

Old Sleuth

**The Twin Ventriloquists: or,
Nimble Ike and Jack
the Juggler**



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Sleuth Old

The Twin Ventriloquists; or, Nimble Ike and Jack the Juggler / A Tale of Strategy and Jugglery

CHAPTER I

NIMBLE IKE ENCOUNTERS AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE
AND TWO WONDERFUL VENTRILOQUISTS PLAY PARTS AGAINST
EACH OTHER WITH ASTONISHING RESULTS.

"Great Cæsar!"

The exclamation with which we open our narrative fell from the lips of Nimble Ike, one of the most remarkable ventriloquists that ever sent a human voice rambling around through space under the most extraordinary inflectional disguises. Detectives disguise their appearance, but ventriloquists disguise their voices, and make them represent at will all manner of individualities, in the human or animal. Nimble Ike, as we have intimated, was a wonderful ventriloquist; he had played more pranks and worked more wonders with his talent than any other person possessed of the remarkable gift. He had paralyzed professionals and amazed amateurs, and with the aid of his marvelous vocal powers had performed many good deeds on the side of right and justice, forcing rogues to confessions and scaring schemers and roués out of their wits. He was a daring youth, possessing many talents other than the gift of ventriloquism to a remarkable degree. He had never met his match, and when not engaged in aiding some persecuted person or working with detectives he amused himself in various ways by an exercise of his powers. As stated, Ike had never met his match either among professionals or amateurs. He stood number one as a ventriloquist wonder. He had been told of a youth who also possessed the gift in a most remarkable manner. He had never met the youth and was led to doubt the fact that there was another who came anywhere near him. One day Ike, having nothing else to do, determined to visit the Metropolitan Museum in Central Park. He had been there before and enjoyed himself every time, but he had never attempted any of his pranks. On the occasion when we introduce him to our readers, he was standing beside a mummy case containing the linen-bound remains of some poor Egyptian who died thousands of years ago, and he was deeply interested in the description and explanations offered by a sallow-faced gentleman who was a great scientist and Egyptologist. An old maid teacher of an archæological turn of mind had chaperoned her class of young lady pupils and had secured the services of the sallow-faced man with the big spectacles to act as guide and expositor for the occasion. As stated, Ike was greatly interested in what the professor had to say; he felt quite serious and was in no mood to amuse himself, when a most startling, soul-thrilling incident occurred. The professor had all the young ladies gathered close around him like so many serious mourners standing around the casket of a deceased friend. He had been descanting in a very earnest manner and finally said:

"Now, ladies, if that mummy could speak he would."

Here the professor stopped suddenly, his spectacles fell from his face, his hands went up and his face blanched, while the young ladies fell back trembling with terror, for, from the interior of the mummy case came the astounding announcement:

"I can talk. What do you want me to tell you?"

The words came clear and distinct, and they came, as appeared, directly from the lips of the mummy; and so realistic was the declaration that one might expect to see the lurid-looking object rise in its thousands of centuries old shroud and look forth from the sunken hollows where its eyes had once beamed forth.

As stated, Ike was standing near the mummy case, but the wonderful ventriloquist was as much amazed as any one. He did not believe the mummy spoke – he was too great an expert in vocal deceptions – but he was amazed all the same, and his amazement arose from the discovery that there was one living person besides himself who could produce such amazing results. He glanced around and there was only the one party who had been standing near the mummy, and that was the professor with the ladies gathered around him. Some distance off a very trimly-built youth stood gazing at the stuffed birds in a case. Our hero had not seen his face; he could not be the vocal deceiver, however, and the question arose, Who had performed this marvelous trick? Meantime the professor had gathered his spectacles from the floor and had to a certain extent recovered from his surprise and bewilderment, and he ejaculated:

"That was most extraordinary."

He beckoned the ladies about him once again, but they came forward very reluctantly and our hero, Nimble Ike, scanned their faces to learn which one of the pretty girls was the ventriloquist who had worked the great trick. All their faces wore an expression of surprise and alarm, and he was forced to conclude that the voice magician was not one of them, and his final conclusion was that the sallow-faced scientist was the culprit – yes, the sallow-faced man with the big nose and goggles had made the inviting statement, knowing that he could seemingly make the mummy talk. His surprise and alarm, our hero concluded, was all a pretense and a part of his little joke, and it was then that Ike turning away uttered the ejaculation "Great Cæsar!" His blood was up; the professor was a wonderful ventriloquist, but Ike determined to have some sport and give the professor ventriloquist, as he appeared to be, the surprise of his life. He determined to make the mummy do some tall talking and force the professor to a betrayal of genuine surprise.

"Yes," mentally concluded Ike, "the next time you'll shed your goggles for fair."

Ike was in no hurry, however; he intended first to watch the professor and find out if he were really the vocal wonder.

The young ladies finally gathered around, for the professor's talk had really been very interesting. He said:

"Young ladies, I wish to ask you a question. What scared you?"

The ladies did not answer, and the professor again inquired:

"Were you scared by my demonstration or did you, ah – ah – well, did you hear a voice?"

One of the young ladies answered:

"We heard a voice."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it was not a delusion; no, it was not a delusion, but it was one of the most extraordinary incidents that ever occurred since the days of miracles, or, to explain it on scientific grounds, we were all so engrossed on the subject under conversation that by some singular psychologic phenomena, our imaginations were momentarily spellbound by a concentration of all the nerve forces upon a given thought, and thereby our imaginations were abnormally stimulated to such a degree as to make the extraordinary deception possible."

The girls stared, but did not comprehend the professor's explanation, although it was about as plain as scientific and medical explanations usually are.

Ike was unable to decide. The professor appeared to have fully recovered and again became rapt in the subject of his discourse. The young ladies also appeared to have recovered from their alarm and were deeply interested in all the professor said. Ike, however, had lost all interest in the lecture.

He was piqued, he did not understand how it could be that there was really another who possessed a ventriloquistic talent almost equal to his own. As stated, he watched the professor and finally the good man again arrived at a point when he said:

"If that relic of the past centuries could speak he – "

"I can speak," again came the voice from the mummy case.

The professor stared, the ladies stared, but the expression of surprise was not equal to what it had been at the first exhibition. The professor, however, came to a dead stop, he looked slowly around and finally in a husky voice remarked:

"I do not understand it."

Neither did Ike, for he was convinced that the professor was not the acrobatic vocalist. The latter, however, was a man of nerve, a genuine scientist, and he said:

"Young ladies, do not be scared; that linen-wrapped object, that corpse, that has lain swathed in its funeral habiliments for over thirty centuries, says he can speak. We will let him talk." And from the mummy case came the statement:

"I think a fellow who has been silent for thirty centuries should have a chance to get a word in."

Ike was "on to it." He was too great an expert not to fathom the mystery. He had met his match at last. He was fully assured that the lithe-looking chap who was studying the ornithological department was the ventriloquist, and our hero muttered:

"You are having lots of fun, mister, but now I'll give you a scare."

The ventriloquist stranger was still gazing in the bird case, when close to his ear came the startling announcement, seemingly from the bird case:

"What's the matter with you? Why do you disturb that poor old Egyptian who has been asleep for over three thousand years?"

Ike's test brought its result. He saw the strange youth give a start. He turned about, but he did not look at the talking stuffed bird; he turned around to see who it was that had so cleverly matched him. It was a great game all round. The professor was bewildered, the ladies were bewildered, and the young fellow at the bird case, who had bewildered every one else, was himself bewildered. In fact, Ike, the master, was the only one who at that moment held the key to the whole mystery, and knew just what it was all about.

Ike enjoyed his momentary triumph, and so for a few moments nothing startling occurred.

The professor kept repeating, "This is most extraordinary," and the balance of his party evidently thought so.

The young man who had been looking in the bird case, however, as it proved, was a "Jim Dandy," as the boys say. He was not to be kicked out so easily. He also, as our narrative will prove, was an expert and a very brave and resolute lad. He walked around looking into several cases for a few moments and then quietly edged over toward the mummy case around which still lingered the professor and his party, and Ike realized that a most remarkable duel was portending – a duel between two wonderful vocal experts. Our hero had fully identified the young man on whom he had retorted as the individual who had made the mummy speak.

"I'll have first shot," thought Ike, and as the young man passed close to a second mummy case and stood a moment looking at the bandaged face as a "throw off," the relic of a thousand years appeared to say to him in a hoarse whisper:

"Look out, young man, look out, you may get hit with a club made three thousand years ago."

There was a perplexed look upon the young man's face for a moment, and then his bright, clear eyes wandered around and he too fell to a discovery, as he believed.

The professor meantime had become exceedingly nervous and he said:

"I believe I will adjourn the lecture for to-day."

As the professor spoke, there came a voice from the mummy case saying:

"Yes, you had better adjourn it forever, for you don't know what you are talking about."

The professor advanced close to the mummy case to gaze directly at the lips of the three-thousand-year corpse. He was determined to solve the mystery, but as he bent over the venerable object there came an unearthly yell that froze the blood in his veins. He leaped back, the young ladies ran screaming away and there would have been a great scene were it not that at the time there were no other persons in that particular department of the museum.

The professor led the way down to the office to tell his wondrous tale, while the young man who had first started the joke approached and gazed intently on the face of our hero, the great Nimble Ike. The latter returned the gaze and for a few moments it was a duel of stare; neither appeared disposed to open the conversation, while in the mind of each there dawned a suspicion, and finally the young stranger mustered up sufficient courage to ask:

"Say, young fellow, who are you?"

CHAPTER II

A MUTUAL RECOGNITION FOLLOWS BETWEEN TWO WONDERFUL VENTRILOQUISTS AND AT ONCE THEY COMMENCE TOGETHER THEIR EXTRAORDINARY PRANKS.

Ike did not conclude to reveal his identity at once, and met the question with a similar one:

"Say, young fellow, who are you?"

"I asked first."

"Did you?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"It's your place to answer."

"Do you want an answer?"

"I do."

"I'll tell you something: you asked the wrong person. Go and ask that stuffed owl who I am."

The young man stared.

"You want an answer to your question?"

"Oh, come off," said the young stranger.

"That settles it," said Ike.

There came a smile upon the face of the youth and he caused a voice to come like a halloo from away down the other end of the room, inquiring:

"Say, owl, who is this young chap?"

Ike was amazed, but the owl uttered its peculiar hoot and answered seemingly: "He's the devil himself."

The halloo came again.

"I thought so, for he is not square; he don't keep his promises."

"Why not?" asked the owl.

"He promised you should tell who he was."

There came a hoot and an owlish sort of laugh, with the statement:

"His name is Isaac Andro."

"Nimble Ike?" came the halloo.

"Yes;" and the owl added: "Now it's your turn to keep your promise."

The halloo came in answer:

"I am Jack the Juggler."

Ike at once advanced, offering his hand and saying:

"Shake, old fellow, I am glad to meet you. I've heard about you."

"And I've heard about you. I am delighted to meet you."

"And I am delighted to meet you," answered Ike.

"We must be friends."

"Sure."

"We can have a heap of fun."

"We can."

"We are against the deck."

"We are."

"Will you visit me at my home?" said Ike. "Go with me now."

"I will be delighted."

"Do you live in the city?"

"I did live here, but I've broken up my home."

The two wonderful lads wandered off together – Ike the ventriloquist, and Jack the juggler, also a ventriloquist and hypnotist.

The two soon arrived at Ike's house and the latter showed his guest all through his place, exhibiting his contrivances. Ike ordered a meal sent in and the two remarkable geniuses sat down in a very social conversation.

Ike told his strange, weird story, all about the old necromancer and the mysterious box. And Jack told all about himself, and finally Ike said:

"See here, we are two of a kind."

"We are."

"Let's become partners."

"I am agreed."

"Take up your abode with me."

"On one condition."

"Name your condition."

"I am to share the expense of living in this house."

"Agreed, as it don't cost much to live."

Neither of the lads had told their romance. They had only told the simple story of their lives, and when the meal was over they commenced by mutual consent to practice together, and so several days passed. Ike with his unusual brightness invented a signal code so they could converse with each other and no one else understand their talk. One evening the two lads were playing a game of billiards together in a well-known billiard room, when a very handsome young fellow entered, whom Ike at once introduced to Jack as his friend, Henry Du Flore. Ike and Du Flore held a few moments talk and then Du Flore departed. The moment he was gone the ventriloquist said to his new comrade:

"That young man is a detective."

"He don't look like one."

"He is a splendid officer, brave, shrewd and persistent. I have several detective friends, but I've taken quite a fancy to this young fellow and I am aiding him all I can."

"Is he a Frenchman?" asked Jack.

"No, he is an American born. His father was an engineer on an ocean steamer. He was drowned when Henry was quite a lad. Henry was left an orphan at an early age, compelled to knock around and pick up a living as best he could. He got appointed on the police force, won promotion and is now a regular detective. I want him to make a great success, and I am aiding him all I can."

"I took a fancy to him at the first glance," said Jack.

"I am glad of that."

"Yes, I am in with you and when we can do him a good turn we will."

"I am much obliged to you, and we can aid him right now. He has been assigned to run down some burglars who are infesting a section of country over in Jersey. The gang has become very daring. They are very expert and the losses of the people have been heavy; they have raised a fund which is offered as a reward for the capture of the thieves. The chief in New York is anxious to aid the officials across the river and has detailed my friend Henry on the case. It will be a big thing for the young officer if he can run down those thieves."

"We will secure the big thing for him," said Jack. "I've had a little experience in detective work."

"So I've heard."

"When does he start in?"

"I am to hear from him later."

The two ventriloquists finished their game and walked over to a table where two experts were playing a great game in presence of quite a crowd of witnesses. Ike and Jack were both very fond of the game, although neither of them could play an expert game, with all their talents; their genius

did not run in this direction. It is remarkable that a great many men who are expert in one direction are singularly deficient in others. There was a party of young smart Alecs watching the game. They were very boisterous and demonstrative – really interfered with the players – and they were very unmannerly in several ways, pushing forward and crowding quieter people in a very rude manner. Ike and Jack fixed their eyes on the dudes and then exchanged glances; and that exchange of glances meant a little fun for the tricksters and discomfiture for the boisterous dudes, the sons of rich men who because of their social position were permitted to cut up their capers where better youths would have been kicked out of the place. The dudes every few moments would break through the crowd and go to the bar, and upon their return they would push through to the front, shoving others aside as though the balance of the beholders were mere serfs; and in pushing through upon one of their returns, Ike became their victim. The young ventriloquist did not submit to be pushed so rudely and said:

"See here, Mister Man, you should wear better clothes. You are such a pusher you should have gotten ahead in the world."

The youth stared and the bystanders laughed. The joke was a good one. Many times it could be applied in a crowd, for there are so many rude people who appear to think there is no one in the world besides themselves.

"Don't you like it?" demanded the pusher.

"Oh, yes, I like it," answered Ike with a laugh. "It's quite an honor to be knocked around by a thing like you."

"I'll punch you in the head if you say much."

"Oh, I won't say much. I'll be as quiet as a lamb. I won't even bleat. It's all right; excuse me for being in your way. I am proud – very proud – to be knocked aside, certainly."

At that moment there came a voice asking:

"Why don't you rap that dude on the head?"

The dude looked around to learn who had offered the bold suggestion, and then demanded:

"Who spoke then?"

"I did," came a voice, but no one appeared to know just who the "I did" was. But there came the suggestion:

"Don't look so fierce. You're around to swipe pocketbooks, you are. I advise these gentlemen to be on the lookout."

The three dudes all closed in close to each other. Their faces were white with rage and they had just liquor enough in them to be anxious for a brawl, and one of them said:

"I'll give a hundred dollars to know who spoke."

"What will you give?" came the voice.

Ike stood still and apparently as mute as a sexton at a funeral.

"You haven't got a hundred cents; you just hung your last drink at the bar."

"You're a liar," came the declaration from one of the dudes.

"And you're a thief, or let's see your money."

The dude went down in his pockets, drew forth a roll and exclaimed, as he waved it aloft:

"Here's my money. A hundred to ten you are a liar, and a hundred to one you dare not show your face."

"Here I am."

The voice sounded as though the speaker stood directly in the midst of the trio of dudes. The "chappies" looked at each other in amazement.

"Send for an officer," came a voice. "I've lost my pocketbook."

It appeared as though the voice came from the opposite side of the crowd to where the dudes were standing.

The dudes were dumfounded; indeed, the game was stopped and the owner of the billiard hall walked over to learn what the row was. Very well, at this point the row commenced. One of the youths, calling the proprietor of the hall by name, said, or seemed to say:

"You go away from here, you duffer. We own this place and don't want any of your interference."

The declaration took the proprietor's breath away for a moment. He just stood and gazed, when another of the youths appeared to say:

"Charley, why don't you smash Decker in the jaw? What business has he to come around here and interfere with our fun?"

"Who are you talking to?" demanded the proprietor, his face white with rage.

"*You*," seemingly came the answer from the dude.

The proprietor could stand no more. He made a rush. He did not care at that instant if the dudes were the scions of the governor of the state. He grasped the chap who it appeared had given him the insolence by the loose part of his trousers and the collar of his coat, and he walked him French fashion toward the door. The youth made a vigorous protest. His friends also joined in, when the bartender rushed from behind the counter and seized another of the "chappies," and a guest who was a vigorous fellow seized the third one; and then commenced a grand march toward the street door, and each one of the dudes was thrown into the street and a kick was administered to each as he was thrust out. Poor dudes! they had not been guilty of the particular sin for which they suffered, but they deserved all they got, just the same, for they had made nuisances of themselves.

Jack and Ike left the place. They were delighted with the rebuke they had administered, but the fun was not over. The three dudes were standing at the corner of the street talking over their grievances. They espied Ike and Jack and one of them said:

"There are the fellows who drew us into this trouble."

"Let's hammer them."

Neither Ike nor Jack were formidable-looking chaps, and the dudes sailed for them. Well, a lively scene followed. The two ventriloquists were both lithe, active athletes, and the way they polished off the "chappies" was a sight to behold, and they were having a heap of fun when suddenly both were seized by the collars of their coats and found themselves in the grasp of two stalwart policemen.

Neither lad was scared. They did not mind their arrest on such a trivial charge at all, and they were led off. Ike asked by signal:

"What shall we do?"

"What do you think?" came the answer.

"Shall we be locked up and raise old Cain in the station house, or shall we make these officers dance right here?"

"Let's make them dance," came the answer.

The lads struck a good chance even as the word was passed. They were passing a tenement house and a man had just raised a window to close the shutters or something, when there came as though from the man a mad cry of "fire!" The officers stopped short, and again there came several cries, seemingly from different parts of the house. The officers let go their hold upon their prisoners. A fire in a tenement house was a far more serious matter than the arrest of two youths for fighting in the street. As stated, the lads were released, and they darted away to secure hiding places from which they could witness the fun and excitement, and there was excitement. One of the officers rapped for assistance and the second one ran to the fire-alarm box to give the signal, and officer number one made a rush to the house. He found the door open and he ran up the stairs shouting "fire! fire! fire!" The tenants rushed from their apartments and there followed a scene of wild confusion, and while the yelling and screaming were at their height two engines arrived, also a platoon of police, and the firemen of the engine company entered the house, but still there was no sign of either fire or smoke. A thorough examination followed. No signs of a fire could be discovered. The sergeant in charge of

the platoon of police asked the two officers who had given the alarm where they had seen the fire. They protested they had not seen any fire, but that a man had raised the window of one of the front rooms and had shouted "fire!" The firemen meantime were thoroughly convinced that there was no fire, and they were mad at being called out on a fake alarm. They commenced to abuse the police, who protested that the cry had come from the house. The tenants had all returned to their rooms and they also had been loud in their protests and threatened to make a complaint at headquarters.

"From what room did the cry come?" asked the sergeant.

The two policemen pointed out the room. The sergeant, accompanied by the two officers, went up to the room. There were several very respectable men in the room and they all protested that they had given no alarm. All declared that they were prepared to swear that they had not. The sergeant was bothered, and said to the two patrolmen:

"This matter must be explained."

"We did hear a cry of fire."

"No one else appears to have heard it."

"We heard it."

"Where is your proof?"

One of the officers said:

"I wish we could find those two lads. They heard it."

"We can't find them."

The two men were ordered to report at the station house to answer charges for their lark, as the sergeant termed it. Other men were put on the beat and our two ventriloquists crawled forth from their hiding-places and Ike said:

"That was a pretty severe joke."

"Yes, it was very amusing."

"We must do something to save those men or they may be broke."

"How can we do it?"

"We can."

"How?"

"We'll rattle the sergeant on the same scheme," came the answer.

CHAPTER III

THE VENTRILOQUISTS DO RATTLE THE SERGEANT AND HIS PLATOON AND AGAIN RAISE OLD CAIN IN A MOST REMARKABLE MANNER.

The two vocal experts fell to the trail of the sergeant and his platoon, but kept well out of sight. They were determined to set the two patrolmen right after getting them in such a bad scrape. The whole charge against them was having claimed that they had overheard cries of fire. The sergeant was discussing the matter with the roundsman when suddenly from a private house before which at the moment they were passing came a series of wild, frantic screams, and the next instant the screams were followed by cries of "fire! fire!"

"Well," exclaimed the sergeant, "it's a fire this time. Run to the alarm box and summon the engines."

The roundsman dashed off to give the alarm and the sergeant ran up the stoop of the house and commenced to bang on the door with his club, and the two ventriloquists were enjoying the joke. The door of the house was opened by a gentleman enveloped in a dressing-gown, who in great excitement demanded:

"What in thunder do you want?"

With equal excitement the sergeant demanded:

"Where is the fire?"

"What fire?"

"The fire in this house."

"There is no fire in this house."

"Then why in thunder did you yell 'fire, fire?'"

"No one yelled fire. What is the matter with you?"

The owner of the house discerned that it was a sergeant of police to whom he was talking. "Have you gone crazy?" he asked.

"Gone crazy! No; but what did you mean by yelling fire?"

"I did not yell fire. Every one in this house has been in bed a long time."

"Who was it screamed?"

"No one screamed."

"Do you mean to tell me you did not yell fire?"

"No one yelled fire."

"And no one screamed in this house?"

"No one screamed."

At that moment the engines reappeared and the owner of the house said:

"I'll have this matter inquired into. If this is a joke you will find it an expensive one."

The foreman of the engine company approached and demanded:

"Where is the fire?"

"There is no fire," said the owner of the house.

"No fire?"

"No fire, and I don't know what the officer means by banging on my door and arousing my family at this hour of the night."

"And I can't understand," said the foreman, "what he means by calling out the engines every five minutes on a false alarm."

"There is my platoon of men, there is my roundsman. They will all testify they heard a cry of fire, followed by screams, coming from this house."

"Then your platoon of men and your roundsman will testify to a falsehood," said the house owner.

"Is there a fire in your house?" demanded the foreman of the engine company.

"No, sir."

"Is there a fire anywhere around here?"

"No, sir, not that I know of, unless it's in the upper story of these policemen."

"Say, sergeant, let me ask you one question: Have you received orders to test our department by these false alarms?"

"No, sir, I'll swear and prove that there came an alarm of fire from this house."

"That's what your men said down at the tenement house. I reckon it's a night off for the police department, or else they all want a night off. But let me tell you, if you didn't receive orders to give these fake alarms I'll know the reason why you did give them; that's all."

The sergeant was clear beat out. He apologized to the owner of the house, went down among his men and asked:

"Did you men hear those screams?"

"We did," came the answer.

"Did you hear the cries of 'fire, fire?'"

"We did," came the answer.

"All right; we'll find out about this."

"How are you going to find out all about it, sergeant?" popped in the roundsman.

"I don't know."

The roundsman was a friend of the two men who had been sent to the station house in disgrace, and he again asked:

"How about Jones and O'Brien?"

"I've been thinking about them."

"We heard it; they claim they heard the cries. I don't see how they can be held responsible."

"I don't know what to think of it."

"Can I advise?"

"Yes."

"Send the two men back on post and say nothing about the whole affair. That's my advice."

"Roundsman, it's all very strange."

"It is."

"It's one of the mysteries of the century."

"It is."

"I am not crazy. I'd think so, only we could not all go crazy."

"I'll swear I heard the cries."

The platoon started for the station house. The men were all greatly mystified, but a greater mystery was yet to confront them. The ventriloquists had been witnesses of the result of their pranks and determined to press the matter along. They followed the platoon at a safe distance, one of them going around the square so that they approached the station from opposite quarters. The men were just in the station; the last man was passing the door when right at his ears sounded a wild, unearthly yell, followed by the cry of "Fire! fire! fire!" The man stood like one paralyzed, then the sergeant rushed into the street. Not a soul was near, and yet even while he stood there again right at his ear sounded the weird cry, "Fire! fire! fire!" The man was dumfounded. He stood and gazed in wild dismay. The sergeant at the desk came rushing forth, demanding:

"What's the matter? Where's the fire? What are you all standing here for?"

"Do you think there is a fire?"

"Didn't you hear the cry?"

"Yes; did you?"

"I did."

"Then go find the fire. We've heard cries of fire all the night, but devil a fire can we find."

Jack and Ike had had fun enough in that one direction and they started off toward Ike's home. They had not gone far, however, when they struck another little adventure – a very peculiar one. Indeed, possessing their singular talents they were continually running into adventures, as their gifts gave them great powers in every direction. A little girl had stopped a crabbed, sleek-looking old gentleman and had asked him for alms. The man had said:

"Go to the station house," and he spoke in cruel, hard tones. The girl with a sigh turned away, and Ike said:

"Let's give that old skinflint a dose."

"Agreed," came the response.

Ike ran forward and dropped a silver dollar in the girl's hand and then slid along and joined Jack. The two secured advantage ground, for the old gentleman had stopped to gaze in the windows of one of the great hotel restaurants. Suddenly there sounded in his ears:

"Cruel, cruel old man!"

The old gentleman looked around in every direction and saw no one near him, yet the words had sounded, as stated, close beside his ear. While he was still gazing again there came a voice, saying:

"Cold, cold-hearted!"

The old gentleman looked around in an amazed manner, and with anger in his heart, but he saw no one. He became a little bewildered, when again there came a voice saying:

"Go to the station house! Go to the station house!"

The old man turned pale. It was the most mysterious incident of his whole life, and again came the words:

"Go to the station house!"

The admonition sounded close in his ears, and yet there was not a living soul near him that he could see. He began to tremble, and again, even while he glanced around, the voice repeated:

"Please give me money for bread," and there came the response in exact imitation of the old man's tones:

"Go to the station."

"Great Mercury!" ejaculated the man. "I am pursued by a phantom."

"Yes, you are pursued by a phantom, you who refused to give a poor child money for bread."

"I'll give the next child I meet a dollar," murmured the old man in trembling tones.

"You promise?"

"I do."

"All right; I'll leave you until my presence is required again. Good-night."

The old gentleman moved toward his home, and it is to be hoped he became a more charitable man.

The two lads started on their way and were moving on up Fifth Avenue when Ike, who was quick-eyed and observant, saw a man rush out of a hallway. The fellow's actions were suspicious and our hero remarked to his companion:

"Hello! Jack, there is something going on here."

The two lads determined to trail the man. They saw him go up the street, where he joined a second man. The ventriloquists stole up close, and both being lithe and active they were able to secure a position very near where the two men stood, and they heard one of them ask:

"Are you sure it's dead easy?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure you have the right house?"

"Yes."

"That woman is very smart."

"She is?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I've been watching her for weeks. There is something strange about her and her movements, but she's got the stuff; of that I am sure. She lives alone in that big house with only one servant – an old man – whom we can silence in about two minutes. She is a stranger in New York, and does not appear to have any friends. If we can get in there and away again we can make a big haul, and all in good movable swag. I'll bet she's got twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds alone, and where there are so many sparks there are other fireworks, you bet."

Ike and Jack appreciated that, indeed, they had "tumbled on to a big thing." The men did not talk in particularly low tones; no one appeared to be near them.

"We need a big haul."

"We do."

"I am run way down."

"I am also."

"We struck a big thing when we followed that woman from Boston."

"We did."

"We are not known in New York and the scent will be on natives."

"That's it exactly. We can get away with our haul, return to Boston and read the papers and learn how these smart New York officers are closing in on the robbers."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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