dey want, but perhaps you do, and if it's anyting like a nigger, you can tell dem dat dey can't hab him. I'm going out de back way, my dear. Nunno, you can't open de front door, 'cos I hab got de key here; but you can hab dis key directly I hab left de premises by de back road. I'll put de key on de top ob de wall."

Janet commenced to shriek "Murder!" at the top of her voice, but Pete merely whistled to Rory; then, leaving by the back door, he crossed the yard, and tossed the key to Janet when she followed him up.

Keeping along the narrow passage, he made his way into a side street; then, leaving the constables to cool their heels outside his lodgings, he proceeded to the powder-mill.

Here he could learn no trace of his comrades, and he waited until midday in the hope that they would turn up; but as such was not the case, he proceeded towards Freddy's mansion to learn how the patient was progressing. Dr. Thorn was just leaving as Pete arrived.

"He has regained consciousness, Pete," said the doctor, "but it will not do for you to see him yet. I have given strict orders that he is to be kept perfectly quiet."

"Nunno! I won't go near him," answered Pete. "If I could only find Jack and Sammy we would hunt de murderer down."

"I am going to place the matter in the hands of the police."

"Dey ain't de slightest good," growled Pete. "Dey always catch de wrong party, but in dis case I'm determined to catch de right one. I can't make it out at all 'bout Jack and Sammy, and I can't make inquiries ob de police, 'cos dey want to catch me."

"To catch you? What do they want to do that for?"

"I dunno. Pr'aps dey tink I'm a poacher."

"Impossible!"

"You neber can tell what a bobby is going to tink when he starts on de job. De only ting is dat if dey catch me I'm mighty certain dat it will take a good many ob dem to take me to prison. Do you tink you could find out about Jack and Sammy for me?"

"Without doubt. You leave that to me."

"Bery well, and you leabe it to me to catch de assassin. I ain't going to allow Freddy to be knocked about in dis manner. We knew dere were poachers in de woods, and we were going to catch dem. Seems to me as dough dey had got to know our intentions, and dat while some ob dem attacked me, de oder scoundrel crept up behind Freddy, and did his best to murder him. Now, it stands to reason dat it ain't safe to let such men be at large, for which reason I am going to capture dem."

"But you cannot capture half a dozen or more men single-handed."

"How's dat?"

"Why, it is impossible, Pete. Probably they will be armed."

"Bery well, I shall take deir weapons away. I 'spect dere's nuffin illegal in dat."

"Certainly not; but I don't see how you are going to do it."

"It has got to be done. Men like dat would be quite zapable ob burning down Freddy's house in order to hab revenge. 'Nuff said! I'll start on de job straight away, and if you meet Jack and Sammy, I want you to tell dem what I am doing, and dey will be sure to come and help me. Dis way to London, Rory!"

Pete crossed the lawn to the spot where he had found Freddy lying unconscious. He could trace footprints from a clump of laurels close by, thence he followed the footprints into the woods, but here he lost all trace of the trail.

The woods were of considerable extent, and so dense that

in some parts it was difficult to force his way through the bushes.

It was a hopeless search, for Pete had nothing now to guide him. Rory seemed to think that he was required to search for rabbits, and Pete had the greatest difficulty to prevent him hunting.

Towards evening Pete determined to go to the mill again to see if Jack and Sam had arrived, but when he came in sight of it he saw some constables keeping watch, and directly they caught sight of him they started in pursuit.

"Come along, Rory!" exclaimed Pete, darting away. "I ain't got de slightest idea why dey want to catch me. All de same, under de peculiar circumstances ob de case, I ain't got de slightest intention ob being caught, unless dose slops can run faster dan dis child, and I don't 'spect dat is at all likely. Nunno! You come on, Rory. You ain't to go back to bite dem, 'cos you would be sure to get yourself hurt."

Pete darted away at a good swinging pace, and for the first field the constables gained on him; but this he did not mind at all.

Knowing that the race might be a long one, he decided on taking matters coolly for the start.

Choosing a part where the hedge was not so high, he took it at a leap, clearing both hedge and ditch in fine style; then he waited on the other side, while Rory scrambled through, leaping the ditch on Pete's side, which ditch was now full of exceedingly muddy water.

"I tink we might venture to stop here, Rory," exclaimed Pete. "You see, dose bobbies may not know dat dere is a deep ditch dis side dat requires some leaping, and if dey happen to oberlook dat fact, de chances are dere will be some fun. You wait dere, and keep on saying nuffin."

At that part the hedge was not high. It was just an ordinary leap that any active man could have taken; but to clear the ditch was quite another matter.

Pete had known his ground, and therefore he took precautions. Apparently the constables were not so well-informed. Two of them came over together, and Pete uttered a roar of laughter, as both the unfortunate men landed right in the centre of the ditch.

The third pursuer was Sims, and he was in plain clothes. Possibly he saw his danger, or guessed it by the plunging sound, for he leapt as wide as he could.

It looked as though he were going to clear the ditch, but he had not leapt high enough to clear the hedge. His feet caught in the branches, then he turned a somersault, and dived head-first into the miry ditch.

As his legs, which were all that was visible of him, waved in the air, Pete uttered howls of laughter. The fact is, Sims had dived head-first into the mud, which was a couple of feet deep, and the constables, who were drenched and muddy, went to his assistance.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I know you will make me laugh directly. Golly, golly! Look at de man's face! He's as black as a nigger; and you ain't so mighty clean, bobbies."

"I am Sims, the detective!" spluttered that worthy, wiping the mire from his eyes and mouth. "I—"

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm a detective, are you? Bery well, old hoss, I should say dat you detected some mud at de bottom ob dat ditch, and de same remarks apply to de undetective bobbies. Yah, yah, yah! Ain't you made yourselves in a disgusting mess, too! You know, we public pay for your liveries, and you ain't got de right to make dem in dat awful mess. I shall report you to your masters for spoiling your clothes. I dunno weder we hab to pay for your clothes, Sims, but if so, you ought to be fined severely for 'damaging dem in dat disgraceful manner."

"I command you to surrender!" howled Sims, pulling out first one leg and then the other from the squelching mire as he made his way across the ditch; but even then his troubles were not ended, for there was a very steep bank to be climbed, and seeing that it was a mass of wet clay, it wanted some climbing.

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm exceeding your duty, old hoss," declared Pete. "You ought to come and catch me, and not expect me to come to you to be caught. Den again, you are trespassing on Freddy Tempest's land, and I shall ask de man to send you to prison when he gets well enough. Yah, yah, yah! Rader slippery, ain't it?"

Sims made a desperate effort to scramble up the bank, but, losing his hold when he had nearly gained the top, went plunging backwards into the water.

"Yah, yah, yah! I can plainly see dat you want to wash some ob de mud off, old hoss," said Pete, "and I don't blame you for it. You will discover dat it was a mighty lot easier to get into dat ditch dan to get out ob it. You had better get de bobbies to help you out ob your little difficulty. Golly! Ain't you getting into a muddy, miry mess! See if I can comfort you wid dis little poem:

"De shades ob night were falling fast,
So were free cops, who, leaping past
A hedge, and den dere was a flaw,
To meet dem on de oder shore.
'Excelsior!'"

"But one poor cop he dived his snitch
Into de deep and miry ditch.
De oder two, who pulled him out,
Uttered a long and gladsome shout:
'Excelsior!'"

"Beware de mud and waters deep!
Beware de slimy bank so steep!
Dis was de copper's sage advice:
Quoth Sims: 'Advance! We're men, not mice!
'Excelsior!'"

"We'll catch de nigger in his tracks,
And bear him hence on our broad backs.
Let muddy water be in store,
We'll clamber to de happier shore.
And den our voices all shall roar,
'Excelsior!'"

Pete's "poem" did not appear to bring any sort of comfort to the pursuers. They clambered out as best they could. Then Pete went on at his swinging trot, and they followed, determined now to catch him, whatever might be the cost.

But Pete was just as determined that they should not catch him. He led them for a five mile run across country, and at the end of that time he appeared as fresh as when he started, while they were completely pumped out.

"It will be the worse for you if you do not surrender!" shouted Sims.

"Seems to me it will be de worse for you if I do, old hoss," retorted Pete, stopping, for that is what they had done. "You must know dat you ain't got de least chance ob taking a full-sized nigger where he ain't got de slightest intention ob going. Den, again, I want to know what charge you hab against me?"

"Attempted burglary."
"Is dat all? Well, seeing dat I dunno anyting about an attempted burglary, I ain't got de intention ob surrendering."

"We charge you with planning to commit a burglary at Mr. Tempest's mansion."

"Yah, yah, yah!"
"Do you deny having received a letter from your accomplice planning the burglary?"

"Golly! Did Janet open dat letter?" gasped Pete, remembering the few lines he had received from Freddy.

"She opened it at my instigation."
"Golly! Den you didn't gib de woman bery good advice, old hoss. As far as I can see matters, you are likely to get yourself into trouble ober dis."

"We shall arrest you on suspicion of having attempted to murder Mr. Tempest."

"Well, I dunno what evidence you hab got, but seems to me dat you are on de wrong track dis time. Did you try to arrest me on de night Freddy was attacked?"

"Yes. You assaulted the police."

"Oh, I tought dey were sort ob assaulting me! Still, as four men could not arrest me on dat night, I don't see how free are going to do it on dis afternoon. I tought you were poachers, and I was going to capture you. Still, dat doesn't matter at all. What has become ob Jack and Sammy?"

"We are giving you no information. You had better come quietly," said Sims, advancing with his men.

But Pete had no intention of going at all, let alone quietly. As they advanced he retreated, and the quicker they came, the quicker he went.

It was not until it was quite dark that the constables gave up the chase. The night was very cold, and, seeing that they were all drenched to the skin, their condition was not a very enriable one.

"Well, Rory," exclaimed Pete, "we'm got rid ob de slops. All de same, I dunno dat our position is de most comfortable one on de face ob dis round sphere. Here we are face to face wid de dead ob night, in a forest which may be filled wid poachers and oder wild beasts, and all we hab got to defend ourselves against de beasts and de cold is a few crusts ob dry bread, wid a little bacon. Now, you know, dat may be better dan some conditions ob life, Rory, but it ain't nearly as good as some oders—say, a roaring fire, and a joint ob roast beef, and Yorkshire pudding, wid a plum pudding to follow. Still, as Wagglepeare says, it's better to bear de pangs ob hunger and cold dan to fly into de arms ob free fat bobbies. I don't tink dose are his exact words, but dat's what he meant, and Wagglepeare was generally right wid his meanings. 'Nuff said. Come 'long, and let's enjoy ourselves to de best ob our ability."

Pete had set his heart on capturing the poachers, especially the one who had so gravely injured Freddy. First of all, he made his way to Freddy's house, and, finding the coast all clear, called there to make inquiries.

He was informed by the footman that his young master was much better, and had now completely regained consciousness, although the doctor had still given orders that he was to see no one.

"Mind you obey dat medicated man," said Pete, in a whisper, although it would have been utterly impossible for Freddy to have heard his voice. "Now, you see here, James. I want you to do two tings for me to-night. One ob dem is to take care of poor Rory. I don't want to keep dat dog-out in de forest all night on such a cold night as dis. Tink you can do dat?"

"I'm sure I can, and he shall have the best of food."
"Bery well. De oder ting is simpler still. I want you to lend me some box-cord to tie up de poachers, 'cos I am determined to capture dose scoundrels who knocked Freddy on de head. De clothes-line would do nicely, or anyting like dat."

"You can have the cord, right enough, Pete," answered James, who knew that Pete had brought his young master in. "But I warn you that it isn't safe to go fooling about those woods to-night. The young master was never as careful about poachers as he ought to have been, and it's very evident that the brutes wouldn't stop at murder, if it suited their purpose."

"Can't help dat. Dey ain't at all likely to murder me, 'cos my head ain't nearly as soft as Freddy's, and a blow like he has got on de top ob my napper wouldn't knock holes in it. Nunno! Dose men hab got to be caught, weder dey like it or not, and I'm de properest party to catch dem."

"Should have thought the police were the proper parties to do that."

"A policeman can't catch anyting more dan a stray dog, or de flavour ob cook's best meat pie. You want a full-sized nigger to catch a poacher."

"Well, don't you think that you had better start catching them by daylight, because it isn't safe by night?"

"Nunno! You must catch burglars and owls by night. Just you buzz off and get me dat rope, den I will buzz off after de poachers. Freddy was to hab helped me; but, as he ain't well enough to do dat, why, I will take myself for de help. I suppose you ain't heard anyting ob Jack and Sammy?"

"Not a word. They haven't been here, and the manager of the mill, who called up this afternoon, hasn't seen anyting of them. He wanted to make out that it was them and you who had attacked the young master, and I took the liberty of telling him that he had lost his reason."

"Golton couldn't do dat, James, 'cos de man neber had any reason to lose. Buzz off!"

James not only brought the rope, but he also brought a supply of provisions for Pete, and suggested that he should have some one to go with him; but to this Pete would not listen for a moment.

"De provisions, however, are just de articles I am sure to require before de morning breaks, and I'm much obliged to you for dem, old hoss. 'Nuff said, except dat if Freddy makes any inquiries, you are to be sure not to tell him where I hab gone. Dat man would insist on getting up and coming wid me, and I don't want de help ob a man wid a cracked head. You are sure de boy is going on all right, James?"

"Yes. The doctor says that he is out of danger now, and that if we only keep him quiet he will be all right again in the course of a few days."

Pete was satisfied; and, having bidden James good-night, and left Rory in his charge, he made his way alone towards the woods.

Pete's idea was that he would hear the poachers firing; but, if he had thought a little more, he would probably have come to the conclusion that they would scarcely venture to fire after the crime they had committed, especially as they would not know whether Freddy was dead or alive. In any case, the police would be after them, and if they were still in the woods, it would be very unlikely that they would do any more poaching for some nights to come.

CHAPTER 4.

Pete Tracks Down the Foe—A Desperate Fight—A Night in the Woods—Before the Magistrates.

FOR hours Pete wandered about, searching first in one direction, and then in another; but he saw no trace of the miscreants.

The night was bitterly cold, and he suffered considerably from it; but it never once occurred to him to give up the search.

It must have been nearly midnight when, seating himself

beside a clump of bushes, which sheltered him somewhat from the bitter blast, he pulled out his provisions. It was so dark that he could not see what they consisted of; but he found them remarkably good; and there were some sausage rolls amongst them that particularly appealed to him.

"You ain't got de right to waste too much time ober dis job, old hoss," mused Pete. "Still, a man must eat, if he wants to do his work wid any degree ob credit to himself, so here goes!"

So did the food. Pete had not had a proper meal since breakfast, and he had a remarkably healthy appetite. The cook had helped James to supply Pete with good things, and he did credit to her selection.

Pete was just finishing an ample meal, when he heard a movement in the distance, amongst the bushes.

At first he could only hear a rustling, which he did not feel at all sure was not caused by the wind; but gradually the sound drew nearer, and he felt convinced that men were making their way through the bushes. Then all doubt concerning the matter was at an end, for he heard men's lowered voices.

Rising cautiously, he proceeded as noiselessly as possible towards the spot from whence the sounds came. It seemed to him that the men—it was far too dark to see how many of them there were—were proceeding in the direction of the mansion.

As he drew still closer he could distinguish three voices, but they were too low for him to catch the words.

As Pete moved still nearer he trod on a piece of dead wood, which broke with a loud crack; then all sound immediately ceased. He crouched beneath the bushes, expecting that the gang would come that way and search, nor was he mistaken.

They drew so close to the spot where he lay that he could now hear their words.

"I tell you that 'ere nigger is somewheres in the woods, and I'm going to have vengeance on him!"

"You ain't the only one, mate. I was in hopes those slops would have nabbed him last night. Mind, he ain't safe."

"That's what he'll discover, when I come across him," growled a third voice. "As sure as I'm a living man, I'll put a bullet through his head! I'll teach a dirty nigger to lay a hand on me!"

"He did lash into you, too, didn't he, Bull? He deserves all you are going to give him. Besides, you have got to consider that we ain't anything like safe while he's roaming about. If the cops had only took him we should have been all right, 'cos they would have been sure to charge him with that affair; and, seeing as it was him as picked up the body, he would have a difficulty in proving his innocence now."

"That's true enough, mate. It's evident that the police suspect him, and that's just exactly what we want. I'm inclined to get away from the place for a bit, and let him bear the brunt of it. He's bound to get nabbed, sooner or later, and that ought to be enough vengeance for us, especially if they hang him."

"But it ain't enough vengeance for me," growled the other. "Besides, there's always the chance of something coming out in the trial. Dead men tell no tales!"

"Their bodies do."

"We can easy hide that in the pit. Well, what we heard must have been some animal. The best thing as we can do is to get back, else it will be daylight before we reach the dell. It's pretty evident that the nigger ain't here, else we should have come across him. P'r'aps he's discovered that the mansion is being watched."

The voices died away; but Pete had not the slightest difficulty in following the men, by the sound they made in passing through the bushes.

He wanted to discover their hiding-place, and then to decide on how to act. He knew, from what he had overheard, that the miscreants would not hesitate to take his life, if he fell into their hands; but this knowledge did not turn him from his purpose.

It now occurred to him that the mysterious disappearance of Jack and Sam might in some way be connected with the gang, and he hoped to learn a little more concerning them.

The man Bull he knew as the ruffian who had made an attack on Freddy on a previous occasion, and Pete was determined to capture him at any cost.

The worst of it was, that the woods were of such vast extent that were Pete once to lose trace of the gang, there would be very little chance of his discovering them again; at any rate, in the darkness. For this reason he kept rather closer to them than was judicious; however, they failed to detect him again, probably by reason of the noise that they themselves were making.

To a lonely glen far in the depths of the woods Pete tracked them, and he was so close that he could now see the three men descending the side of the ravine.

To follow was utter madness; for, in all probability, all three men would be armed with revolvers, and there was little chance of the shots being heard at that lonely spot.

Yet Pete had made up his mind to capture them, and he was not the style of man to allow peril to turn him from his duty, as he considered it. He knew that one of those three had struck Freddy down, and that, while they were at large, the young fellow's life was not secure.

Stepping to the edge of the ravine, Pete boldly descended, and he had not proceeded many yards when he saw a flash of light, while a bullet whizzed past his head.

"All right, old bosses," he shouted, "I'm coming for you! Dere's one man against free murderers; but I'm going to capture you, unless you kill me, so de best thing you can do for your own safety is to aim straight. Yah, yah, yah! I don't call dat aiming so mighty straight, eider."

It was far too straight for safety, all the same. Pete knew that if he descended in that leisurely fashion he must be hit before he gained the bottom of the dell. It appeared as though the men could see him against the sky-line, for the two shots that had been fired had come so close to him that it was obvious they had not been fired at random.

Now, he sought shelter behind the trunk of a tree that grew up the side of the ravine, then, by means of his ventriloquism, he made his voice appear to come from some distance at the side.

Only one shot was fired in that direction, however. There was one thing Pete noticed, and that was that the three miscreants made no attempt to escape from him. It was pretty evident that they were just as determined to take his life as he was to capture them.

He could no longer see where they were, for the bottom of the dell was densely covered with trees and bushes, and there would be plenty of hiding-places for them.

Now, Pete stepped from his hiding-place; but immediately he had done so another shot was fired, and then he charged down the height.

Twice he fell amongst the tangled bushes, but each time he was up in an instant, and he still charged downwards.

He had reached the bottom when the heavy wind cleared the clouds from before the moon, and with surprising suddenness, the whole dell was flooded with moonlight.

Pete saw the three men distinctly. They were not many yards away from him, and each of them held a revolver levelled at him.

To retreat would have been fatal; besides, such a thought never entered Pete's head.

He dashed forwards, then taking a tremendous leap, turned a somersault over some intervening bushes.

As he was in the air the revolvers rang out. The bullets passed beneath him, and he landed right on the top of the ruffians. Then Pete let himself go, as he would have called it.

He knew that it was a matter of life and death, and he did not spare the foe.

The four men struggled together furiously, Pete striking blow after blow, and every one was delivered with his utmost strength.

Shots rang out, and bullets flew around him; but he heeded nothing now.

He was never in one place for a second; but darting to and fro, he punished those men as probably they had never been punished before.

It was Bull who levelled a revolver at Pete's head. Pete recognised the miscreant's brutal face in the moonlight. He could see his glaring eyes, as once before he had seen them.

The pistol flashed into Pete's face as he jerked his head aside. He was in time to avoid the shot, but it was so close that the flash of the powder scorched Pete's cheek. It was the last shot Bull was to fire that night, for Pete's left fist landed beneath his opponent's jaw, and he went down in a heap.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, seizing a second man round the body, and hurling him with all his strength at the third ruffian just as he was about to fire. "We will call dat de first round to Pete de nigger, and so dat dere mayn't be a second round, I'm sort ob going to jump on you two."

Then Pete took a running leap, and landed on their bodies with a force that knocked the breath out of them.

One of them levelled a revolver at Pete, but he wrenched it from the assassin's grasp, and dealt him a heavy blow on the head with the butt.

"Now, den, if you please, old hoss," he exclaimed, getting possession of the other man's revolver, "dat weapon is sort ob safer in my hands dan yours. Nunno, you don't. I don't want any ob your playful games, 'cos we'm in earnest now. Do you tink you surrender? Well, it ain't any good calling me all dose tings, 'cos, you see, it don't make a bit ob difference to what Jack would call our relative positions. I seem to hab sent two ob you to sleep. If you like to get up, I'll serve you de same."



"Golly!" mused Pete. "If it's anything like a nigger dat dose bobbies want, I'm going out de back way!"

"And so I will!" roared the ruffian, as Pete rose. "See how you like that!"
 "I ain't receiving it, tank you," answered Pete; "but you might sample dat. You see, my reach is just an inch or so longer dan yours, and dat makes all de difference in de world."

Pete had delivered a blow between the man's eyes that sent him to the grass, where he lay groaning a little, but without making an attempt to rise.
 "How do you feel after de sample, old hoss?" inquired Pete, pulling out his pipe, though he kept his eyes fixed on the three fallen men.

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The man continued to groan, but he made no reply to Pete's words.

"I rader tink de man is getting dumb-saucy now!" exclaimed Pete, filling and lighting his pipe. "All right, old hoss; if you do get up you will get knocked down again. I don't mind your getting up a bit, and de only objection I can see to it is, dat you may get hurt."

"What do you want, anyhow?" growled the miscreant, not daring to rise after that threat.

"My present requirements are a match to light dis pipe; but as I hab got one here, I dunno dat I particularly want anything else, just for de present. I was just wondering, old hoss, weder you would allow me to bind your arms behind your back?"

"Don't you dare to lay——"

"Thank you! You ain't bery dangerous, but I may as well bind your arms. May I trouble you to lie on your face? Noder tank you dere. Nunno; on your face, I said!"

Pete had him on his face in no time, and placed his knee upon the prisoner's back, then, pulling out the cord, he secured his arms behind his back; and with the same rope, he served the other two prisoners in a similar manner.

"You see, when dey come to deir senses dey will find demselves all secure; and Bull, for one, is much better dat way dan loose. I'll just cut off some ob your leading rope, 'cos we sha'n't need it as long as all dis. Dere we are, as neat as wax after de bees hab done 'nd it. I 'speat by de time dat I hab smoked my pipe de oder two beauties will hab come to deir senses. I was just tinkin' weder we might not be more comfortable wid a fire. Dere appears to be plenty ob dead wood 'bout here. I'll see what I can do for you."

"It will be seen, you stupid brute of a nigger!" growled the prisoner, wrenching at his hands in a vain effort to free them, but they were much too securely bound.

"Dat doesn't matter at all, old hoss. Dere's no one to sees us 'cept de pheasants and rabbits, and dey won't mind at all."

"There may be slops around?"

"Oh, dey are harmless enough. I rader fancy dat dey got most too wet to care to spend de night in de woods. Howeber dat may be, we will chance de slops, 'cos I ain't got anything to fear from dem. I'll just tie de end ob your leading string to de branch ob dis tree, so dat you can't run away when dose men wake up; den I'll hab a fire in less dan no time. I sha'n't take you to de police-station till de morning, and we may as well be as comfortable as possible."

Pete collected a large quantity of brushwood, then he got some branches from a fallen tree, and smashed them up. Within half an hour he had an enormous fire blazing away, and its heat was very acceptable on that cold night.

Bull and the other man were now sitting up. The three had been discussing their unfortunate position, while Pete was busy with the fire; and as he seated himself by it, to continue his interrupted supper, Bull tried to make terms with him.

"Amazing good food, dis," observed Pete, enjoying his meal, and not taking the slightest heed of the ruffian's words "I ain't going to offer you any, because you will get plenty ob skilly wid nice dry bread in de morning."

"What good will it do you to hand us over to the slops?" demanded Bull.

"I dunno dat I want it to do me any good," observed Pete, taking a huge bite of some sort of pastry. "Golly! Ain't dat mighty nice, too? You see, I want it to do you and de oder people you might come in contact, good. Men like you are far safer under lock and key. I dunno, Bull, how a man can be such a blackguard as you are. You can't be happy in dis life, and it's mighty certain you can't be happy in de next. Freddy Tempest neber wronged you, yet you tried to murder him. On de first occasion dat we stopped you doing de deed, no doubt you meant merely to rob him; now, on dis occasion, I 'speat you wanted vengeance. But I ain't got a doubt dat you robbed de lad as well, after you had nearly murdered him. It ain't your fault dat de hang-man does not put his noose round your neck. Pr'aps two-free years in prison may do you good. At any rate, it won't do you any harm, 'cos dat is about as impossible as a ting could be."

"See you here, I have some money. Now, I'm willing to come to terms with you."

"I don't see de sense of my making an arrangement like dat, 'cos if I was scoundrel enough to touch any money dat you had stolen, I could just as easily take it now widout any compact. Nunno, Bull, you hab come to de end ob your tether. I am going to send you to prison. In fact, I am going to take you dere."

"It won't me as struck the young fellow."

"Ah, I know you struck him on de first occasion, 'cos I saw you do it!"

"We ain't dealing with that."

"Nunno! But I 'speat de magistrates will when I bring you before dem."

"Have a bit of sense, now. We admit that you've got the best of us——"

"M'yes! I don't see how you could do oderwise, seeing dat you are securely bound. All de same, it's not much credit to get de best ob men like you. If you were anything like brave men, ob course dat would be anoder matter; but seeing dat you are about de biggest cowards dat eber walked in shoelather—why, we won't discuss de matter ob credit, 'cos dere isn't any dere. Now, after dat little snack ob supper, and seeing dat dere ain't any more, I tink I will hab a pipe. It's rader a funny ting, but as a rule, after supper I generally go to sleep. Now, on dis occasion I ain't going to do anything ob de sort. I'm going to keep watch on you so dat dere shall be no chance ob your escape."

"See here! We will give you fifty pounds in gold if you set us at liberty," cried Bull. "Fifty golden sovereigns! What have you got to say to that?"

"You ain't worf it."

"Will you agree, mate?"

"Golly! I don't need you to call me mate. But listen to dis, 'cos it is going to be de answer to all you are going to say to-night. Dere's absolutely nuffin dat you could offer me dat would induce me to let you escape. Directly it is light to-morrow morning, I am going to walk you all de way to de police-station. I don't 'speat dat we shall reach it much before eleven o'clock, but dat will be in time for your requirements, 'cos if de magistrates can't deal wid you on dat occasion, dey will be able to keep you in prison till dey can. Nuff said on my part. Now, you can argue all night, and say whatever you like. I don't mind trying to listen to it, but I ain't gibing you any furdur answer. Bear in mind, de answer to all you say is 'No!' and it ain't going to be altered from dat."

Having lighted his pipe, Pete heaped up the fire, and he made it so large that several times he had to shift his position furdur back.

His prisoners pleaded for an hour or so, and Pete appeared to be lost in thought.

"Say dat all again, old hosses," he observed at last. "I was tinkin' ob something else."

After that they commenced to threaten, and their threats had no more effect than their pleading. Pete merely murmured now and then:

"Look at dat, now!" But it was evident that he was not paying any attention to what they were saying.

During the night Pete became very sleepy, so much so that several times he got up and walked about in order to keep himself awake.

It is doubtful if he did not doze towards the morning, but, at any rate, he did not fall asleep, nor did he give his prisoners a chance of escaping.

"Well, here we are wid daylight!" he exclaimed. "Now, dere's one ting I'm rader doubtful about, and dat is how I am going to get you to prison."

"I tel' you straight, we won't move from this 'ere spot," declared Bull, looking very determined.

"Oh, I ain't got any doubts about dat, my poor old hosses," observed Pete. "Wid a fair-sized stick and a little incitation, I ain't got de slightest doubt dat I shall be able to shift you in any direction dat I choose. But dat ain't de question. What is worrying me is dat I made such a mighty good supper dat I ain't left myself anything for breakfast. Now, I'm mighty certain Freddy would like me to hab breakfast at de mansion, and I'm equally mighty certain dat I would like him to hab his own way in dat respect. Ob course, it will be a bit out ob our way, only de chances are dat I would be able to gib my evidence against you wid a clearer brain if I didn't happen to be anything like hungry; and as it stands to reason dat dere ain't de slightest possibility ob me being anything like hungry after I hab had breakfast at de mansion, why, I tink dat will be our direction. If you will kindly wait till I hab cut a nice handy ash plant for purposes ob argument, we will den start in de direction in which I want to go. I rader fancy after we hab gone a short way in dat direction it will be de one you also want to take. 'Nuff said! Let's get de stick."

Pete got it. It was a nice long one, with a good bend to it, and he smiled sweetly as he trimmed it, occasionally glancing out of the corners of his eyes at his prisoners. They did not appear to appreciate the preparations.

"See here, you beast of a nigger," snarled Bull, showing his teeth, "if you dare to strike me, I'll be the death of you. Mind, I'm a determined man, and it ain't so safe for a bloke to rile me."

"Dat's all right, my poor old hoss," said Pete cheerfully.

"I can quite see dat you ain't anything like a safe man; all de same, I'm inclined to tink dat I would rader hab you as

"Toe dan as a friend. As a matter of fact, you ain't going to be eider wid me. I'm merely sorry for you 'cos I know dat you'm got a lot to go trough. Now, I wish you to understand dis little lot. I'm taking you to Freddy's mansion, and it would neber do for you to talk in de presence ob de young ladies who work dere. For dat reason, dere's got to be silence in de ranks. You hab also got to obey my orders. Are you going to obey dose orders?"

"No, you dirty dog of a nigger!" snarled Bull. "We'll soon show you."

"I'm sorry for dat," observed Pete, giving him some stinging cuts, and they were cuts that caused him to leap into the air and utter yells of pain.

"I tought dat would sort ob shift you," observed Pete. "Oh, dere ain't de slightest sense in talking like dat, 'cos it won't hab any effect on me. What we hab got to do now is to kill two birds wid one stone. You see, I want to inquire how Freddy is, and dat's one bird; de oder bird is a blackbird, and I want to get a good breakfast for de poor inseek. Now, I know I shall get dat, if it is only sort ob remuneration for catching you. De cook is mighty fond ob her young master. Yah, yah, yah! I was just tinkin—yah, yah, yah!—she did say someting 'bout what she would do if she eber came across you, Bul. Yah, yah, yah! 'Scuse me laughing, but dat cook is rader a strong woman. She's got an amazing sized arm, and she looks to me de sort ob woman who would keep her word. I dunno dat her reception ob you will be quite as friendly as might be desired. Still, we shall find dat out when we get dere."

It was a long way to the mansion, but Pete drove his prisoners thither, using the stick when they became refractory. He went to the back door, which was opened by Ellen, the cook.

"Why, whatever have you done this time, Pete?" she inquired, gazing at his prisoners.

"I hab captured de poachers, my dear. I wanted to inquire how Freddy is, for one ting, and dat's de principal ting."

"Much better. I think you may see him after the doctor has been. He has been asking for you and your friends."

"I hab got to find dem, Ellen. Dey disappeared in a most mysterious manner; but, you see, dey are sure to turn up all right. I 'spect I shall find dem at de mill, after I hab put dese free beauties in prison. Well, I'm mighty glad to hear dat Freddy is better."

"Won't you come in and have some breakfast? I'm sure you must want it."

"Dat's de bery second purpose for which I called. I tink I will tie up my prisoners in de scullery, if you don't mind."

"Was it one of those who nearly murdered the young master?" demanded Ellen. She had a happy, good-tempered face, but it changed now.

"M'yes, Bull, dat man dere. I 'spect dey were all free in it, but he's de worst. We had a fight, and I sort ob conquered dem."

"Pete, lend me that stick!" cried Ellen. "Lend it to me, I say!"

"Suttinly, my dear. I would rader not chance getting it on my own back."

"As though I would strike you, after you have saved the dear young master. A lad who does nothing but good to all he meets. No one knows what he gives away to the poor. Ah! If the law doesn't punish such wretches as you, Bull, I will. Shut that door, Pete, though Master Freddy could not hear upstairs."

Then Ellen let Bull have it. Pete was quite correct; she was a strong woman, and she used her strength to good advantage. The other two got some of the cuts, but Bull received the lion's share, and he howled with the pain of it.

"There, you horrible monster," panted Ellen; "I hope that will be a lesson to you! Don't you dare to utter a word, or I'll give you another flogging. I believe the lash is the proper thing for such wretches as you. Now, Pete, fasten them up, and you shall have the very best of breakfasts. We will have it together."

"Yah, yah, yah! You hab done me good, Ellen, and I ain't got a doubt dat you hab done Bull some good; at any rate, you can't hab done him any harm."

Pete had a really sumptuous breakfast, and Rory joined him. Like a wise dog, Rory had made friends with the cook. It was surprising how he followed her about, and he was sensible enough not to touch anything that was not given to him.

Pete was a long time over the meal, and Ellen encouraged him to eat, with all the dainties she had prepared.

"If Freddy doesn't soon get well wid you to cook for him, my dear, he ought to," exclaimed Pete. "Dis coffee is just how I like it. I dunno how you seem to know de exact taste."

"Go on with you, now! Anyone can make coffee."

"So dey oan, my dear, but dey can't make it taste like dis."

"Then have some more. There's plenty here, and I oan easily make some more if there is not enough."

Pete was in no hurry. He chatted with Ellen for quite half an hour after the meal was finished, and every now and then she went to look at the prisoners, to make sure that they were all right.

"I will speak to Mrs. Hall, Pete," said Ellen, when he was ready to start, "but you had better have the waggonette to take the creatures to the police station. I know she will order it. Oh, I'm thankful you have caught them! The master's life was not safe, and he is so dreadfully reckless."

The result of the conversation was that Mary came to congratulate Pete on his capture, and she ordered a man to drive them to the police-station.

It was past eleven o'clock when Pete arrived at the Town Hall, and as the court was sitting, he caused considerable commotion when he marched his prisoners in. The constable tried to stop him, but Pete got by all right by explaining that he was interested in the case; and so he was, for Jack and Sam were the prisoners. That is to say, the police were asking for a remand.

"Now, what's de meaning ob dis?" demanded Pete, handing his prisoners to the constable.

"How dare you force your way into the court in this unseemly manner?" cried one of the three magistrates on the bench. He was a grocer in a large way, and a great man in that court.

"How dare you hab dose men arrested, you senseless old hoss?" cried Pete. "Ain't you got more sense dan to mistake honest men for thieves? If I had my way wid you I would put you in de dock and gib you twenty-five lashes. Golly, I would let de cook administer dem, too! What are you charged wid, Jack and Sammy?"

"I don't quite know," laughed Jack. "I only know that the police arrested us, and said something about attempted burglary at Freddy's mansion."

"It's de letter dat has done it," growled Pete. "Dat idiot ob a detective— Why, dere he is. Yah, yah, yah! You'm nearly as big an idiot as de magistrates, Sims."

"I'll commit you for contempt of court if you speak in that manner, fellow."

"I'll spoil de personal appearance ob some ob your slops if dey lay a hand on me. And see you here, old hoss, just you keep a civil tongue in your head, else it won't go well wid you. If you tink you hab got de power to arrest honest men, den I'll show you dat you'm making de biggest error you eber made in your life."

"I never heard such gross impertinence! Why, I will commit—"

"It is gross impertinence, my poor old chuckle-headed booby," said Pete, who was making his voice heard all over the court, for he was exasperated to think that Jack and Sam should have been sent to prison. "And it is impertinence dat you shall answer for. Dere may be certain laws in dis court, but de law ob dis land don't allow honest men to be cast into prison, when dere's not a breath ob suspicion against dem. Sims is an utter idiot, but he's got himself in a tight corner dis time. He entered my lodgings and incited my landlady to open a private letter ob mine. Now, do you call dat legal? Den, again, he has arrested two ob my friends, for de simple reason dat dey were a nigger's friends; and all de time I hab been doing policeman's duty, and arresting dose free murderous scoundrels. Dat was de object ob de letter. We were going to meet at a certain spot to arrest dose poachers, and dey are a lot worse dan poachers. Well, you can understand a man like Sims blundering, 'cos he's got no more sense dan a hen ostrich, but how you could be such utter old idiots to believe de fairy tales dis great detective has told you is more dan I can imagine."

"Silence, fellow, or I will have you taken to the cells!" roared the indignant magistrate.

Now, there is not the slightest doubt that Pete would have suffered this fate, but there was an earnestness in his manner that was rather convincing, and the clerk whispered for some time to the learned bench. He wanted to get at the rights of the case, because he had never been convinced that there was any charge against Jack and Sam.

"Did you arrest these three men?" he demanded, turning to Pete, who merely nodded. "Had you proof that they were guilty of the assault on Mr. Tempest?"

"Suttinly! Dat is why I arrested dem."

"Do you know that a warrant has been issued for your apprehension?"

"For arresting murderers?"

"For attempted burglary, and for an attack on Mr. Tempest."

"Well, Freddy would hab told you differently."

"Unfortunately he was not in a fit state to be questioned."

"Bery well, de doctor would hab told you. De servants in de house would hab done de same."

"Did you make inquiries, Mr. Sims?"

"I was convinced that the prisoner was in league with the gang. He assaulted de police."

"Now, you see how dat idiot has bungled," growled Pete. "Freddy—dat's Mr. Tempest—wrote a letter to me asking me to meet him outside his mansion, and to bring Jack and Sam wid me, if I could. I couldn't, but I went alone. I was attacked by four men in plain clothes, and naturally tought dey were burglars or poachers; so I went for dem, and dey got de worst for it. Mind you, I only learnt afterwards dat dey were de police. Well, dese men come into private grounds, and hit me ober de head wid der truncheons, which I took for jemmies, den dey turn round and say I assaulted dem. I don't care for dat, 'cos I gabe dem rader more dan dey gabe me; but I do care for Jack and Sam being arrested for nuffin, and dere's going to be trouble in de world ober dat. If I was in league wid dose men, how is it dat I risked my life to capture dem? Dey were only free, but dey had free revolvers, and dey fired dem. Here are deir revolvers."

"This—er—certainly alters the complexion of the case," observed the clerk.

"There may not be a word of truth in what this negro says," observed the magistrate. "The prisoners must be remanded, and the negro must remain in custody."

"Yah, yah, yah! You daren't do it, old hoss!" cried Pete. "You can tink to bluff dis child wid your mighty haughty ways, but it won't come off. You hab made a mighty big blunder—at least, de bobbies hab, and you hab been too thick-headed to see through it. How dey could put such an old idiot on de Bench I can't tink. I tink de man must be a suffragette in disguise, and it ain't at all complimentary to de suffragettes. If your wife don't gib you a good flogging when she puts you to bed to-night, de woman won't be doing her duty."

Pete's was the only voice audible above the howls of laughter that his words caused. The magistrate was trying to give some orders, but what they were no one heard.

"Seems to me dat while you hab been bringing your face to dat fine purple colour de lotion has giben you softening ob de brain!" roared the daring Pete. "You ought to go on de teetotal cistern for a year or so, or else go to an inebriate's home. Oh, don't laugh at him, people. It's a mighty sad case. Tink ob his poor wife and children. Fancy habing to kiss an old bag ob bloated lubliness like dat!"

It was a failing of the magistrate, it was obvious to all, and Pete had been quick to detect it.

"I should tink you must hab giben yourself kinks ob de liver," continued Pete.

"Clear the court!" came the infuriated magistrate's voice, between the howls of laughter.

"Den mind how you carry dat magistrate out, else you will burst him; and don't hold a light widin free yards ob him, else dere will be anoder case ob spontaneous combustion."

The uproar was simply deafening, and how the matter would have ended is doubtful; but suddenly there was silence in the court, for Freddy Tempest, with his head bandaged, and looking terribly ill, staggered into the court.

The magistrate knew him well; in fact, he was his very best customer. Freddy was given a chair on the Bench, and all were silent now, for Freddy was a great favourite, and known to all for his many deeds of charity.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, rising to his feet, though the magistrates motioned to him to be seated. "As you see, I have come from a sick bed in order that justice may be done. It was only this morning that I received a letter informing me that my friends, Jack and Sam, had been arrested, and that my other friend, Pete, had brought the men who attempted my life to this court."

"Gentlemen, I know Pete well, and I felt convinced that he would do and say that which were better undone and unsaid, when he found that his comrades had been wrongfully imprisoned."

"I wrote the letter to Pete, and was going to meet him, when I was struck down by that miscreant Bull, who left me for dead. That I should have died is only too probable; but Pete found me, and carried me into my house. This is the second time that he has saved my life."

Then cheers burst forth, and the magistrates did not try to stop them, knowing that it would be all the same if they did. Those cheers were for Pete. That he had saved Freddy's life was quite sufficient to make him a hero in the eyes of the people.

"In conclusion, I may say that the charge against my comrades and true friends is absolutely groundless. I would go bail for them to the whole extent of my fortune. They are employed by me, and the only complaint I have ever had against them is that they will insist on doing more than they need do. It was they who helped me to defend my home

against the attack of a gang of whom that man Bull was the leader, and, as I dare say you have heard, it was Pete, who, at terrible risk, captured these three miscreants. Needless to say, I shall get into grave trouble with my doctor for having come here, but on learning what had happened it was impossible for me to remain in bed."

"You ought to hab done so, Freddy!" growled Pete. "I'm bery much annoyed wid you. A day or so more in prison would not hab mattered to Jack and Sam; besides, I would hab kept dem company, 'cos it was my intention to show de bobbies dat deir strength ain't as great as mine."

"The worthy magistrates have been misled, Pete!" said Freddy, who guessed that they needed a little soothing, after Pete had let himself go. "Your indignation at the degradation your comrades have suffered naturally made you speak in heat."

"I dunno, Freddy; still, I said exactly what I meant." "It would appear that Sims has been over zealous," observed Freddy, with a view to smoothing matters over.

"If dat means dat he has acted unlawfully, and dat he has made nearly as big an idiot of himself as he has made ob dese magistrates, I should say you are right."

"Under all the circumstances of the case," exclaimed the magistrate, who had held a short consultation with his clerk, "I am willing to pardon the contempt of court."

"Dat's mighty kind ob you, old hoss."

"The prisoners are dismissed, and—"

"Yah, yah, yah! Do you tink it is going to end like dat, old hoss? Well, if you do, den I tell you plainly dat you are mistaken. Jack and Sammy ain't going to be put in prison by a bibulous old hoss at de instigation ob an empty-headed detective. I say dat a man has no right to open my private letters. As for de prisoners—well, you ought to be put to prison for your stupidity. Dere's just one oder ting, Sims. I can't do anything to de old hoss on de Bench, 'cos he's too old, and I don't suppose you could knock common-sense into a noddle like his, but if I come across you, I'll gib you de worst thrashing you hab eber had in your little life. And dere's anoder ting. If you get any where near Janet, if you don't get your face torn I shall be surprised. You'm lost her free good lodgers, and you hab induced her to commit a fraud by opening my letter, and you did it under pretence dat you were going to marry her. Now, den, wait till she knows de difference, and see what will happen to you. Yah, yah, yah! I would gib a sovereign to see you in dat woman's company for half an hour."

"Here, you come along!" gasped Freddy. "The case is at an end!"

"But what about Jack and Sammy habing been in prison?" "Why, that was a gross miscarriage of justice, and it is a matter that you can consider later on," answered Freddy.

"Bery well!" exclaimed Pete. "I know mighty well dat Jack and Sammy wouldn't go in for damages; all de same, I mean to fix dis matter up in my own way. Sims, I fine you five pounds. De magistrate I fine twenty pounds. If dose amounts ain't paid to de hospital fund widin free days, you will bof hear more 'bout de matter. De money is to be handed to Dr. Thorn for de use ob de patients. 'Nuff said! If dat money ain't paid in, I'll know de reason why. You can hab your names in print as much as you like, and take all de credit for de donation, but it has got to be paid."

Then Freddy got Pete from the court, and Jack and Sam followed, while Pete's prisoners were detained.

Subsequently they were committed for trial, and they received sentences that will keep them out of harm's way for many a year to come.

The comrades drove back to Freddy's house with him, and he induced them to remain there, and let Golton, the manager, attend to matters at the mill.

Freddy received his lecture in a very humble manner, and promised that he would obey all future orders, and the following day Mr. Thorn brought some strange news to him.

The magistrate and Sims had sent donations for twenty and five pounds respectively.

"It is the first penny the man has ever contributed, although he has plenty of money," said Dr. Thorn.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I tought he would send dat money. 'Well, Jack and Sammy, if you hab suffered indignity, it has done good to de poor little children in de hospital, so I know you will be content."

They declared that they were perfectly satisfied, although they had their doubts whether the magistrate would be so.

As for Sims—well, he never goes down the street where Janet dwells, and he is in daily dread of meeting that gentle creature.

THE END.

(Another fine tale by S. Clarke Hook next Wednesday, entitled, "Jack, Sam and Pete's New Chum." Also another splendid story of Tom Sayers by A. S. Hardy. Please order your MARVEL in advance. Price One Penny.)

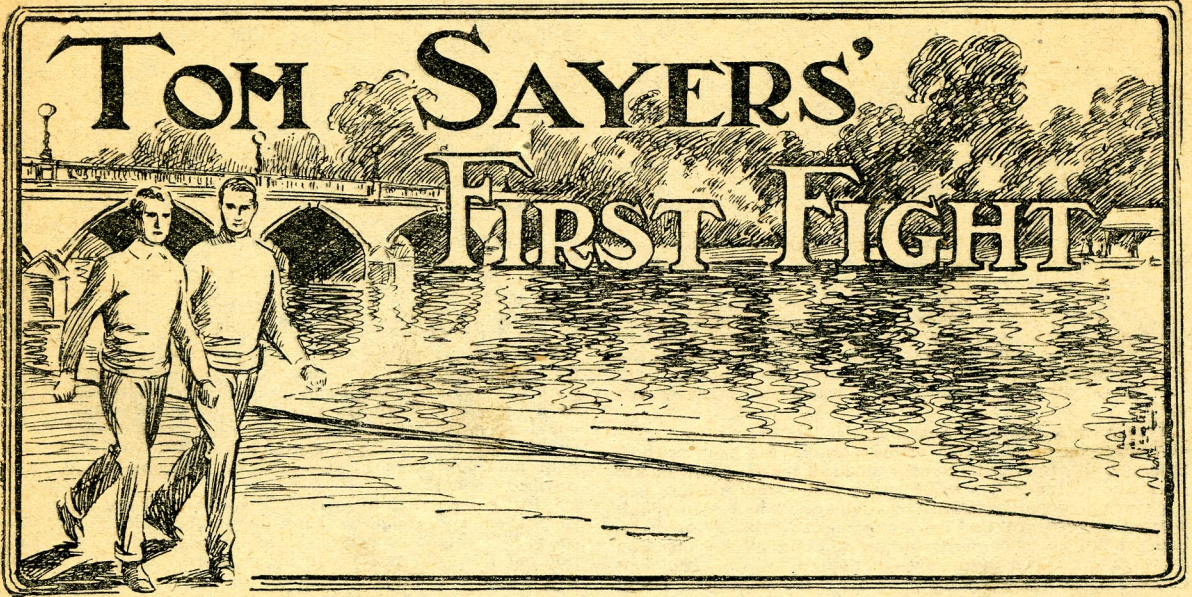
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CHAPTER I.
In Hyde Park!

IT was after nightfall one day in early spring that a taxi-cab drew up near the Marble Arch, and the lad who had been driving it leapt down from his perch behind the steering-wheel, blowing upon his hands to warm them, and stamping upon the ground in the vain endeavour to restore circulation to his frozen toes.

A mild winter, in which there had been scarcely any frost, and no snow to speak of, had suddenly changed without warning into the severest of weather. The snow was falling fast. The roadway was covered with it, the footpaths had two inches of snow upon them. Hyde Park, seen beyond the railings, was covered with a mantle of white.

The lad who had jumped off the taxi-cab seemed insufficiently clad to stand the severity of the weather. His shabby cloth suit was of summer weight. His trousers were frayed at the bottoms. About his neck was twisted a cheap cotton scarf. He did not wear a linen collar, probably finding such a luxury beyond his means.

Yet there was a hopeful look upon his fresh and healthy features, and a gleam of courage in his blue eyes as he darted a glance of gratitude towards his companion of the box-seat, who now took his place behind the steering-wheel.

The taxi-cab was enamelled blue, with a red finish here and there. It was an old-fashioned kind of cab, such as those which are used by the cab proprietors to teach the young, uninitiated aspirants for a driver's post how to drive.

"Thanks, Bob!" said the ill-clad youth. "I don't know when I should have got up to town if I hadn't fallen in with you at Hampton Court. But I can't get anything to do out of town. London's the only place for me. I may get a job here with luck to-morrow morning. I shouldn't stand a chance outside. It was a bit of luck meeting you. Though the tramp back might have kept me warmer."

"That's all right, Tom," said the cab driver cheerily. "You're here, and it would have been a long walk. And, another thing, I've taught you how to handle a motor-engine on your way up. You did the last four miles of the journey yourself, and managed the traffic jolly well. You might do worse than approach my firm for the post of driver. We could do with one or two smart lads, you know."

Tom made a grimace. "Maybe," he said. "And they tell me that there's money to be earned at the job, too. Still, I don't think I was cut out to drive a motor-cab. I haven't got a sou in the world, Bob, and I've not had a bite since I took some cold tea and

a bit of stale bread at a labourer's cottage this morning. Goodness knows where my supper's to come from. Maybe I'll think of taking to cab drivin'. Maybe I won't. Anyway, I know where to find you if I change my mind."

"That you do," answered the cab-driver cheerily. "And here, here's a bob for you. I can spare it, Tom. You want it. Don't refuse it. I've had more than a bob from you, my lad, at a time when I needed it sadly. Catch, old man!"

The cab-driver had felt in his pocket, and fished out a silver coin, which, with a flick of his gloved hand, he tossed to the freezing lad.

The latter caught it, and looked at it.

He hesitated a moment, then smiled.

"All right, Bob," he said. "I'll take it as a loan to be paid back when I'm doing a bit better. It will get me supper and a bed. Thanks!"

"You're welcome, Tom Sayers," answered the driver, feeling for the handle of his clutch. "I'm late. I ought to have turned in at the yard more'n an hour ago. Anything else I can do for you, Tom, mate?"

"No," answered Tom. "I've got your address, Bob, if I want it; but I'll try and fend for myself. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned the driver; and then the cab was whirled off over the snow towards Park Lane, and Tom, turning upon his heel, entered the gates of Hyde Park, and crossed the road.

Despite the cold, despite the snow, despite the fact that no bleaker or more lonely place than Hyde Park could have been found in the whole of London under the existing conditions of weather, there were the usual groups of enthusiasts, cranks, and what not gathered in the open space by the Arch to listen to the vapourings and outpourings of such well-meaning or egotistical individuals as had come there to expound their own particular and pet theories.

Here was to be found a Socialist trying to drive home his principles into the ears of a shivering, listening crowd. Over there was a Labour leader telling of the hardships and grievances suffered by the working man. Again near by was to be found a religious teacher propounding the gospel to a sedate and inspired following.

The voice of the one clashed with that of the other. But they went on speaking, hammering their points home, and occasionally challenged by some member of the audience who disagreed with a statement, or interrupted the speaker out of pure devilment.

They did not mind the weather. They went on with their self-appointed tasks, applying far more energy and zeal to their hobbies than, maybe, they applied to their work.

Day after day, night after night such speakers as these

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are to be heard in the great Park. Day after day and night after night such mixed audiences as these are to be discovered listening to them. On fine nights the crowd is greater; there are more casual listeners, and the speaker does not have it quite so much his own way. That is the only difference.

Tom mixed with the group of listeners, not that he had any interest in what was being said, but because he did not feel quite so utterly alone when rubbing shoulders with his fellow-beings, and it was a little warmer there in the midst of the crowd—that was all.

The snow fell steadily. There did not seem a chance of the fall ceasing ere morning. Terrible weather for those who had no homes to go to, and for whom there was no roof to shelter them that night.

Yet Tom had known it to be colder than now. There was scarcely a breath of wind blowing, and the snow was warm—or seemed to him just then to be warm.

Tom turned his coat-collar up about his neck, and pulled his cap down about his ears. Then, having tired at last of the lengthy diatribes and selfish mouthings of the Socialist, he turned away, and seeking the shelter of a tree-trunk, he leant against it, crossed his arms over his chest to keep himself as warm as possible, and began to criticise the crowd.

Tom Sayers, young in years, was old in experience. He had never known his father or his mother. He had somehow managed to grow up to the threshold of man's estate in the East End of London, how he hardly knew, and his way had been cast in rough places. His companions had been rough characters—doubtful and desperate characters many of them, and yet he had managed to obtain an honest living one way or another. Down in the depths though he was, Tom had never yet become what many of his evil companions would have liked to have made him—a thief.

Yet he had known many thieves, had lived in the same house with men who had been sent to penal servitude for lengthy periods.

Tom had a subtle instinct which enabled him to distinguish any particular type of man on the instant, and so it was that as he leant against the trunk of the tree and looked about him, he was able to detect the thief in the crowd, able to correctly identify the labourer out of work, able to pick out the officer in plain clothes who sauntered along in the snow, smoking a pipe, whilst he kept his eyes skinned for doubtful characters, and patrolled his lonely beat.

Two policemen, with their shoulders protected by their heavy capes, passed by, walking with firm steps, and disappeared into the gloom. Tom was quick to notice how some of the loafers shifted their positions as the men came along, and how they sneaked into the darkness as if a guilty conscience drove them there.

It was a strange world, this we live in, thought Tom, and there was a lesson to be learnt there in the crowd. He might have shouted "Honesty is the best policy!" here, and have sent the crowd shivering away. Honesty! He doubted whether there was a single honest man in all these groups of queer people who stood around him.

The fierce glare of the electric lamps made Tom feel drowsy. He had not eaten for many hours, and he was tired. He closed his eyes. His head fell forward until his chin rested upon his chest, and he slept.

Doubtless some of the wretched people who passed him by noticed his condition, and doubtless there was many a human heart which beat with sympathy for him; but most of them were quite as wretched as he. Some of them had not even eaten dry bread or drunk cold tea since the dawn had broken, as he had done. They felt that they, too, would like to sleep perhaps, but hunger kept them awake, and so envying Tom his condition, they left him alone, and Tom Sayers slept on.

How long he remained asleep in that stand-up position Tom never knew, but he was roughly awakened by a strong hand shaking him vigorously by the shoulder. He opened his eyes, and was on the alert in a moment.

"Wake up, my lad!" said a rough but not unkindly voice. "You can't go to sleep here, you know. Do you want to be carried out of the Park cold and stiff in the morning—eh?"

Tom found himself looking into the red, good-humoured face of a policeman, and stood upright. His neck was stiff. His bones ached. He felt frozen to the marrow, and he marvelled that he had ever gone to sleep at all.

"No, sir," he said, "I didn't mean to go to sleep. I was tired, I suppose. I'll get along out of it."

"I think you had better, my lad," answered the policeman good-humouredly. "You don't want to be in here after the gates are closed. It's none too warm you know.

Here! Here's some coppers. Go and get yourself a mug of coffee. That'll warm your blood."

Tom's face flushed.

"No, thank you, constable," he said. "I've got a shilling. I'm not so badly off. You give that to some poor wretch who needs it a bit more'n I do."

And, with a shake, he threw the snow off his shoulders, and trudged along over the white pile towards the exit gates.

The crowds had gone. The speakers had packed up their stands and other properties, and departed long since. The loafers had one and all vanished. The Park looked a deserted, awful place indeed.

Tom passed out through the gates, and stood shivering at the corner of Park Lane for a minute or two, watching the magnificently-equipped motor-cars dash by carrying their lucky occupants home.

Well, he thought, some men were born rich, and others were born poor; some men were destined to achieve great wealth and position, and others were doomed all their lives to poverty and misery; some people were well educated, and started life with every advantage; others, even in these days of Board-school education, could not read or write, and were for ever handicapped in the race for life. It had always been the same, it always would be the same. Nothing he could do would alter it; and he felt somehow that if he could drift along with a good deal of true philosophy to help him, and kept to the straight path, he would have justified his existence.

"I'm not a-going to grumble," muttered Tom, as, hands in pockets and shoulders bent, he shuffled along over the snow. "I might be better off, and I might be worse. But nothing I can do or say will alter the past, and it's no use grumbling."

He was thinking hard, and did not see a man come hurrying towards him from the opposite direction, and a moment later the two collided, the man reeling back with an oath upon his lips, and Tom looking up at him in surprise.

"Tom Sayers!" cried the man, then, in a tone of surprise; and Tom, eagerly eyeing the other, discovered that he had met with an old and disreputable gutter acquaintance of the East.

CHAPTER 2.

At the Coffee-Stall.

TOM continued on his way without recognising the man. The fellow turned and shuffled by his side. "You don't seem glad to see me, Tom," he said.

"I'm not," answered Tom gruffly.

"Why not? Getting stuck-up? Taken to psalm-singing?" "No," answered Tom. "But there's such a thing as honour amongst thieves. I've never known you to be honest in any of your dealings, Ted."

"Don't be 'ard!" said the other, assuming an injured tone of voice. "They've always been down on me. I've never had the chances some of 'em have had. I'm down on my luck, Tom. I've just come out of quod."

Tom made no reply.

"I haven't even got the price of a 3d. doss," muttered the gaolbird.

"I have," said Tom shortly.

The other's eyes widened greedily.

"Lend us a penny or two, Tom," he said, "for the sake of Auld Lang Syne."

"Why should I?" answered Tom. "I never did like you, Ted. You've often done me a bad turn, or tried to. If I wanted to give some of my pennies away I could find a much more deserving object for my charity than you."

"Don't be 'ard," whined the man—"don't be 'ard! Look at the night!"

"I can't help the snow," said Tom shortly.

"I know you can't," answered Ted, aggrieved. "I wish you could."

Tom Sayers quickened his stride, but still the man hung on, and so they reached Hyde Park Corner, and here Tom turned to the left, and, feeling the pangs of hunger gnawing hard he made his way to the coffee-stall set by the side of the Park railings, and called for a cup of coffee and some bread-and-butter.

Around the stall were grouped some ten or twelve loafers, some of them smoking, all of them desperate-looking characters, men down on their luck, too, who, maybe, never deserved any other fate than that which had overwhelmed them, but to be pitied for all that.

"Hallo, Tom!" said one of them, recognising the boy.

"Hallo!" growled Tom, sipping his coffee.

He felt a hand pluck at his sleeve.

"A cup o' something warm, and a bite of bread, for the



"All right, my lad," said the old pugilist, with a vicious setting of his underjaw. "I'll riddle you for that!"

sake of old times, Tom," came to his ears, in Ted's whining voice.

"Give him a mug o' coffee," said Tom, pushing a copper to the stall-keeper. "And here—here's a bit of bread, Ted."

The fellow seized both with a cry of joy, for he was ravenous, and as Tom noticed how far gone the fellow seemed, he no longer regretted giving him that little assistance.

It was a weird scene. Everywhere, look where one would, there was snow. It covered the big open space, in the centre of which the Wellington statue stands. It covered the hill leading to Knightsbridge. It stretched away down Constitution Hill as far as the eye could see. It lay thick upon the roofs, and it picked out the fine tracery of the trees in Green Park over there. In the road were the tracks of countless wheels which had passed over its surface, but those wheels had rolled the vehicles to which they were attached home long since, and besides these loafers who lounged at the coffee-stall there seemed to be nobody about. Not even a policeman was to be seen. The guardians of the peace had doubtless sheltered themselves wherever possible—small blame to them.

Yes; Tom and his idle companion, and the cheery manager of the coffee-stall seemed to be the only beings abroad at this hour of the night.

No; there were some others, for of a sudden Tom's eyes caught sight of the glare of a pair of powerful headlights attached to a motor-car, that came speeding up the hill from Knightsbridge. It belonged to some gentleman who had been visiting, thought Tom, who was now making his way homeward with all possible speed.

The lad seemed cheered by the sight of those lights, and he marvelled as he saw the car literally fly up the hill, thrusting the snow before it in a powdered spray.

The lights lit up the snow like the limelights in a panto-

mime. Tom contrasted the two pictures: Wealth and luxury speeding there; poverty and misery lounging here. And he smiled a bitter smile.

What a distinction there was drawn between the two classes! Would they ever mix without strife wondered Tom? He doubted it. Between the rich and the poor there was a line clearly drawn. The two classes would never mix.

Never! Why not? To his unbounded astonishment, as the car flashed near, he saw a man clad in evening-dress, who was seated in the comfortable interior of the car, lean forward and shout some instruction through a flexible speaking-tube. In a moment the car slackened its pace, and the front wheels were swept round in such a way as to direct the magnificent vehicle towards the kerb-side.

It came to a halt opposite the coffee-stall, and the door was immediately opened by the chauffeur who had leapt down from his place, and who turned the handle for the dandified occupant.

"Here, you're cold, Fowles," said the gentleman, linking his arm in that of his chauffeur. "Come and have a cup of coffee!"

He spoke in a high-pitched voice which carried well, and the loungers about the coffee-stall heard them. They looked at one another in astonishment, and nudged one another. Then they turned round and watched the well-dressed swell as he came staggering nearer, half held up by his driver.

Tom was astonished as much as the others at the unusual sight. He flashed a critical glance at the owner of the car, and saw a young man of not more than twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, clothed in irreproachable fashion. Tom knew good clothes when he saw them, although it had never been his privilege to wear them. That fur-lined coat, worn over the evening-dress, must have cost at least a couple of hundred pounds, thought Tom. The evening-dress

suit he wore was of the best. The waistcoat was of flowered silk, and adorned by gold buttons set with brilliants. Two magnificent first-water brilliants flashed in the front of his crumpled evening-dress shirt. He wore a gold and platinum key-chain, and as he felt in his pocket Tom's alert ears caught the sound of chinking gold.

The swell wore a silk opera-hat, which he had thrust on the back of his head. His overcoat was open, revealing the magnificent fur lining.

His face was good-looking, although not over intelligent, and his cheeks bore the hue of health. His eyes were glittering unnaturally, and he moved with a slight stagger, as if he had been dining not wisely but too well.

"Better get back into the car, sir, and let me drive you home," Tom heard the chauffeur say as the pair approached the coffee-stall. "You can get all the hot coffee you want there, sir."

"Mind your own business, Fowles," answered the master, speaking thickly. "I want some hot coffee. If I want hot coffee, I suppose I can have hot coffee, can't I?"

"You can have whatever you like, of course, sir," answered the chauffeur, trying to soothen his master. "But it's late, and it's cold, and you might catch your death out here, sir—getting out of the warm car."

"Bosh!" cried the swell. "Hi, you, stall-keeper, give me some coffee, the best you've got, and give my man here some."

The stallkeeper hastened to obey the order with alacrity, and the loafer, seeing the sparkling diamonds, and hearing the chink of gold, came nearer, winking at one another. Tom finished the hot liquid in his mug at a draught, and set it down upon the shelf of the stall.

His features assumed a determined, serious expression, as if he anticipated trouble. He knew the characters of these loafers, and he knew that the sight of the diamonds the well-dressed swell wore must be a sore temptation to them.

The swell spilt some of the coffee on the snow. Then he turned unsteadily and gazed stupidly at the loafers gathered around him. It occurred to him that they were poor, and that they must be feeling the cold.

"Stallkeeper," he said. "Here! Give these gen'lmen some coffee, the hottest you've got, will you? Give them anything your stall affords."

"Are you going to pay, sir?" asked the stallkeeper cautiously.

"Pay, be hanged! Of course I am. There's half-a-sovereign. Take for whatever they have out of that and keep the change."

He flung the coin on the shelf of the stall as he spoke, and Tom saw the flash of a diamond ring in the light of the stall lamp.

The chauffeur, keeping one eye on his master and another on his car, sipped at his coffee, and doubtless felt thankful for the warming liquid, but Tom could see that he disapproved of the whole proceeding.

The loafers clamoured round the stall. "You're a real gent!" they cried. "You're one of the good old sort, you are! Long life to you, sir! May you never know a moment's unhappiness. Here's your good health, sir, and if you could give us the price of a bed, you'd be a real benefactor, sir."

These and other kindred requests were voiced in no uncertain fashion. Some mumbled of gratitude. Others spoke of their family troubles and trials, of their starving wives and starving children, fictitious for the most part, but the swell wouldn't listen to them.

"No!" he cried, knitting his eyebrows together in an angry frown. "I've paid half-a-sovereign to feed you; if that doesn't satisfy you, you're an ungrateful set of vagabonds!"

The murmurs and requests died away. One or two of them still mumbled their hypocritical thanks, but Tom was quick to notice the glances of intelligence and meaning they flashed at one another, and how their cunning eyes glittered at the thought of the wealth this young swell had in his pocket.

Half muddled, half sober, the owner of the magnificent car whose engine throbbled as it remained stationary in the gutter, leant against the coffee-stall, not attempting to drink his coffee, but smiling stupidly and nodding his head as he saw how the roughly-clad crowd were enjoying their unlooked-for feast.

"What do you think of that, Fowles?" he said, laughing, as he turned his eyes on his driver. "That shows you what a little money, well spent, can do. If I hadn't pulled you up here these poor devils wouldn't have had anything to eat or drink to-night."

"And a good job, too, sir," answered the chauffeur, with a grim smile. "You take my advice, sir, and drink that coffee, and get back to your car."

The swell laughed. He didn't mean to hurry himself, not he.

Meanwhile, Tom noticed that his old-time acquaintance, hungry, gaol-bird Ted, had gone off along the road, skirmishing a bit, doubtless looking to see where the police were, and if the coast was clear. Tom heard him whistle from a coign of vantage fifty yards away. That whistle was understood.

Some of the men moved off towards the road, carrying their steaming mugs of coffee with them. Others surrounded the swell, standing a few yards away from him, but there was evidently a plan of campaign quickly arranged and understood amongst them all.

Two minutes later the swell, having tired of his exploit, and having tired of his coffee, set the mug down on the shelf of the stall, and turned to his chauffeur.

"Now, then, Fowles," he cried, "give me your arm, and let us get along!"

The chauffeur, only too glad to get his master away, obeyed the command, and the two walked off towards the waiting car; the driver moving with alacrity, his master somewhat unsteadily.

A man immediately barred their way. "I'm speaking for my mates, gentleman," he said. "Will you give us just a half-a-quad to buy a bit of food, and get us shelter for the night? You'll never miss it, and it will mean all the world to us."

The swell laughed. "No!" he cried. "What nonsense! I've done enough for you. You'll get nothing more out of me."

The man drew himself up and looked around. "Now then, lads," he cried, at the top of his voice, "on to him! All together!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Attack—Tom Sayers to the Rescue.

TOM was not altogether unprepared for the scene that followed. These ruffians were men of the dangerous type, who were always hanging about the doors of the prison. Sometimes they were dragged through them. If they escaped they were lucky. Acting in concert, they now set to work to cleverly relieve the swell of whatever money and valuables he carried.

The man who had spoken to him first sprang at his throat, meaning to bear him to the ground. The chauffeur, alarmed, drew his arm away from his master's and struck out at a burly ruffian who came charging at him. But he was immediately overpowered, and borne down to the ground by two desperate villains, who were prepared to choke the life out of him if he resisted to any great extent.

The swell, sobered now, immediately realising the nature of the attack, struck the man who tried to throttle him in the face, and sent him staggering back for a moment, but the next he found himself in the grasp of four of their number, and was thrown down in the snow as if he had been a powerless child.

Meanwhile, Ted, the gaol-bird, had come running back to the coffee-stall. The man in charge of this, seeing that the gang meant to rob the gentleman, began to cry out.

"Stow that noise!" cried Ted, cramming a piece of cake into the fellow's mouth; and then he slammed down the front of the stall which another of the men had unfastened, and together they prevented the poor fellow from opening it again.

Having him securely caged inside they knew that his cries would never be heard, and before the police had taken the alarm the robbery would have been effected, and the whole gang would be able to get clear away. Running, one in this direction and the other in that, they would soon be beyond reach of pursuit, and they would be able to share the swag when they met together at some appointed place on the morrow.

They knew very well where the place would be. "Help, help!" shouted the swell, struggling fiercely with his would-be robbers. One of them struck him in the face with his clenched fist.

"Stow that," he cried roughly, "or I'll use my knife!" "Help!" wailed the chauffeur; but this mouth was instantly filled with a scarf which one of the ruffians had pulled from off his neck.

The whole action in the little drama had taken place within the space of half a minute. Indeed, so quick were all the movements of the men, that Tom himself, looking out for trouble though he had been, was caught unprepared.

The swell was thrown down, and the men were busy pulling at his shirt-studs and rifling his pockets before Tom had time to interfere.

Then with a bound Tom Sayers sprang towards them, and, stooping, he caught the man who held the swell by the throat a stinging blow behind the ear with all the force he could muster up.

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With a howl of agony the fellow let go his hold, and rolled over, lying half dazed in the snow.

"Let go! Let the gentleman alone!" cried Tom Sayers; and as he spoke he struck out at the men left and right, hitting one here and another there, until the echo of his blows went rolling across the open space, making weird music in the night.

The startled scoundrels sprang up, and turned snarling on Tom.

"It's Tom Sayers!" cried one of them. "What's the matter with you, Tom? Have you taken leave of your senses? There's rich spoil here, and you'd have your share. Honour amongst thieves."

"I'm not one with you," cried Tom fiercely. "Stand back there, or I'll make a hash of some of you!"

He saw the chauffeur lying upon the ground, with his head hanging, evidently badly hurt, and he saw one of the men go to kick the poor fellow. The kick never landed home, for with a right-hand blow Tom caught the ruffian a smack on the jaw, and he went down full length as if he had been shot.

The dismayed ruffians paused for a moment. Then, as they saw that their prize was about to escape them, they came rushing at Tom in a body.

"Settle the lad first!" cried one of them. "We can easily deal with the swell afterwards."

Settle the lad first! Ay, that was all very well, but there are very few lads like Tom Sayers in the world. There may be some better built than he, but it is doubtful, and certainly there can be few possessed of such muscle as he had for a half starved lad, and surely few with as big a heart as he.

As they came madly at him, Tom danced about with his fists working, looking for likely places whereon to plant his blows; and when he did hit, it was with the force of a battering-ram.

Whack, smack, crack, wollop, thud! One after the other his blows went home, and the men who set about him, fierce hitters though some of them were, reeled and staggered under his blows.

"All right, sir!" cried Tom encouragingly, as he fought his game battle against tremendous odds. "Just you get your man round, and drive off in your car as quick as you can. I'll prevent this rabble from touching you."

The swell helped his chauffeur up. The man was beginning to come round; but, all the same, the gentleman did not venture to regain his car. Instead, he stood with arms akimbo watching Tom dance about amongst the men, who were trying to hit him.

"Bravo, my boy!" cried the swell, in a tone of ecstasy. "On the point, by George! That's settled him! Knocked out as clean as a whistle. Aim for their ribs, lad! Ah, there goes number two! Keep it up, my boy! I'll back you to beat the lot of them."

Two of Tom's antagonists were down, and did not seem anxious to get up again. But then the odds began to tell against Tom. The chauffeur, Fowles, saw him driven back.

"Don't let them beat him, sir!" he cried, as he sprang to Tom's help. "They'll kill him if they get half a chance now."

The swell, sobered by this time, swung himself out of his fur-lined coat.

"Look after that, Fowles!" he cried; and in he dashed to Tom's rescue, cutting one man down with a half-arm jab that was landed home with a skill and science that showed that he, too, knew how to use his fists. Tom found the relief grateful enough. He and the swell stood side by side facing the crowd, and Fowles, who had caught up his master's coat, was looking round for the police.

There was no sign of any assistance coming from that quarter. The two men Tom had beaten down were on their feet again.

"Use a stick! Knife 'em!" roared one of them. "Settle 'em somehow! We don't want our trouble for nothing."

Tom realised, as he stood panting, and weak from the privation and suffering he had undergone of late, that he could not hold out much longer against such overwhelming odds.

"Never mind trying to fight them with me, sir," he panted, "get to your car—quick!"

"All right, then, my boy," said the swell, realising to the full his danger now, "but not unless you'll come too."

"I'll come, sir," answered Tom between his clenched teeth, as he drove one of his enemies back with a stinging blow between the eyes; "I'll come. I don't want to stay to argue the point here any longer than I can help."

"To the car, Fowles!" shouted the swell.

The man ran swiftly forward, but a foot he did not bargain for was outstretched, and down he came headlong. In a moment a pair of greedy hands snatched up the gentleman's magnificent fur-lined coat, and the fellow who pos-

sessed himself of it turned and belted for his life, having got his fair share of the spoil. The chauffeur rose from the snow dazed, holding his hand to his head.

"The coat, sir!" he groaned. "They've got that!"

"Never mind the coat, my lad," cried his master, hurrying him forward to the waiting car, and leaping himself inside, and closing the door just before one of the ruffians managed to reach it, and flattened his face upon the crystal window-pane.

Tom Sayers, seeing that the gentleman was safe, now fought his way through the crowding gang, and sprang upon the footboard of the car.

"Drive on!" he cried.

"I can't!" groaned the chauffeur. "Something's the matter with my arm. It almost seems as if it was broken by that fall."

Tom did not hesitate. He clambered over the chauffeur's fainting form to the vacant seat behind the steering-wheel, and with the motor still working he thrust the clutch home. There was a grinding, tearing noise, and then the car started off with a leap, as the clutch caught and the driving-wheels engaged.

Around and about the car the snarling, discomfited gang of thieves swarmed, shouting and yelling in their disappointment. Tom drove through them, caring not one jot if he ran them down. They scattered like leaves before a gale, and off the car dashed in the direction of Piccadilly at an ever-increasing speed, until Tom, only a novice at driving, feared that he must lose all control, and dash the vehicle to pieces on the hill.

And across the open space, now that all was over, came the police, running from all quarters like madmen, and bent on rescuing the unfortunate owner of the coffee-stall, who was still being held in durance vile by the gaol-bird Ted.

CHAPTER 4.

Fashionable Quarters.

THE high-power car which Tom Sayers was driving sped ahead, plunging over the snow-clad surface of the road like a thing of life. So fast did it speed onward that they had flashed over the brow of the hill ere Tom had had time to gather his wits together.

He clung on to the steering-wheel with the desperation of a drowning man clutching at a straw. For the moment he completely forgot how to control the engine, and his eyes started as the vehicle thundered down the hill, tossing the snow from its front wheels in a shower of spray.

The chauffeur, Fowles, lay half-conscious on the leather-covered seat by his side. Tom realised that it would be useless to appeal to him. Then, as the car thundered ahead, he suddenly remembered that he could check the pace by throwing the clutch out. This he immediately proceeded to do, and then gingerly letting his hand stray to the lever-brake, he applied that, and with a throb of joy felt the brakes grind upon the drums of the hind wheels.

The relief was tremendous; but so firm was his application of the brakes now, that he slewed the heavy car round, almost running the front wheels over the kerb. But he had brought the car to a standstill, and that he reckoned was something to be thankful for.

In a moment the owner of the car had the car door open. He leapt out, his face wearing an anxious expression now.

"Bravo, my lad!" he cried. "I owe you a debt I shall never be able to repay. You got us clear of that gang of hooligans. Fowles"—and he bent over the unfortunate chauffeur—"how is it with you?"

"Oh, all right, sir," moaned the chauffeur; "only one of those chaps has hurt my arm. I'm getting better now, but I thought at first the bone was broken."

"Can you drive the car home?" asked the swell, looking steadfastly at Tom.

"I don't know that I care about it, sir," answered Tom. "You see, it is a powerful car, and I've never really driven one until to-night. It would be taking a risk."

"Well," said the gentleman, "you help Fowles inside, and sit there with him. I'll drive the car."

Tom opened his lips to utter a protest, but the swell would not hear of it.

"Not another word," he said. "My man's hurt, and it's all through me. You get inside and look after him, and when we get home, my boy, I want to have a talk with you."

Tom ceased to argue. Besides, he thought, why should he? It was better to be inside that magnificently equipped motor-car, seated upon stuffed cushions, than to be parading the streets at such an hour of the night in the cold and the frost, with insufficient body clothing on.

He helped Fowles in, the swell, having seated himself

shivering in his evening-dress suit behind the steering-wheel, drew on a pair of Fowles's thick motor-gloves, caught hold of the wheel, backed the car, swept her about, and dived up Down Street into the fashionable thoroughfare of May-fair.

Within a minute or two the motor-car stopped outside a fine West End mansion, and the gentleman, jumping down, went to the door, fished his bunch of keys from out his pocket, and opened it with one of them. Then he came back to the car, from which Tom had already jumped, the pair of them helping Fowles, the chauffeur, to alight.

"You go inside, my boy," said the swell to Tom. Tom hesitated. "I insist!" said the gentleman.

Tom peeped into a magnificently furnished hall, and hesitated no longer, but walking in, whipped his shabby cap from off his head, and gazed around him with some surprise. He had not a very extensive knowledge of the interior of fine West End mansions, but he had heard and read enough to guess that this man must be worth a fortune to own such a car, and live in such a finely appointed house.

Luxury abounded on every side. It was a little different to the interior of an East End doss-house, or a Salvation Army shelter, thought Tom, as he made a grimace, and caught himself wondering how this adventure of his was to end.

"Do you think you are well enough to take the car round to the garage, Fowles?" asked the swell, turning to the chauffeur.

"I think I can, sir," answered the man.

"All right. Take it round at once, and don't bother about touching it to-night. Just you go off to bed, and if you are in any pain, telephone for the doctor."

"I'm better now, sir," answered the driver, as he tried to smile. "The faintness has passed away, and I don't think my arm is really hurt much."

"Good-night, Fowles!" said the driver's master, pressing a gold coin into the palm of the man's hand.

"Good-night, sir!"

The chauffeur climbed up to the box-seat, started the car, and drove off. Having seen him safely away, the swell closed the door, bolted and locked it, and motioned to Tom to follow him.

The boy did so, marvelling at the rich decorations and fine things he saw on every hand.

His guide opened the door of a room abutting on the hall. He switched on the electric light, and Tom found himself in a magnificent dining-room, where table was laid for supper, and where a fire, banked high up the chimney, flared and flickered. Magnificent paintings adorned the walls. There was some fine silver on the table, which was lavishly set. The swell, after warming his hands at the blaze, turned to the wall, and rang an electric bell.

"Sit yourself down, my boy," he said, nodding encouragement at Tom, "and warm yourself by the fire."

Tom obeyed, feeling a little bit awkward at present, but not in the least bit shy. In answer to the bell, the door was opened and a sleepy-eyed manservant appeared, who wore a suit of faultless livery.

"Let me have covers for two," said the swell airily. "The soup and a little fish will do. You can bring a bottle of wine. Do you drink wine, my lad?"

"No," answered Tom, "water will do for me, sir."

The man in livery, although he might have been excused had he stared open-eyed at Tom's ragged and dirty figure, moved noiselessly over the carpet towards the door, without so much as the relaxation of a muscle. Maybe he was used to his eccentric master's pranks.

The soup was very quickly brought, and Tom was served with a silver plate full of the steaming stuff. He felt ravenous at the very smell of it, and began to eat at once. He

did not speak until he had finished it and the fish was brought.

"Thank you, sir!" he said then, flashing a look of gratitude at his companion.

"The thanks should be from me to you," said the swell airily, trying to straighten his ruffled shirt-front, which was marked by the imprint of dirty fingers and thumbs, but which Tom noticed with a thrill of pride still retained its pair of diamond studs. "If it had not been for you, my brave lad, I might have been lying dead on the pavement by Hyde Park corner now, instead of being seated here eating my supper. What's your name?"

"Tom Sayers, sir," answered Tom.

"Tom Sayers!" cried the swell, flashing a sharp look at Tom. "You don't say so? Well, you fought up to the name! Any relation to the famous Tom Sayers who was boxing champion of the world?"

"No, sir," answered Tom. "And Sayers isn't really my name."

"Then what is it?"

"Don't know, sir. I became known as Sayers after knocking out a man twice my weight in fair fight down east, and the name's stuck to me ever since."

"Well, Tom," said the swell, pushing his chair back from the table and crossing his legs, "I like you. You're a bit shabby, and all that sort of thing, but there's an old saying that the clothes make the man. I'll rig you out smartly in the morning, and I've got a proposal to put before you."

"Yes, sir?" said Tom indifferently.

"I'll not tell you what it is before the morning. Meanwhile you're going to sleep here. There's a spare bed-room at the top of the house you can have. I'll see about it now."

He rang the bell again, and the man in livery entered the room noiselessly, as before.

"I want one of the bed-rooms at the top of the house got ready for my friend," said the swell, arching his eyebrows and looking fixedly at his servant. "See to it, Thomas; and come back here in a few minutes for a letter I wait you to take to the post for me."

"Yes, sir," said the man, bowing and silently leaving the room.

"Just excuse me a moment, Sayers," said the swell, turning his back on Tom.

He walked to a small writing-table placed in a corner of the room, and, turning the cover back, commenced to pen a letter, which was written and sealed in a trice.

"There, Tom," said he, turning round when the letter was finished, "I've written that letter in your behalf as well as my own. I shall have a friend here to-morrow morning, whom I wish to introduce you to. I think I shall be able to find you something to do, if you will accept a job."

"I'm down on my luck, sir," answered Tom Sayers, "and so you can tell I shall be glad of a chance of doing any honest work. But meanwhile I should be just as pleased if you would let me go and get a sleep outside. I don't feel as if I ought to be sleeping here."

"And I," laughed the swell, taking a cigarette out of a gold cigarette-case which rested on the mantelpiece; "I don't intend to let you out of my sight! I place too high a value upon your acquaintance, Sayers! I suppose you think me a little eccentric, eh?"

Tom smiled.

"I was thinking so, sir," he said, tapping his forehead significantly. "I was just wondering whether you were all there."

"Because you saw me stop the car by that coffee-stall, eh? Oh, well, young men will be young men sometimes, Tom, and I haven't sown all my wild oats yet," said the swell airily. "And now let me tell you who I am. My name is Archibald Fairbanks—the Honourable Archibald Fairbanks. Ever heard of me?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom promptly, "I have, sir. You're the chap who was badly hit over the last Derby, and whom I've heard referred to by betting-men as a bit of a mug. You backed 'The Nipper' in that last bantam-weight fight at the National Sporting, and lost £3,000 over it, they say."

The Hon. Archibald Fairbanks seemed inclined to be nettled by Tom's candour, but after a moment's thought he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Tom Sayers," he cried, "you seem to be a knowing kind of bird, and you at least are no mug, if I am! Well, I'm not going to quarrel with you—you've done me too great a service to-night for that. I'm tired, so are you. Supposing we go to bed?"

"I shall be glad, sir," said Tom, who felt languid and tired now.

"Come along," said his eccentric host.

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Tom was conducted up a broad flight of carpeted stairs—up and up—until he realised that he was at the very top of the house. His host opened the door of a prettily-furnished bedroom.

"You sleep there, Sayers," he said. "You will find a pair of pyjamas put out for you. Here's the bath-room, with towels. You'll find the water steaming hot. Take a bath and sleep well. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" said Tom. And his host hurried down the stairs, leaving him alone.

Tom's eyes rested on the white-enamelled bath with a gleam of delight. That was a luxury he appreciated more than any other. He turned the water on and smiled joyfully as he saw the steaming water gush from the pipes. He closed the door of the bath-room, cast off his dirty, threadbare clothing, and tumbled into the refreshing liquid with a splash.

Five minutes later, with his body aglow, he passed into his bed-room through the connecting door, bearing his clothes in his arms; got into the suit of pyjamas—silk pyjamas, evidently the property of the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks himself—and slipped into his bed.

The electric button was by his side. He cast a lazy glance about him, and his eyes half-closed as he felt himself being lulled to sleep by the comfortable warmth.

"I never thought when Bob landed me at the Marble Arch to-night," Tom muttered, as he pressed the electric-button down and switched off the light, "that I should see the inside of a comfortable bed to-night. But there, you never know your luck!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Spar with the Gloves.

IN the morning, when Tom arose, the sun was shining upon the snow-clad roofs, and a sharp, healthy snap was in the air. Tom discovered that a clean collar and tie had been provided for him, as well as brush and comb. When he had washed and dressed himself, and had donned the spotless linen collar, and tied the fine silk tie, he smiled as he looked at himself in the mirror. He did not cut such a bad figure after all, although his clothes were shabby, and he felt more at his ease when he went downstairs to his breakfast.

He ate alone in the magnificent dining-room in which he had partaken of supper over-night.

"Mr. Fairbanks will be down to see you presently," said the liveried servant, as he removed the porridge.

The servants were well-trained in this establishment. They evinced no surprise, and they put on no airs. They must be well paid, thought Tom.

Tom Sayers had finished his breakfast, had thrown himself into a comfortable lounge chair, and was reading the columns of a morning newspaper when the door of the dining-room was opened, and the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks entered the room, accompanied by a tall, well-built, sporting-looking man, who trod on his heels.

"Ah, and how have you slept, Sayers?" said Tom's host, smiling at him and eyeing him carefully up and down.

"Very well, thank you, sir," said Tom, grinning as he rose from his chair; "better than I usually do! And I may as well tell you, sir, that I don't usually have such luxurious quarters!"

Tom eyed his host keenly now, and as he saw a rather good-looking and by no means weak face revealed in the morning sunlight which streamed through the window-panes, he began to have a better opinion of the wealthy young scapegrace who had got himself into such trouble over-night.

"Tom," said the Hon. Archibald, "this is the gentleman whose acquaintance I want you to make. His name is Bat Horgan. He's been a bit of a terror with his fists in his time, and he's the best trainer of a boxing-man I've ever known. I've told him what you did last night with that gang of roughs who set on me at Hyde Park Corner, and I've brought him here so that he can run the rule over you. Bat, what do you think of him?"

The professional pugilist, who had been eyeing Tom up and down, uttered a grunt of approval.

"He'll do if he's as good as he looks, sir," he said gruffly. "My lad, if you can manage to please Mr. Fairbanks, your fortune is as good as made. We've got a project set for you. If you're good enough, we're going to get you to box Seeley of Bermondsey, lightweight boxing champion of England, as Mr. Fairbanks' Unknown. Are you game?"

Tom stared, but he soon made up his mind.

"I'm game for anything that will earn me an honest living," he said.

"You can be made to pull the beam at ten stun," said the pugilist, looking Tom up and down. "And you see, my

lad, it's this way. Mr. Fairbanks is in a bit of a hole. He's had no luck with his fighters. As soon as he backs a lad to win a purse, so surely does the lad go and let him down. He'd backed a lad against Seeley for this very fight as we want you to take on, but the fool's been and got blood-poisoning—can't be got fit to appear in the ring this side of six months—and there's £200 staked a-side for forfeit. Now you laid about you last night like a champion, it seems, according to Mr. Fairbanks here, and so he brought you home and kept his eye on you. Well, my lad, what do you say?"

"I'm willing, if Mr. Fairbanks will have me," said Tom eagerly; for he saw a chance looming in front of him which it might be wise for him to accept.

"It will be worth a good home, and pocket-money for you right up to the time of the fight," said Bat Horgan; "for you'll train from here. Mr. Fairbanks doesn't care a snap of the fingers what his neighbours think. There's the Park nice and handy for you to do your walking exercise in, and a gymnasium can soon be fixed up here."

"Are you willing, Sayers?" asked the swell.

"Yes, sir," answered Tom.

"Good! Then that's fixed. The only thing that remains now is to satisfy Bat that you are class enough to face Seeley, who is a capital boxer and as tricky on his feet as any lad who ever stepped into the ring. You've got your gloves with you, Bat?"

"Yes, sir," said the pugilist, grabbing up a bag which he had set upon the table.

"Are you ready to box now, Sayers, or would you like your breakfast to digest a little?"

"I'm ready, sir," answered Tom. "Breakfast doesn't trouble me so much as all that. Who'm I to have the gloves on with, sir—you or him?"

"Oh, with Bat!" said the Hon. Archibald, with a smile.

The pugilist unfastened the bag and drew out two pairs of boxing-gloves, whose colour and general appearance showed that they had already seen a great deal of service. Bat handed a pair to Tom and fastened them on the lad's wrists in no time. Then he slipped on his own.

The Honourable Archibald Fairbanks pushed the big table back, so that there was plenty of room left in the big apartment for them to manoeuvre in.

"Put 'em up, young Sayers," said Bat, with a grin and a wink at his patron, "and let me see if you're worthy to bear the name you've got. I don't remember the old Tom, but I've met a good many lads who knew him and who sparred with him, and they all say he was a fair marvel."

Tom set himself in a boxing attitude, standing almost stationary, and Bat took in the attitude in the twinkling of an eye. He seemed surprised to find that Tom did not prance about like most of the showy boxers of the time. For a moment an expression of doubt shone in his eyes, and then, as he noticed how well-guarded young Tom was, his face lit up with an expression of approval again.

"Just you try to hit me, laddie," he said. "Just a soft one on the point."

The words had scarcely left his lips ere Tom landed his right smack upon the mark, and down full-length upon the carpeted floor the pugilist went as if he had been shot.

His face was a study. He had invited Tom to hit, and had been prepared for the blow. Yet Tom had landed it home, had completely beaten him, and Bat saw a thousand fires darting before his eyes as he picked himself up, and reflectively rubbed his chin with the inside of his boxing-glove. Then, with a shake of the head, he got rid of the effects of the blow.

"All right, my lad!" he said, with a vicious setting of his underjaw. "I'll riddle you for that!"

He meant business, and he came at Tom like lightning, his gloves flashing swiftly this way and that, his feet shifting from spot to spot as he pranced about, endeavouring to frighten and bewilder Tom.

But it would have taken more than Bat, with his over-fat body and his old-time methods, to have frightened Tom. Tom did not care one jot for all the ferocious faces the fellow pulled as he danced about him, as Bat's left glove flashed harmlessly over Tom's shoulder. As Tom ducked his head he planted his own flush upon Bat's face, and landed heavily with his right in Bat's stomach, causing the fellow to grunt like a pig.

This was hurricane work, with a vengeance, and Bat lost his temper. He forgot that he was merely there to test Tom's ability, and that this was not a money match. He forgot that he weighed almost fifteen stone to Tom's bare ten. He forgot that he was the taller and much the stronger of the two. He forgot everything, in fact, except that he wanted to drub the boy for hitting him, and round and round the room they dodged, Tom always eluding his fiery but slower antagonist; whilst the Hon. Archibald

Fairban's roared with laughter, and shouted encouragement to Bat.

"All right, sir!" panted the distressed pugilist, after a couple of minutes' useless chase and flaying of the air with his gloved fists. "I'll knock his head off presently!"

Tom smiled. He did not wish to make a show of Bat, but he was enjoying the fun, and as Bat had suggested the test, he meant to show them that he was quite good enough for any Seeley of Bermondsey, be he champion or not.

Least it be thought that this performance of Tom's be in any way remarkable, it must be remembered that Tom had been used to protect himself with his fists ever since he was a toddling child, and used to fight with other children of the gutter.

All his life he had used his fists. Being honest, he had often had a rough time of it with young ruffians who were jealous of him, and who were enraged because he would not let them lead him astray. Tom had often to fight lads twice his own age and size—ay, and even grown-up men at times—and he had developed a cunning, a quickness, and an art which was almost entirely his own.

Bat Horgan as he rattled at Tom now discovered that he was boxing with a shadow. He could see Tom, but he never could hit him, and when at length Tom dashed in and peppered him right and left, raining blows upon face and body until the room fairly echoed with them, Bat reeled back with one hand in the air, appealing for help.

With a deft blow Tom toppled him over flat upon his back, panting, Bat lay there, looking up with dazed eyes, in which, however, a suspicion of a smile lurked down.

"What do you think of him, Bat?" asked the swell, coming forward and smiling with delight as he helped the ponderous Bat upon his feet.

"Think, sir?" gasped Bat. "Why, you've found a marvel, sir! I should say that the equal of this lad at his weight has never yet been seen inside a ring."

The Hon. Archibald smiled, and nodded.

"That, Bat," he said, "was precisely the opinion I formed of him last night, "and that was why I took care to bring h'm home, and wrote that letter to you last night."

"He's good enough, sir," said Bat, hauling off his gloves. "You can back him against Seeley for all the money you've got in the world."

CHAPTER 6.

A Training Spin.

THE snow had vanished. Hyde Park was bathed in a spring-like sunshine, and the grass seemed a beautiful green. The birds twittered and sang in appreciation of the change. The winter seemed to have vanished for good, and none could be said to really miss it.

One or two energetic and athletic folk were cantering their horses along Rotten Row. Here and there could be seen a manservant taking an airing; but really there were few people to be seen in the Park, for most folk had not partaken of breakfast yet.

It was at this early hour of the morning that two men came striding manfully along the gravel path near the Serpentine, swinging their arms, and making a gait of something near to six miles an hour.

Both wore sweaters, and one of them was a great deal older than the other. The two were Bat Horgan and Tom Sayers, and Tom was taking his customary early morning exercise. He had partaken of a cup of coffee and a biscuit or two, and his breakfast proper was to be eaten when he got back to the house in Mayfair, after a hot bath and massage.

Then there would be rest until luncheon, and after, and then the boxing, ball-punching, flexing of muscles, and other gymnasium work to follow.

Bat Horgan was making a man of Tom, as he put it, when discussing the question with his wealthy patron, and certainly Tom looked all the better for the good feeding and sound training he had been accustomed to ever since he had decided to fight that glove-fight with Seeley for the Light-weight Championship of England.

Bat came panting along by Tom's side now, and moving with wonderful freedom and ease for a man of his weight and age.

"That's the way, Tom, my lad!" he panted, as he strode along swinging his arms. "I never had a lad under me so amenable to discipline as you are. If you don't make a real World's Champion, I shall be very much disappointed in you. I don't know a lad of your age and size as can fit as hard as you can; and you're not a lad as wants strong drink, and is always threatening to kick over the traces. I may as well say that the governor is very pleased with you."

Tom smiled.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "He's given me a jolly good time since I've been at his house, and he's not blamed me in any way for that Hyde Park Corner business."

"How could he, Tom?" panted Bat Horgan. "Why, it'd be rascally ingratitude if he did."

"Well," said Tom, speaking the words deliberately, "it's like this. I knew some of the gang, and they knew me. They pinched his gold watch, as well as his fur coat. It was a valuable one, he's told me. Cost him £150 at Benson's, and though he's offered a big reward, they've never sent it back, or opened up negotiations with him. It's a lot to lose. I knew some of them, Bat. That's the way of it."

"H'm!" said Bat, swinging along the pathway, and turning abruptly to the left. "One more turn of the Park, Tom. I let you off light yesterday. You fought them, Tom, didn't you? If it hadn't bin for you, they would have had his diamond stud, his gold, maybe his life as well. You saved him that. He ought to be grateful. About the watch. Do you think you could get it back, Tom?"

"I might," answered Tom, his brows clouding; "but I haven't bin up East for a long time. I don't like that gang, and they don't like me. There's no love lost between us, and they're a bit afraid of me. Yes, if I went up there, I might hear something about it, and get it back, but it would cost a bit."

Bat nodded.

"I've lived East, too, Tom," he said, "and I've met many shady characters in my time. I can understand. I don't think it's worth it. Let the watch go."

They moved briskly along the level way in the direction of the Marble Arch, and almost reaching that, turned to the left again, and kept up their brisk six miles an hour walk, until once more a turn was made, and they faced towards the Serpentine again. Both Tom and his trainer were flushed of face now, and perspiring freely. Both looked the picture of health. Tom revelled in these morning walks, and felt as fit as a king.

On they trudged, and of a sudden Tom saw leaning against the railings a little way in front of him a disreputable-looking loafer, whose rags clung about him like a shroud, and who was spotted with mud almost from head to foot. Tom uttered a cry, and slackened his pace.

The loafer was Gaolbird Ted!

Tom instantly made towards him. Ted hesitated, looked at Tom's companion, and then, doing a hand-spring over the railings, took to his heels.

That was enough for Tom. After him he went; but he didn't need to hand-spring the railings. He took them at a bound, and over the grass he went in hot pursuit of Ted, whilst Bat Horgan stared in amaze.

Ted was swift of foot, and desperate. He had need to be swift. Sometimes he had only his pace to stand between himself and arrest. He ran swiftly now, dodging to right and left, and making the way as difficult as possible; but he couldn't run so fast as the well-trained and well-fed Tom. When their first efforts began to tell, Ted faltered. Tom, gaining his second wind, ran as steadily as ever, and at length getting within reach of Ted, he grasped him by the collar, and rolled him over on the grass like a ninepin. The fellow gave a howl for mercy, and Tom hauled him, gasping and livid, to his feet.

"Oh, you thought you'd run, did you?" said Tom grimly. "Now, then, where's that watch which was stole off the gentleman the other night at the coffee-stall? The police got three of you, and not one of them knew anything about it. Scotland Yard has been trying to trace it, but they haven't succeeded in finding it yet. You know something about it, Ted. Where is it—eh? Tell me, or I'll throttle the life out of you!"

"I don't know!" whined the gaolbird, putting up a hand as if to protect his face from a blow. "Let me alone, can't cher?"

"I want to know!" said Tom fiercely. "He's been a good friend to me. He's looked after me ever since I saved him that night, and I want to get it back if I can."

Ted's cunning eyes glittered.

"I know you've found oil, Tom," he said. "I've seed yer in the Park here of a morning with that other bloke, walking as if you was training for a prize-fight, or some other stunt. I haven't struck lucky. I've bin starving ever since. Play light. Maybe I can get you the watch back at a price. You leave it to me. You don't want to mix yourself up in it. There's several of them have sworn to make it lively for you if they get hold of you. You leave it to me. Make it worth my while, and I'll get the watch back. I dare say. Where do you live? You just tell me, so that I shall know where to come to when I want you."

Tom eyed the rascal doubtfully. He hesitated. He knew that, maybe, Ted would be able to lay his hands upon the watch, whereas the whole body of police-officers and Criminal

Investigation men, with all their cleverness, might fail. Should he trust Ted? After all, why not? The fellow couldn't do any harm.

"All right, Ted," he said, as he released his grip on the lad's throat. "I'll leave it to you. You bring the watch back, or tell us where we can get it, and I'll guarantee you shall have a fiver, if not more, for your trouble."

Ted's eyes glistened.

"Give me a bit of silver to help me now!" he cried, as he held out his hands. "I'm starving!"

Tom felt in his pocket, pulled out a shilling, and gave it him. Ted spat upon it—a vulgar trick common to men of his class.

"Where shall I find you, Tom?" he said.

"At the Honourable Archibald Fairbank's, in Mayfair," he said.

Ted opened his mouth, but he did not answer for a moment. He seemed to be staggered by the intelligence.

"Oh, all right," he muttered at last. "I'll see what I can do, Tom."

And he shuffled off, leaving Tom to rejoin Bat Horgan, his trainer, who now came bustling up, and who was eyeing the disreputable Ted with no friendly glance.

"Why, what ever's up, Tom?" the trainer asked.

"That was one of them!" said Tom, with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "That was the fellow Ted I've told you of. He's going to try and get back Mr. Fairbank's watch for him."

The trainer shook his head doubtfully.

"I wish you'd let the fellow alone, Tom," he said. "He's up to no good. I don't suppose he feels very friendly towards you. Harm may come of it."

Tom laughed, and started off at a brisk walk again.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "What harm could?"

And Ted, the gaolbird, as he shuffled along over the dewy grass, turning over and over the shilling Tom had given him in the palm of his hand, of what was he thinking as he made his way in the direction of the Marble Arch, keeping both eyes skinned for the park-keepers and police?

"My!" he muttered. "Tom Sayers at the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks! That's him, then, we nearly 'milked' that night? He's a rich cove, he is. They say his house is filled with all kinds of costly things. Wonder if it would be worth Bill's while to break into it—eh? The Hon. Archibald Fairbanks? That's the chap whose bin rooked right and left by the trainers and bookmakers, and who made such a hash with his Turf affairs. He's the chap whose been done brown by more than one boxing cove, and whose backed an unknown to box Seeley of Bermondsey twenty rounds for £200 aside at Wonderland at the end of the month. My! Can the unknown be Tom Sayers? Looks like it! He's in training, and he's got Bat Horgan to look after him. But wouldn't take on a duffer. Besides, Tom can fight. He's good enough to beat Seeley. Whose on Seeley's side? Let me think. There's Captain Atkinson. He ain't much class, but he's a good chap to us blokes. He don't mind a bit of shady work with a shady character. There's money in this! Money in it! And revenge!"

And, turning, he shook his fist at Tom Sayers and Bat Horgan as he saw them hurrying away in the distance.

His evil cunning features lit up for a moment with a smile of triumph, and he quickened his stride. But he slowed down into the usual slouch before the gates were passed, and then bethought him that it would be wise to go and get something to eat ere commencing the labours of the day.

CHAPTER 7.

The Gymnasium.

A BACK room in the house of the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks, in Mayfair, was for the time being converted into a gymnasium. Like most other rooms in this West End mansion, it was artistically decorated and painted, and had an elegance in keeping with the rest of the establishment.

But the costly furniture and window hangings had been removed, a thick mat had been placed upon the floor instead of the heavy pile carpet that usually covered the boards, and upon this Tom took his daily sparring exercise.

In one corner of the room hung a punching-ball of light weight. Attached to the wall there was a pair of chest expanders. The uninitiated would have marvelled at the lightness of these. They were such a pair as a woman might have used for her exercises. The average young man who goes in for weight-lifting, and who likes his chest expanders of double strength, would have stared to see them, and might have felt inclined to make a wager that he would break them at the first attempt.

There were dumb-bells lying over there on the floor. They

were 2lb. dumb-bells—"and heavy enough, too," as Bat Horgan would say when visitors remarked upon the lightness of them.

A boxer has to rely upon his quickness for success. His muscles have to be supple and free. Heavy weight-lifting, and the use of over-strong expanders, developers, and the like, and the exercising with heavy dumb-bells produces knotted muscles, and slows the athlete who thinks he is doing wonders with his constitution by producing these bulging muscles. Foolish idea! Men of perfect physique can be found every day who have never used anything but two-pound dumb-bells, and whose exercise is natural exercise, the best exercise of all.

The atmosphere of Tom's training quarters was redolent with the scent of embrocation, and before the blazing fire there were things laid out to dry.

Some wag had stretched a piece of brown-paper over the fireplace upon the wall, and across this he had written in chalk, "Tom Sayers," and beneath it in sprawling letters, "Tiger Lumley, his sparring partner."

In one corner of the temporary gymnasium sat Bat Horgan, smoking a pipe, his rubicund visage glowing with rude health. In another corner sat Tom Sayers, resting after a stiff bout with Tiger Lumley, a smart lad with his fists, but a rare uneducated specimen of a youth, with a pale, knobby physiognomy in which gleamed a pair of cunning, untrustworthy eyes.

Bat Horgan had apologised to the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks when he had made the selection of Tiger as Tom's sparring partner.

"You see, sir," he said, "I don't care a rap about Tiger. I don't like him. I don't think he's honest; but I know him. He's a rare quick lad with his 'dooks,' and he might have climbed to the top of the tree if you could have got him to follow instructions and leave the drink alone. But he ain't got no intelligence. He'll throw over the traces on the advice of any fool that happens to tell him to go against his trainer, and after he'd sold more than one honest sportsman a pup, they left him severely alone."

"Good gracious!" cried Fairbanks, amazed. "What will become of him?"

"Oh, he'll sink to the gutter, which is really the only place fit for him!" said Bat, with an air of disgust. "He came out of the gutter, and he'll go back to it. Nothing can save him. Meanwhile, he's smart with his dooks, and just the sort of lad to get the best there is out of Tom, and so I have secured him for you, Mr. Fairbanks. He's just a means towards an end."

Bat had drawn a very true picture of Tiger Lumley. Utterly worthless and untrustworthy, the fellow was still a smart lad with his fists, and as tricky as half a dozen average boxers put together.

Tom didn't like Tiger. He liked nothing that was shifty and treacherous, but he put up with it for the time being, answering Tiger when spoken to, but scarcely ever volunteering to engage the other in conversation.

Tom still occupied his room at the top of the house. Bat Horgan had a sleeping apartment next to him. Tiger Lumley slept out, and merely came to headquarters to put the gloves on with Tom, being well paid for his services.

It was during this period of rest in the afternoon after exercise, that a manservant entered the gymnasium and approached Bat Horgan with a solemn air.

"There's a gentleman," he said, with a strong emphasis on the last word, "wishes to see Mr. Sayers. He says he is expected, but wouldn't give his name."

"Somebody for you, Tom," said the trainer doubtfully. "Know who it is?"

"I think I can guess," answered Tom. "It's Ted."

"Show him up," said Bat.

A minute later the liveried servant, expressing strong disapproval of the condition of things, opened the door, and, sure enough, into the gymnasium stepped Ted, the gaolbird, looking more evil and disreputable than ever.

He grinned as he saw Tom, and then looked at Bat with an air of dissatisfaction.

"Hallo, Tom!" he said. "I've kept my word, you see. But I want to have a talk with you alone."

Bat got up.

"All right, Tom," he said. "I'll clear for a bit. I'm not afraid to leave you with this gent. I think you might knock his face off him if he tried any tricks. Here, you, Tiger—clear!"

The cunning and weak-looking boxer shuffled up on to his feet, and throwing the end of the cigarette he had been smoking into the fire, he moved towards the door. Ted and he came face to face. Ted grinned. Tiger Lumley started, and turned red in the face, shifting his feet uneasily.

"You've got into a comfortable crib, Tiger, you have," said Ted, with a broad grin.

"Think so," answered Lumley awkwardly. Ted nodded.

"Yes," he said; and then, grasping the other by the sleeve, he whispered in his ear: "Tiger," he said, "if you've anything to do with Fairbanks and Tom Sayers, just you come and see Captain Atkinson. It may be worth your while."

Tiger opened his lips, but made no verbal reply.

"Mum's the word," whispered Ted. "See you outside some time to-night. We can unfold then."

Lumley went out.

"You seem to know one another," said Tom, eyeing Ted suspiciously.

"Should think so," answered Ted readily. "Me and Tiger's old pals. We've done many a racecourse stunt together, and have been in a dust-up together, too, before to-day. I never thought to find him here with you, though, Tom."

"Didn't you," answered Tom shortly. "Well, look here, Ted, and I don't want to engage in any unnecessary conversation with you. Have you got the watch, or have you brought me news of it?"

Ted fished in his pocket.

"Have I?" he cried. "Here! What do you think of that? Isn't that worth a fiver?"

As he spoke he drew a gold watch from out his tattered pocket, and gave it into Tom's hands.

Tom looked at it with critical eyes, and very quickly made out the initials A. F. interlaced. It was the Hon. Archibald's watch all right enough.

"Ted," he said, "I know where you got this from. It was you who stole it."

"I didn't," answered Ted. "If you'll remember, I didn't take any actual part in the attack on the gentleman. I was lookin' after the chap in the coffee-stall, and a tough job I had of it to get away from the police. No, a chap named Hyams stole it, and when the police nabbed him he dropped it in the snow. I found it there by accident when I passed the place an hour later. They had all missed it. You can bet I was pleased. I stuck it in my sky-rocket, and said nothing about it. I didn't like to pawn it. I was afraid. I reckoned it would be a shame to break it up and melt the gold down, and so I kept it, and here it is; and I don't know what you think, I reckon it's worth a fiver."

Tom walked to the door.

"Wait here, Ted," he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

"All right," exclaimed Ted, walking to the window and looking out.

Tom closed the door after him, and left the scamp alone there. The fellow opened the window, and craned his head out.

"It don't seem to me," he muttered, as he looked around, "that it would be extra difficult to make an entrance in here. There's that house to be let next door. There's no caretaker in it, and nobody watching it. The police ain't half on the alert just now. It looks like being a heavy night to-night. I don't think it would be a difficult job to get in next door, and one could easily make their way there to here, and just pinch a few articles of value, and get back again. My! Ain't there some things in this house to pinch, too! I'd get Tiger to come in, but you durstn't trust him; and Tom's no good. He's all for honesty, cuss him! The gang's given him up ever since he peppered Big George. Big George is in quod with a 'lifer.' Tom would give the show away. No! We'll have to work without him; but I think it might be done."

In the midst of his musings he heard Tom's footsteps outside, and he hastily closed the window, which moved down noiselessly in its well-made grooves.

"Well?" said Ted, as Tom came in.

"There," answered Tom, counting out five golden sovereigns into Ted's open and itching palm. "There's five pounds for you. The governor paid out without a murmur. I told him just as much as he ought to know, and no more. And now, Ted, clear out. We don't want you here. You poison the air."

"I'll remove the poison somewhere else," said Ted, the gaolbird, with a grim chuckle, as he moved towards the door, and doffed his shabby cap to Tom. "Good-afternoon, mister. Sorry to see you're giving yourself airs, Tom. But don't get too stuck-up, you know. Pride often comes before a fall, you know!"

Tom followed Ted out on to the landing, and watched him until he reached the floor below. Here he was taken in hand by the liveried flunkey, and conducted towards the street door. Ted, whistling a snatch of a comic song, and with his hands stuck into his trousers-pockets, gazed impudently around him. Reaching the door of the dining-room, he pushed it open, and stuck his head in. His eyes flashed as he saw the valuable things displayed there.

"My eye!" he said, to the flunkey. "Don't the sight of 'em make your mouth water? Here, Lord Roberts, just show me out afore I'm tempted to sneak a few of the things!"

The man in livery opened the street door for him, and Ted walked out on to the steps. The door was instantly banged to.

"That's the style," muttered Ted, as he slouched away. "The empty house next door will be the way. I'm going East'ard to find Bill!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Burglary.

TOM SAYERS, in the soundest state of mind and body, turned into his warm and comfortable bed at the end of the day's labours, ready to sleep like a top.

It didn't take him long to fall asleep, and usually he rested in dreamless, health-giving slumber until Bat Horgan came in the morning to shake him by the shoulder and tell him that it was time for him to tumble into his cold tub, have his coffee and biscuit, and start upon his training walk. But somehow, on the night after Ted's visit, Tom could not get off to sleep. He lay with his eyes open, staring into the darkness, and imagining all kinds of vague fears. First of all he found himself back amongst the thieves' dens of the East, from which he had only managed to escape but a little while ago. Then he would be tramping the streets hungry and cold, without a friend in the world, and with even the officers of the law his enemies. Then again he would find himself riding on the buffers of a railway-carriage, going Northward, so as to escape from London town, leaving the great city in the hope of finding employment and a living elsewhere.

Not one pleasing recollection came to him, and at one o'clock in the morning, when Bat came in to have a last look at his charge, and found Tom tossing restlessly from side to side, the trainer shook his head in disapproval.

"Tom, Tom, Tom!" he said. "This won't do! If you're going to be restless like that, I shall have to give you a sleeping powder! We can't have you lying awake like this. You'll find your nerves go wrong. You'll lose flesh. You'll lose your quickness and activity, and we shall find you as stale as a dry biscuit by the time the fight comes off, and where'd Mr. Fairbanks and his money be then? No, I think you'd better have a powder."

Tom smiled.

"I'm all right, Bat," he said. "I don't want any sleeping draught. I don't believe in 'em, for one thing. Neither ought you, with all your experience. It's nothing. I've eaten something that's disagreed with me, that's all. I shall soon go to sleep if you leave me alone."

"Oh, all right, my boy!" said Bat, and he left the room, returning to his own comfortable sleeping quarters, and quickly throwing himself between the sheets, intending to return to Tom and see how he was getting on in an hour or so. But Bat did not return. He was tired and sleepy, and once his eyes closed, he did not open them again until the whole household was aroused, and he went rushing downstairs half-clad, with the rest.

As for Tom, he still found sleep impossible. It would not come to him. His brain was in a wonderfully active state. He kept on thinking, thinking, thinking, and nothing he could think of was sufficient to induce slumber.

Perhaps it was ordained that he should not sleep, for in the very dead of night he fancied he heard a scraping noise near the skylight which was let into the roof, and was situated immediately above the topmost landing, a few yards or so away from the room in which he slept.

Tom paid no heed first of all; but then the creakings, and groanings, the tearing sounds, and the scrapings continued until he knew that there could be only one explanation of the noises. They were being produced by human agency! Someone was trying to break into the house from above.

Then Tom heard the fall of a light body upon the landing outside, and out of bed he got in a flash, feeling for some of his clothing, and hastily getting into it. Then he moved towards the door, but even as he did so, he received a check, for a nimble hand turned the door-key, which was outside in the lock, and Tom was a prisoner!

Tom went to the wall, and pressed the button of the electric bell, and set the bell ringing down in the kitchen. None of the servants would be up at that late hour, but he hoped that the unusual sound might attract the attention of someone in the household, or even the ears of a policeman patrolling the beat outside. But those who had entered the house heard the ringing of the bell, too, and they checked Tom's move by severing the wires.

Tom was as cool as a cucumber now, and as he realised that there were burglars in the house, he set himself to consider what was best to be done to save his patron's property, and catch these villains in the act.

Bat was in the next room, and Tom battered on the dividing wall with all his might until the very room shook. But Bat didn't hear. Nothing short of a dynamite explosion would have roused Bat from his deathlike sleep. It was useless for Tom to shout for help. His cries would never reach any of the servants' ears. Failing in both his objects, Tom, in his chagrin and disappointment, turned his attention to the door itself. If he could only get free, he would rouse the house in a moment! But there was no way of getting free. That key being on the outside of the door, instead of the inside, had upset all his plans.

Tom waited for some minutes—precious minutes that were fleeing quickly away—trying to make up his mind, and then suddenly determining to risk everything, he hurled himself at the door, and burst the box of the lock away in a jiffy.

Then he didn't trouble about rousing Bat. The men were at work downstairs. He didn't fear a hundred of 'em. He felt that he was quite able to take care of himself, and down the thickly-carpeted stairs he went with a rush.

Reaching Mr. Fairbank's door, he knocked loudly upon it. "Who's there?" came in his patron's sleepy voice.

"Me sir," said Tom quickly. "There's burglars in the house! I'm going down to have a cut at 'em! Do you rouse the house!"

He heard the Hon. Archibald utter an exclamation of amazement, and heard him tumble out of bed, and then rushed down to the lower landing, where he saw a dim light gleaming. The villains were at work in the dining-room. Tom did not hesitate for a moment, but threw the door wide, and rushed in. He saw a man standing upon the rich morocco covering of one of the chairs, and busy with his penknife, ripping one of the splendid Romney portraits that hung in the room out of its frame. The man heard Tom come in, and turned his face round. One look, and Tom recognised him as one of his old associates of the East End, a rough, desperate character, who stuck at nothing, and who had more times than enough seen the interior of a convict prison.

"Bill!" he cried.

The burglar grinned. "Eh, Tom Sayers, lad!" he cried. "I knowed you was here, and so I made up my mind to pay you a visit. Join in with me, and you'll have your fair share of the swag. But keep that mouth of yours shut, will you?"

"I've already opened it," said Tom grimly. "Put back what you've stolen, Bill, and be quick off, if you want to get away, for I've roused the house, and you've done me a decent turn or two in the old days. I don't wish you any harm."

Bill's eyes flashed fiercely.

"Roused the house, have you, you young snake?" he cried. "Well, then, I'll be off! Hi, you, there! Leave the lad alone! I won't have Tom Sayers hurt!"

Tom, remembering now that Bill was not alone, swung himself round. But he was too late for the rogue who had crept up behind him as noiselessly as a cat, brought down a loaded life-preserver upon the back of Tom's head, and Tom dropped like a stone. He fell full length, with his arms outstretched, face downward upon the pile carpet.

So quickly had the blow been delivered that he had not time to recognise his assailant, and Ted—for it was the treacherous gaol-bird who had dealt him the fatal blow—whipped the life-preserver into his pocket in a flash, and, thrusting a gold cigarette-case he had stolen, into his pocket, he edged towards the door.

"All right, Ted," muttered Bill, as he made a rush for liberty, "I'll remember you for that! Tom was ready to give us a chance, but you didn't give him one. I'll mark you for that! Meanwhile, it's a case of get away from this hot bed as fast as we can!"

Out into the hall he rushed, and not a moment too soon, for he heard the sound of voices above, and could hear footsteps running down the stairs. He hesitated for a moment, then dived for the street-door; but even as he did so, he fancied he heard the sound of a bit of steel being thrust into the lock. He did not like that sound, and, catching the now thoroughly-frightened Ted by the arm, he drew him below, into the basement, down into the servants' quarters.

The electric lights had been untampered with by Bill, and the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks turned them on as he came running down the stairs. After him came Bat Horgan, only half dressed, and behind him crowded the bravest of the male servants.

They reached the hall, and at the same moment the hall door was opened from the outside (Bill and Ted had drawn the bolts of it in case it might have been necessary for them to have escaped that way, and so there was only the lock left to pick) and a tall, well-built, alert-looking man ran in. Bat Horgan gave him one glance, and then hurled himself at him, and got the stranger by the throat.

"Here! Here!" he cried gleefully. "Here's one of 'em! We've got him, at least—and he'll split on the others!"

We'll nab the gang that have been guilty of this night's work, sir!"

Bat was a man of great muscular strength, and for a moment he bore the stranger backward. But then, with a sudden wrench the other got himself free, and with a blow sent Bat reeling backwards.

"Ah, Mr. Fairbanks!" he cried, as he recognised the young aristocrat. "Glad to see you, sir! You have burglars in the house! Order this man of yours to keep his hands off me, and we'll see what's to be done!"

Bat opened his mouth, and gasped.

"You know him, sir?" he said, casting a swift glance at his patron.

"Oh, yes, Horgan!" said the Hon. Archibald. "This gentleman is well known to me. His name is John Thurloe, and he is one of our rising detectives. Thurloe, how did you get in?"

"Picked the lock, sir," answered the detective easily. "You see, I discovered that thieves had broken into the empty house next door, and after making a hasty examination of the premises there, I came to the conclusion that your house was their object. I judged it best to make my entry by the front door. I've sent a constable to guard the roof, and there are two men watching the house outside, so that the rascals will have to be clever to get away. Meanwhile, we are wasting time. The men have gone downstairs, I believe. It seemed to me I heard them scuttle down like rats as I tried to open the door. They would have made their exit that way if they had not heard me trying to pick the lock. Come along, let us go down and take them red-handed!"

The detective rendered his explanation in quiet but yet forcible tones, and all were impressed by the coolness of his manner. He was the first to lead the way down the darkened well of the staircase, some of the servants seeming to be none too anxious to come to close quarters with the burglars, and after him came the Hon. Archibald, and Bat Horgan, the latter thirsting to distinguish himself after having made one blunder in seizing the detective.

Scarcely had they reached the landing below than they heard the door leading to the area steps open, and the sound of scrambling footsteps running upward.

With a rush, the detective Thurloe continued the chase, and when, breathing deeply, he gained the street level, he saw two of the policemen he had left on guard there, rushing like madmen along the street, both minus their helmets, which lay in the road, whilst in front of them, legging it as fast as they could go, were the two burglars they should have captured, both of them having gained a long start, and seemingly safe to get away.

Thurloe, taking a police whistle from his pocket, blew a shrill blast upon it, hoping to attract the attention of some constable on a distant beat who might intercept the run-aways. But it was a forlorn hope, for he had already impressed the service of most of the men he could find, and the detective, chagrined at the failure of his plan, which he had made complete enough, went back into the house by way of the front door.

He met Bat and the Hon. Archibald in the hall.

"Sir," cried Bat, his face paling now, as he looked at his patron, "what about young Tom? You say it was he roused you up? Well, it's not like him to hide himself this way when there's trouble about. Let's search the house for him."

They hadn't far to search, for when the detective pushed his way past the group of staring servants and entered the dining-room, the first thing he set eyes on was the form of poor senseless Tom lying stretched out upon the carpet. The detective ran to the lad, knelt beside him, and turned him gently over so that he could see the pale face. There was blood upon it, for Ted had been heavy-handed with that deadly weapon of his. Still, the detective was quick to detect the signs of life.

"It's concussion," he said. "But I can't say how bad the lad is. Send for a doctor. Poor Tom Sayers!"

"You know him, sir?" said Bat Horgan, bending down beside the detective, and putting one arm about Tom; whilst the Hon. Archibald sought the telephone to ring up the doctor.

"Ay," said the detective solemnly, "I know him. And he knows John Thurloe. He's a good lad, with the heart of a hero, and I'm sorry to see they've hurt him like this. But I'll tell you one thing. That blow was not delivered whilst Tom Sayers faced his enemy. The fellow must have crept up behind."

"Will you help me to carry him upstairs to his own room, sir?" asked Bat, half-choking; for he had grown to be very fond of Tom, and, in his simple way, feared the worst, as simple folks are apt to do.

"Ay," said John Thurloe.

Tenderly the pair lifted Tom, and tenderly they carried

him up the broad flight of stairs to the top of the house, and laid him to rest in the bed he had left in a state of mental unrest not so long before.

Then the detective went down into the street to see whether the burglars had been caught or not; whilst Bat, seating himself by Tom's side, awaited the arrival of the doctor, and blamed himself whilst the tears welled from his eyes for ever having left Tom alone that night—for he had gone off to his own bed with a feeling of dire foreboding upon him which he would have done well to heed.

CHAPTER 9

At the Black Bull.

IT was the evening before the fight for the Lightweight Championship of England, for a side bet of £200 between Captain Atkinson and the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks, and a Purse of £500, offered by the promoters of the contest—£400 to go to the winner and £100 to the loser—and a great number of sporting-men and hangers-on of the Ring had gathered together at Seeley's training headquarters, the Black Bull, near Hampstead Heath. The public bars of the inn were filled with loungers of all types. The gymnasium—in which Seeley had just gone through his final bit of preparation before the eyes of a dozen or so interested onlookers, including his backer, Captain Atkinson—echoed with the roar of voices, and compliments, as well as strong drinks, were being handed round.

A needy-looking individual, who had once been a wealthy bookmaker, but who had come down in the world, and who was on the look-out for a good tip from the proper source, buttonholed Captain Atkinson as the latter came near him for a moment, and dragged him into a corner.

"Captain," he said, "have you found out who Fairbanks' Unknown is yet?"

"Yes," said the captain, with an oath, his face reddening to the hue of fire and his eyes flashing vindictively. "There's been two of them. The first lad let Fairbanks down. Now he's got a better lad—and a dangerous customer, too, they say."

"H'm! Is your man going to beat him?"

Captain Atkinson looked his questioner full in the eyes.

"Yes," he said, "I think I may safely let you into the secret. Our man is going to win. There's nothing can stop him—and the fight hasn't been arranged, either."

The ex-bookmaker's eyes brightened. He meant to gather together a pony by to-morrow, somehow, and have it on Seeley to win, and he wouldn't want to hedge the bet, either.

And now a bluff-looking fellow, with closely-cropped hair, came to the captain's side and plucked him by the arm.

"Our man's arrived," he said, "and he's brought t'other with him. They're waiting for you in the private office."

"Excuse me," said the captain abruptly. And he turned and left the bookmaker.

In the private office close by the captain found Ted and Tiger Lumley, of all people in the world—the latter looking paler and more disreputable than ever, whilst his cunning eyes searched the captain's face, as if he expected to see sovereigns growing there.

"Come about the little job, sir," said Ted, with a grin.

The captain opened the door, looked out, found nobody listening there as he had expected, and closed the door again.

"Well," he said, "we'll come to business quick. Your name is Lumley, eh—and you've been boxing with this lad Sayers, who is going to fight Seeley for Fairbanks?"

Tiger Lumley grinned and nodded assent.

"You know both men—you've boxed with Seeley, too?"

"I've fought him, and nigh licked him!" said Lumley sentimentally.

"Well, well, come to the point! Is Sayers good enough to beat my man?"

"Beat him?" cried Lumley, with a down-turn of the lower lip. "He'll knock his head off!"

"Straight?"

"Straight, sir. It's as much as 50 to 1 on Tom Sayers."

This was a facer for Captain Atkinson, and he pulled at his ginger moustache as if he didn't quite appreciate the position.

"I must win the money," he muttered. "I counted on that and what I should win in betting to pull me out of a deep hole. It's got to be done. I can square the referee if I pay him well. He'd allow clinching, and my man's good at that. Here, Lumley!"

"Yes, sir."

"Ted says you can help us to win this fight. Now, how can you do it?"

"What's it worth, first of all, sir?"

"Fifty pounds down—£100 more if it comes off."

"I'll do it!" said Tiger Lumley, rubbing his hands together. "I hate Bat Horgan; I hate Tom Sayers, with his airs and graces—and no man's good enough for him, if you please; I hate Mr. Fairbanks; I hate the whole gang of 'em, and I'll serve 'em a dirty trick if I can! Look here, sir. I'll doctor the stuff Tom's got to drink during the fight. It'll be easy enough. Bat will be there to look after him, and I'll be assistant and bottle-holder. I can just have the powder nice and handy, and when Bat gives me the bottle, after carefully filling it himself and seeing that it isn't doctored, I'll make it all right. I can't do any more. Your man will have to keep on his feet until Tom's ready to take his first drink. Then once he's swallowed a drop of it he'll soon go stupid, and your man can finish him off. It don't matter what people say afterwards—the stakes go with the fight, and you'll win your money. The most the other side can hope for will be to get their own back in a return match."

"Which," said Captain Atkinson, "they will have to whistle for. All right then, Lumley, I rely on you. Here, hold out that hand of yours and take the money!"

Tiger Lumley, the traitor, held out his grimy paw, and, after taking a roll of banknotes from a pocket-case, the captain counted ten fivers out to the scoundrel, who flicked them with his fingers, devoured them with his eyes, and then stowed them away with a chuckle.

"That's good enough, captain," he said; "you can consider the job done! And now, is there a back way out of here, so that I can get away without anybody seeing me? It won't do for people to say I'd bin visiting Seeley's training-quarters—that might give the game away!"

"Here, get out of the window!" cried the captain, opening the window of the office as he spoke, and permitting the cold night-air to blow in. "It leads into the yard. You can gain the heath from there. Slip off, and remember I rely on you!"

"All serene, cap'n!" chuckled Tiger Lumley. And, climbing out, he let himself down on the other side, waved a hand to the pair of scoundrels, and disappeared.

"Thanks, Ted!" said the captain, holding out his hand. And Ted, the gaol-bird, took it and grasped it warmly.

The pair of rascals were just about a match.

"I thought it might not be necessary to come to this little arrangement," said Ted, with a significant grin. "When I landed Tom Sayers on the head with that life-preserver the other night, I could have sworn I'd settled him for good. But there, some chaps have heads like iron! And so I brought Lumley here for you to deal with, colonel. I reckon you can write that fight down as good as won!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Glove Fight.

IT was the night of the big glove-contest between Seeley of Bermondsey, Lightweight Champion of England, and Fairbanks' Unknown, and a mob of people flocked about the doors of the theatre long before they were open, although most of them had not even the price of admission on them, and had not a thousand to one chance of getting in. But they were there, eager lovers of the noble art, and they thought even the most meagre scrap of information they might be able to glean sufficient compensation for their weary waiting in the cold and gloom.

The greatest excitement prevailed amongst them, and the name of Tom Sayers passed their lips almost as often as that of the much-fancied Seeley.

The men had turned up at the theatre in the morning, and had been duly weighed; and, like wildfire, the news had flashed through the East End that the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks' Unknown was none other than Tom Sayers—a lad who had been reared in the slums of the East, and who was known to not a few of the rough folk dwelling there.

By the time the electric lamps outside the theatre were lighted, the crowd had grown to enormous proportions, and there was a strong body of police there to keep the pavement clear and the crowd in order.

The doors were opened at last and a rush was made, and for a moment there was fighting at the pay-boxes. Then news came that the galleries were crowded; that no seats were to be had under half-a-guinea, and a howl of disappointment went up.

"Clear the way for the ticket-holders!" cried the police, as they forced the crowd back.

Then the ticket-holders arrived, first in ones or twos, then in batches. Then Captain Atkinson came along with some of his friends, and received a rousing cheer. Then came the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks—immaculately-dressed, his cheeks flushed through the hearty dinner he had partaken of and the good wine that had followed it, and of which, maybe, he had swallowed a glass or so too much.

The crowd of ticket-holders swarmed in—many swells in

evening-dress passing through the door now. And then, the majority of the audience having arrived, the crowd waited patiently for news of the fight.

Inside the building the scene was an extraordinary one. In the galleries rows of rough-looking faces peered downward at the ring, which was set in the centre of the floor. The place was ablaze with light. Special seats had been provided for the "toffs," and men in evening-dress, smoking fine cigars, could be seen everywhere, whilst the stage was packed with them.

Several bouts were staged, and youngsters who had hopes of obtaining honours of some sort some day valiantly fought their desperate battles inside the ropes with a determination and pluck that deserved far more than the small monetary reward that was to be their lot.

And amongst the foremost seats surrounding the ring sat Bill the burglar—Bill, the man who had broken into the Hon. Archibald's house, and whom Tom had discovered in the very act of cutting a valuable oil-painting from its frame. He was dressed in a loud, but well-cut suit, and looked particularly "dossy" for him. He was smiling, and had his hat cocked on one side. He was smoking a half-crown cigar, and looked generally prosperous.

Bill had a weakness for Tom, although he and the boy had never been able to hit it in the old days—for he could never get Tom to turn thief and rogue—and he had come to see Tom make a hash of Seeley—that is, if Tom had sufficiently recovered from that crack on the head that Ted had given him to set about his man in real earnest.

Burglar Bill was as happy as you please, and he cared nought for all the world; but he was suddenly brought very much to earth by finding a man take the vacant chair beside him and feeling himself plucked by the shoulder. He gave a gasp of fright, turned, and found himself staring into the determined, cold-looking eyes of detective John Thurloe.

Bill mastered the terror that seized him by an effort.

"Bill," said Thurloe sternly, "I've been looking for you for some days now, and I thought I might find you here. You were in that burglary at the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks'."

Bill's legs shook. It was all up with him. He hadn't a million to one chance of escaping from that crowded place.

"Tom Sayers has betrayed me!" he cried, with a ferocious glance towards the door through which Tom must come on his way to the ring from the dressing-room. "I'll nail him for that!"

"You ought to know Tom Sayers better than that," said Thurloe quietly. "Nothing would ever make him betray a man, unless he knew the villain were wanted for murder."

"Who give me away, then?" asked Bill defiantly.

"I found some of the stolen goods in the possession of a receiver named Brooks," said Thurloe grimly. "Brooks is now lodged safely in prison, and he split on you. That's how, Bill. But I don't want to be extra hard on you. There's another man I want to lay my hands on—the ring-leader in this business, a scamp named Ted. Where's he to be found, Bill?"

The burglar cast his eyes around the crowd. He was in a tight corner. He knew Thurloe. The detective was more than a match for him. He would take him to the station as soon as look at him; but Thurloe didn't want him so much as Ted, and Bill felt, somehow, that Ted would be a bit better out of the way, for Ted was a poisonous snake who would turn at any time and bite the hand that fed him.

Ted had entered the building along with Captain Atkinson a little while before. Ah! Bill caught sight of him now!

"He's over there, Mister Thurloe," he said, with a jerk of his thumb in Ted's direction. "If you want him, you can take him easy enough."

Thurloe caught sight of Ted.

"Right, Bill," he said. "I'll leave a man to keep a watchful eye on you, and go and sit near my man. Him, at least, I don't mean to let go."

Thurloe shifted his seat, and Ted, all unconscious of the danger that threatened him, and thinking only of the nice bit of money he was about to make out of Tom's defeat, and of the revenge he was about to obtain over the lad he hated, was all smiles and side, showing himself off to a number of ruffianly compatriots of his, and waving his hand to some old acquaintances in the gallery.

The preliminary bouts came to an end, the last of them being fought out to a constant roar of applause, so fine a contest was it, the referee vainly calling for silence. And then the ring was cleared and prepared for the principal event of the night.

The keenest excitement prevailed. Men shouted defiance at one another.

The partisans of the respective men exchanged bets. Then the dressing-room door opened, and Tom Sayers made his appearance. Eager heads were craned forward, and when

the crowded theatre recognised Tom, and discovered beyond all shadow of doubt that Mr. Fairbanks' Unknown was Tom Sayers, a shout went up which shook the very roof.

"Bravo, Tom! Hurrah for Tom Sayers! You're the boy, Tom! Just you give it him!"

Tom was followed by Bat Horgan, and Tiger Lumley. Lumley carried the towels and sponge. Bat carried the precious bottle, which he did not intend to let out of his keeping until the fight began.

The trio stopped for a moment beside the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks' side, and Tom, smiling, shook hands with his patron.

"Feeling all right, Tom?" asked the aristocrat, speaking a little thickly, for he had been drinking with his friends since his arrival at the theatre.

"Never better, sir," answered Tom. "And my head's as right as can be. Doesn't trouble me in the least."

"Well, Tom," answered the young aristocrat earnestly, as he saw Captain Atkinson, "win for me, for I want to beat that scoundrel Atkinson. He's robbed me of a lot of money in his time, and he is a blackguard. Beat Seeley, for my sake."

"I will if I can, sir," answered Tom, and after another shake of the hand, he clambered modestly into the ring, bowed as he heard the thunder of applause ring out again, and then took a seat in his corner whilst the referee took the gloves Bat handed to him, and examined them to see that they were all right.

Then a roar announced the appearance of Seeley, of Bermondsey, the light-weight champion of England. He was a well-built lad, but he did not look so fit as Tom, and, somehow, he was not put together in quite the same compact and wonderful way.

Tom Sayers took the eye far more than the other lad.

Seeley's gloves were examined. The lads sat eyeing one another. Lumley tied Tom's gloves on. Seeley's seconds did as much for him. The audience had been shouting odds of 3 to 1 on Seeley, but as they saw the two lads, and contrasted them, and noticed how cool Tom appeared to be, the odds slackened to 2 to 1.

"They'll be on our side presently, Tom," said Bat, with a grin.

Everything was in readiness, and the master of the ceremonies was addressing the impatient audience. Bat now handed the precious bottle to Lumley, and knelt on one knee outside the ropes, ready to dart to Tom's assistance when need be. Lumley, with a deft touch, let the powder he had retained in his hand slip into the neck of the bottle, and replaced the cork. He meant to shake the bottle up first chance he got, and Tom should have some of the liquid at the earliest opportunity. Lumley held up his hand. This was a signal to Captain Atkinson that he had doped the liquid.

"Fairbanks," roared the captain, from the other side of the ring, "I'll have another £500 on with you!"

"Done!" said Fairbanks.

The next moment the lads were facing one another, had shaken hands, and the timekeeper had called out "Time!"

There were many present who expected to see Seeley settle his man in that first round, and these stared in astonishment at Tom as they saw the lad hold himself erect with every vulnerable spot well covered, and his long arms stretched out, whilst he smilingly invited Seeley to hit him.

They moved cautiously about. Tom evidently did not intend to indulge in an extraordinary amount of footwork, and Seeley, finding he could not persuade Tom to dance after him, although he indulged in a lot of side stepping and other business, paused nonplussed.

Then he came cautiously in. Tom had done little work. The audience now clamoured for the lads to go in at one another. Tom did not respond. He saw that Seeley was getting nettled, and he also wondered why his opponent, who was supposed to possess a marked superiority, did not go in to force the fighting. How could Tom guess that Seeley did not want to go in until Tom had taken some of that doctored liquor, which was enough, so Tiger Lumley had told the captain, in a letter which might have been produced in evidence against him, to render Tom silly if he even so much as rinsed his mouth out with it.

Two minutes of the round had vanished, and Tom, realising that Seeley did not intend to come at him, went in, and with his first blow knocked the light-weight champion of

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England clean off his feet, whilst a yell of utter consternation rang out.

One blow, and a knock-down! This was exciting, if you like. Tom towered above his fallen foe, but he made no attempt to hit him again, and Seeley remained down for eight seconds. Then, scrambling up, he scuttled away from Tom, who was after him now, hot with the lust of battle.

Seeley came to the centre and stood his ground, and the pair were clinching when time was called, although Tom held his gloved hands aloft to show that it was not he who did the holding.

The men were up for the second round, looking little the worse for their first venture, and Seeley began to box a little now, although he looked anxious. Well he might, for Tom had not taken any of that doctored drink as yet.

Seeley went in at Tom, but received a heavy body blow and a one, two on the head for his pains, which sent his headpiece back with a jerk, and unsettled him.

He drove in at Tom, but the latter easily dodged the blow, and then, accepting a challenge for some in fighting, drove left and right home on Seeley's body until he had the latter gasping like a fish out of water upon the ropes, and fibbed him as he pleased until at last the fellow fell out of the ring and was saved, it seemed, only by the call of time.

The round finished amidst a scene of indescribable enthusiasm. It was seen that Tom was far and away the better man. Tom returned to his corner, to be caught in the arms of Bat, and sat down upon his chair.

"Give me that bottle, Lumley!" cried Bat.

Lumley handed it to him.

"Here, Tom," said Bat, "your mouth must be dry. Just have a drop of this. It will ease your throat a bit. Swallow a little. It won't do you any harm."

Tom obeyed, and thought what a funny taste the stuff had.

Seeley noticed that Tom had partaken of the liquid. Once again Captain Atkinson stood upon his feet, shouting that he would lay two to one on Seeley.

Seeley got up with alacrity for the third bout. Tom advanced just as eagerly, and with a blow on the side of the head, knocked his man down for the second time. Seeley almost took the count, then rose, and dodged Tom a bit. Then he saw the fire die out of Tom's eyes, and went in at him like a maddened bull. Tom fought him off cleverly, but his blows lacked sting now.

What had happened? Tom seemed to be faltering. Those beside the ring looked on in amazement as the erstwhile hero of the fight seemed to become of a sudden weak upon his pins, and allowed Seeley's blows to land home.

Tom was a bit dazed at the end of the round, and Bat, rushing to him when the gong sounded, caught him up bodily and carried him to his corner.

"Ay, my lad," he cried, "what's the matter with you? What's come over you?"

Tom stared before him with dazed eyes.

"I don't know, Bat," he swooned. "I seemed to have become weak all of a sudden. My legs seem to be no part of me. I've got fire in my body. That drink I took burns me. I've lost strength. I feel as if I had taken too much to drink, and my head throbs."

"What!" cried Bat, aghast. And he seized the bottle which Lumley held out to him, and hurled it with a crash from the ring.

"No more of that!" he cried, as he set to work to try and bring Tom into shape for the next encounter.

Amidst a never-ending roar of voices, the men advanced into the centre of the ring for the fourth time. Seeley did not hesitate a moment, but went in to bustle his man. Had Tom been anything like himself, such tactics would have seen the end of Seeley. Tom would have knocked him out in a trice. But Seeley knew how things stood, and it was seen that as Tom swayed there, with his head rolling, and his hands moving feebly, would be unable to resist his man, and when Seeley at length caught him a vicious half-arm upper-cut on the jaw, and Tom fell, it was only what all had expected.

Captain Atkinson waved his opera hat in triumph. Seeley stood over Tom, his vicious under jaw thrust out, his hand ready to deliver another blow the moment Tom rose. The referee went on with the count.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine!"

"Get up, Tom!" roared Bat, frantic with despair.

"Ten!"

It was all over! Tom Sayers had lost the battle, and Seeley, the victor, was pounced upon and dragged away.

Bat went to Tom, and, bending, put his hands beneath the poor lad's arms.

"He didn't knock you out, Tom," said the old pugilist, in a broken-hearted voice. "Couldn't you get up?"

"No," answered Tom. "I found it impossible for me to move. They've drugged me, Tom."

Poor Tom was almost weeping at the treachery which had laid him low. About the ring sportsmen crowded and clamoured like madmen. They hurled their jeers and gibes at poor Tom, accusing him of selling the fight. In the body of the hall where the men fought and struggled, the pick-pockets were busy now.

The Hon. Archibald Fairbanks, after being jeered at, and triumphed over by Captain Atkinson, turned and forced his way out into the street. He would not wait for Tom or Bat. He had been the victim of foul play before, and he looked upon it all as a conspiracy to rob him, in which even Bat and Tom had played their parts to perfection. And so poor Tom was deserted. Bat took him out of the ring, and conveyed him to the dressing-room, where the poor fellow was dreadfully sick and ill.

And whilst the wild commotion was going on in the body of the hall, Bill, the burglar, deeming this the time to make his escape, elbowed his way into the crowd, cleverly tricked the detective whom Thurloe had set to keep a watch over him, and, having once gained the street, fled for life and liberty. Ted, for his part, made no attempt to get away. He was enjoying his triumph over Tom to the full, and he meant to share in the handing out of the proceeds of his villainy to Captain Atkinson. Ted reckoned he meant to have at least £100 out of this job.

When Tom had left the ring, Ted elbowed his way towards the place where Captain Atkinson stood, and had almost reached him, when a hand of iron fell upon his shoulder, and he was whirled round. He found himself face to face with a keen-eyed, clean-shaven, good-looking fellow, and his features lengthened with fright.

"Ted," said John Thurloe persuasively, "I arrest you for participation in that burglary at Mr. Fairbanks', in Mayfair, the other night. I am a detective. My name is Thurloe."

With a savage cry Ted turned to make a bolt of it, but in a moment his wrists were seized, there was a sharp snap of the handcuffs, and Ted was caught as cleanly as you please.

Ted, the gaol-bird, destined for gaol again, shook with fright.

"Captain," he cried, looking at Captain Atkinson, "you know me. Get this chap to set me free. He'll do it if you bribe him heavily enough."

"He'd better not try," said John Thurloe grimly.

Captain Atkinson, a man of the world, took in the position of affairs in a moment. He realised that he was about to get rid of Ted cheaply, and he was not sorry, for Ted might have proved himself troublesome.

"Are you speaking to me, fellow?" he said, with a sneer. "I don't know you. I've never set eyes on you in my life before."

And he turned his back on the unhappy wretch.

Thurloe had some assistants there. At a sign from him they crowded round Ted.

"Take him away," said Thurloe. "And don't let the crowd outside catch sight of him, or there might be an attempt at rescue."

The men gathered about the handcuffed Ted and forced him away.

"Captain Atkinson had Tom Sayers drugged!" shouted Ted, as they removed him. "I'll own up now. It was all a plot to rob Tom of victory. The water was drugged. Lumley was in it. I'll have the whole gang of 'em locked up. If I've got to go to gaol, they shall go to gaol, too."

Thurloe pushed Ted ahead.

"That was how it was done, was it?" he cried. "Well, I've my knife the deeper in to you for that. As for Tiger Lumley and Atkinson, they'll deny the charge, and however much one may suspect, I take it there will be little proof to show. It isn't likely either of them will be anxious to give themselves away. But you, Ted, my fine fellow, I've got you, and you're going to quod."

And so Ted, his eyes streaming with hypocritical tears, was rushed out of a side door, placed in a waiting cab, and driven to the nearest lock-up.

A few minutes later the big building was empty, the lights were turned down, and the last of the disappointed sportsmen hurried out into the street to fight the battle over again there.

That night, whilst Seeley was partaking of a champagne supper with his backer and patron, the unscrupulous Captain Atkinson, in a fashionable West End restaurant, surely the luckiest winner of a glove-fight who ever stepped into a ring, poor Tom Sayers and Bat Horgan were footing it towards the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks' house in Mayfair. Tom had recovered from the drug he had taken, but was still far from well, with a white face and a shivering body. Bat Horgan had nearly shed tears of disappointment, and was the most wretched man alive. To have worked so hard, to have got Tom so fit, to have turned Tom

out the best lad at his weight who had been seen in the ring for years, and then for the lad to have lost the battle owing to the treachery of a gang of scoundrels, was the bitterest blow Bat had ever experienced. The poor fellow was broken-hearted, and he could talk of nothing else as he walked on through the streets with his arm linked in Tom's, and his eyes set on the lad's sad but determined face.

It was late when they arrived outside the house in which Tom had trained, and which he still considered as his headquarters.

Amongst other things, Tom felt bitterly his patron's neglect of him. He thought that the Hon. Archibald Fairbanks might at least have stood by him in the moment of adversity. Surely he did not believe that Tom had sold the fight?

The Hon. Archibald Fairbanks, to tell the truth had been so enraged at the disappointment, that he had taken more champagne than was good for him after the decision was given. For the time being, his judgment was warped, and he was no longer a man of reason.

When they arrived at the house, Bat went up the front door steps and knocked at the door. A few moments later it was opened by the flunkey. He looked at them stolidly, but barred the entrance.

"Oh," he said, eyeing them coldly, "the master is indisposed, and he told me to tell you when you came that he doesn't want you here any longer."

"Did he leave that message for me as well as Tom?" asked Bat Horgan, with a snarl.

"Yes," said the flunkey loftily. "That was his message. That he is not at home to either of you. He doesn't want to see you, in fact, and he will be obliged if you will seek quarters elsewhere."

Tom's eyes flashed, and took on that steely look of determination which was characteristic of him when he found himself down on his luck.

"Will you tell Mr. Fairbanks," he said, "that, at least, Bat and I wish to explain? We want him to listen to what we have to say before he passes judgment. Will you go and tell him that?"

The man shut the door in their faces, and they heard his retreating footsteps echo along the passage.

He was back again in less than a minute.

"The master won't see either of you," he said. "You can take that as definite."

And once more the door was closed.

Tom Sayers, with Bat, retreated down the steps. Bat's face was red with indignation.

"That's what happens, my lad, when the luck goes against you!" said Bat, furious with indignation. "After what you've gone through, it ain't fair."

"Well," said Tom grimly, "there's an end of things, Bat. And I shall have to turn out into the world again to earn my living."

"You've got that £100 to draw, your side of the purse-money," said Bat. "That'll give you a start, Tom."

"I won't touch a penny of it!" cried Tom, raising his head proudly. "Not a single penny! They can give it to whatever charity they like, but I won't touch it. Mr. Fairbanks can keep it, or, better still, you Bat. I won't have it."

"Spoken like a hero, Tom," said Bat, gazing at Tom admiringly. "But we'll make you take it, and to-morrow you'll find the Hon. Archibald in a better frame of mind. He'll listen to reason then."

"He won't have the chance to," muttered Tom.

"Here, my lad," said Bat, springing up the house steps again, "I'll have another try! Do you stay there a moment."

Bat banged at the door furiously. He rang the electric bell. But no answer came to his knocking, and after a minute or so he got sick of trying. He came grumbling down the steps again, and looked for Tom.

But not a soul could he see. The street was deserted, and Tom Sayers was gone, gone to begin life afresh, and just as badly off as ever he had been in all his chequered career; when, had it not been for the unscrupulous villainy of his enemies—the arch-offender amongst whom, however, John Thuroloe, had landed in gaol—he might have been lauded as a hero that night, fawned upon and flattered beyond all reason. Instead, he was an outcast, and had tramped abroad with but a few shillings in his pocket and no roof to shelter him, his heart big with pluck and determination as he faced the world again.

The luck was dead against him. Poor Tom Sayers!

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of Tom Sayers, by A. S. Hardy, next Wednesday. Please order your copy of THE MARVEL in advance. Price 1d.)

NEXT
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GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

REDCASTLE & CO.

A School Tale of the Adventures of the Chums
of Austin Towers.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Algernon Chitterlow, aged twenty-one and always beautifully dressed and scented, hates his stepbrother, Dalton Redcastle, a young Britisher blessed with a decidedly mischievous—though open and cheery—nature. After much persuasion from Algernon, Colonel Redcastle decides to send his son to Austin Towers—a school kept by a certain Dr. Quilter, a man known far and wide as a boy-tamer. Consequently, Dalton is packed off, and put on his promise that he will deliver himself at Austin Towers.

On his way to Dr. Quilter's, Dalton meets Edward Stanley Vere Montague, and Thomas Dodd—two lads after his own heart—also bound for Austin Towers. The three arrive at the school, but are not impressed by their new companions. Rogers, a bully, and his cronies, take a violent dislike to Redcastle and Co., and the two factions frequently come to blows.

By means of a trick Algernon Chitterlow gets Dalton into a nasty scrape with a rascally bookmaker named Bunce. Luck aids Dalton, however, and he gets out of his scrape, and succeeds at the same time in extricating his worthless step-brother from the bookmaker's toils. Bunce complains to Dr. Quilter, but is shown up, and the boys eject him violently from Austin Towers. The rogue is finally chased from the scene by a panting and enraged crowd of villagers, whom he has swindled wholesale.

(Now go on with the story.)

[The Masked Juniors.

"TAKE your nose down out of the air, Monty," said Dalton next morning, "an' don't try to look knowin', for it doesn't suit you. What are you walkin' about and mutterin' for?"

Montague waved his hand airily.

"While you two rotters were messin' about with bookies and racehorses," he said, "I have matured a great idea. With your help, my trusty but thick-headed comrades, I am going to make money for the lot of us—barrels of it! You will do most of the work—I provide the brains!"

"Scrag him!" howled Tommy wrathfully.

And together they cast themselves upon the speech-maker. When he had emerged from the struggle and settled his necktie, he condescended to explain.

"Item the first," he said—"we're stony broke, or near it. There's the football sub. due, and, besides, we haven't had a feed at Rogers's for a week!"

"I'm with you there," agreed Dalton; "but cough up the idea, ducky, or we'll slay you once again!"

"As our stern parents refuse to send us any more oof, we must earn some for ourselves. Has it occurred to either of you that Westbury Fair begins this week?"

"A fair in March?" said Dalton.

"Of course; the great horse-dealing fair! It's one of the biggest in the country. There are all sorts of shows there, and lots of johnnies will make money. We've got to rake in some, too. We'll go to that fair, strictly incog., and start a show ourselves. I'll bet we do as well as any of 'em."

"What sort?"

"A boxin' show," replied Montague. "Tommy and I will lamm each other for the amusement of a brutal populace. I've sent home askin' my brother to send down the big marquee that's used for refreshments when my mater gives garden-parties. He's done it, too, and paid the carriage, like a brick. Then—"

"You're off your chump, Monty!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Shut your fat head till I've finished! We can scrape together three bob between us for capital, and we can get a moke and cart from old Jerry on tick, to hoist the things along with. It's a whole holiday on Saturday, so we'll start as soon as possible after breakfast, and take our pitch on the ground in a good place."

"But what's the good of it?" said Dalton, in bewilderment. "Who d'you think's goin' to pay good money to see a couple of kids pummel each other?"

"And, besides," said Tommy, "do you think we're goin' to start a scrapperin' match before a whole tentful of grinnin' chaw-bacons? There'd be the dickens to pay at the school when it was found out, too."

"You're a good little chap for your size, Tommy, and a

fine shot with a catty, but your head is made of duff!" replied Montague. "The population won't pay to see two kids pummel each other, as you coarsely express it. They'll pay to see the 'Mysterious Masked Boxers, famed all over the world, noted for their science and hard hitting, fightin' to a finish!" Wait till you see the placards I shall stick up all over the marquee!"

"Holy wars!" exclaimed Dalton.

"Don't you see the jape, kids?" cried Montague. "We're not such bad hands, any of us, and we can say here, without bragging, that we're more science than most, while Dolly is a real star. We'll give 'em plenty for their money, and label it the 'Sensation of the Age'! Do you twig? There's nothing on this good green earth that draws like a fight."

"By gum, no, that's true!" murmured Dalton, catching his enthusiasm. "What weight gloves?"

"Oh, regulation full-sized ones! Must play the game decently. Black silk masks safely fixed on, for all three of us. That'll preserve our giddy identity. In other words, the rude mob won't know us from Adam. And, better than that, it'll give the thing the touch of mystery that'll make it draw like a house afire."

"I believe old Monty's struck a good thing!" said Tommy, listening with all his ears.

The conclave began to get excited.

"Tommy and I will do the first big fight, under Queensberry rules, and we'll go it like fun, an' give 'em plenty for their money," continued Montague, "and Dolly can be reserve. We'll bill him an open challenge to the whole fair, to box anyone under eighteen and not over ten stone."

"I say," exclaimed Dalton, "steady on, Monty! What the dickens—"

"Look here, my dear chap," said Montague earnestly, laying his hand on Dalton's sleeve, "you know quite well you can settle any ordinary fellow of even a year or two older and a stone heavier. You're the smartest chap with your fists I've ever seen, and those left-handers of yours are simply deadly. Why, I'd back you against a tough off a race-course, if he fought fair!"

"But suppose I run against some champion light-weight, who'll simply slaughter me?" said Dalton doubtfully.

"Not at that age, dear boy, or anything like it. You'll only have to tackle some village dud who fancies himself as a slogger, and you'll make hay of him. I'd take your job on like a shot, if I was good enough."

"All right; I'm game!" said Dalton. "What about the masks and gloves? And the ropes and things?"

"I'll look after that. I've got most of 'em already."

"We shall have a tent full!" said Tommy joyfully.

"Bob a nob entrance, too!"

"No; that's too much. People think before they part with a bob. A few reserved places sixpence, and the body of the tent fourpence a head. The chap who ain't fighting, keeps the door, in his mask."

"Great idea! Shove it along!" returned Dalton.

And the resourceful three talked of ways and means and prices till school-time, longing to be at it. They thought of little else till Saturday morning dawned.

As soon as they were able, they left the school quietly, and, providing themselves with Jerry's donkey-cart, made the best of their way to Westbury railway-station, where Montague's marquee, sent from home, was waiting for them.

"I didn't realise the blessed thing was as big as this," said Montague, looking at the great bundle of canvas and jointed poles. "It's lucky the Jerusalem pony is a big 'un. We'll have to heft the poles ourselves. Good job they're jointed, and take into small pieces."

It was a pretty severe load for the boys and the humble quadruped, but somehow, by devious roads, they came within hearing of the noise and bustle of the great fair, and saw the moving crowds that filled it.

"We'll halt an' put on the masks here," said Montague, "in case some rotter from the school sees us."

They had changed into old tweeds before starting, and the rest of their luggage was in the cart. Just as they were setting out after donning the masks, a large, powerful-looking, very ragged tramp, with a face smothered in red whiskers, and wearing a glorious grin, came abreast them.

"Wot-ho, cullies!" he said, staring hard at the boys. "Wot's this, the 'Three Masked Mugs; or, the Disappearin' Till'? Or is it good old 'Maria Martin; or, the Murder in the Red Barn'? Shall I come an' 'elp yer with the props?"

Montague was about to refuse, but Dalton, who liked the look of the tramp, especially his grin, gave him a wink.

"Take the job on spec. if you like," said Dalton. "Give us lots of help, and we'll give you five bob out of whatever we make. If we make nothing, you'll get nothing."

The tramp plucked a battered keybugle from his breast, and gave a devastating toot.

"I'm on!" he said, putting it back again. "Allers game for speckylation, cullie! Me farver roined 'isself by it,

otherwise I should be prince in me own right, for 'e popped 'is crown one night just afore the pubs shut, an' lost the ticket afore 'e got home. Put me down on the bills. Five bob to nothin'!"

"Come on, then, Tired Tim," said Montague. "We'll tell you more when we know you better."

"Isn't this a bit risky?" whispered Tommy.

"We've got to have some help with all this truck," answered Dalton. "He's a big, hefty chap, and I like his looks. He'll add to the giddy fun!"

They reached the grounds of the fair, where great crowds gathered about the rings of the horses, the auctioneers, the booths, jugglers, penny-gaffs, and shooting-saloons. It was soon very evident that all the best spots had been taken, and that in the fair itself there was not room for even another wheelbarrow, let alone a marquee.

"They copped all the best pitches overnight, guv'nor," said Tired Tim; "they allers do."

"Never mind, we'll shove up the tent outside," returned Montague, "and then draw the crowd out to it afterwards. Then we sha'n't be interfered with while we're gettin' ready."

They selected a smooth piece of turf a couple of hundred yards away from the outskirts of the crowd, and there they turned the donkey out to graze, and began the work of pitching the marquee.

It was a much bigger contract than they thought, and without help they could never have done it; or, at least, it would have taken them till nightfall. But Tired Tim was invaluable. He was an old hand at tent-pitching, and he knew just where everything should go, besides which he was immensely strong, and could work hard on the rare occasions when he chose to. In an hour and a half they had the marquee fully set, all its ropes pegged out, and its flags flying.

The marquee was pitched on ground that rose up to a higher, flat surface at the back of the tent, and on this part they roped off a regulation ring. Another rope barred the reserved space for the sixpenny places, and the marquee had a little compartment of its own in one corner, some twelve feet square, which served as a dressing-room.

"Great whelks!" said Tired Tim. "Is it a prize-fight?"

"Not quite that, but a fight of sorts," said Montague.

"Well, cullies, I reckon you knows your business, but I give you the straight tip, if it's anything out o' the ordinary, you'll have ter square old Pinky Ponk."

"Who?" said Dalton.

"That's the perlitie name for old Sowerby, the mark. You know what a mark is, cullies? A copper in plain clothes, an' this perticular one is a mighty shifty sort. 'E belongs to Westbury police-station, an' he noses about places like this for wot he can touch."

"A plain-clothes bobby?" said Tommy Dodd. "Well, I dare say there's work for him in a mob like this. But it makes no difference to us; we aren't doing anything wrong."

"That's no odds, cully. You 'ave to square Pinky, or he'll queer you pretty badly."

"D'you mean he's a blackmailer?" exclaimed Montague.

"That's about it. Unless you weigh out 'alf a thick 'un, at least, with a show like this, 'e's like enough to get up a charge an' run you in, all the lot of you."

"I won't give the brute a penny!" cried Montague wrathfully. "He'd better jolly well leave us alone. Bear a hand with this banner, Tired Tim. Help me stiek it up over the door!"

"I say," said Dalton to Tommy, "did you hear that?"

"Sounds fishy—eh? I've heard of that sort of thing being done."

"I believe it's all my eye," said Dalton; "I don't believe any bobby would do it. Though I have little differences with 'em from time to time, about catapults and small matters of that sort, I like the police, and I believe they're as straight a lot of chaps as any in England."

"So they are—most of 'em; but there are black sheep in every flock, Dolly."

"This bird won't get anything out of us, because we haven't got it to give," said Dalton. "By gum! Look at Monty's placards!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story next Wednesday. Please order your copy of "The Marvel" in advance.)

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

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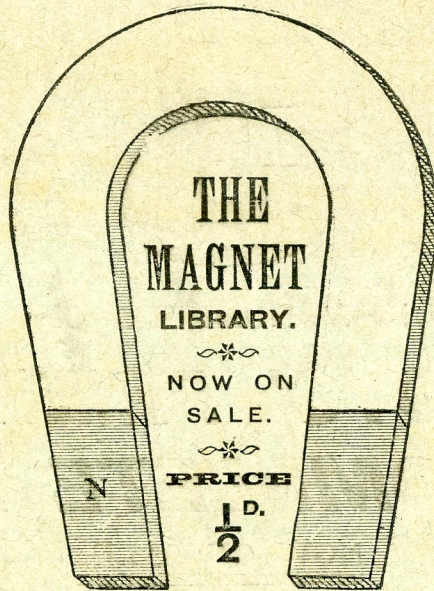
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