

Brereton Frederick Sadleir

# Under the Chinese Dragon: A Tale of Mongolia



Frederick Brereton

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# F. S. Brereton

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### CHAPTER I

#### Ebenezer speaks his Mind

Mr. Ebenezer Clayhill was a man who impressed his personality upon one, so that those who had once obtained but a passing glimpse of him could not fail but recognise him, however long afterwards.

'Fust it's his nose what strikes yer,' had declared old Isaac Webster, when ensconced with his bosom friends of an evening down in the snug parlour of the 'Three Pigeons.' 'It's just the most almighty one as ever I seed, and I've seed a power of noses, I have, Mr. Jarney.'

He sniffed and looked across at that individual, as if he challenged him to disprove the statement, or even to doubt it; for Jarney was a cross-grained fellow, an old weather-beaten boatman, into whose composition quite a considerable quantity of salt seemed to have been absorbed. The man was short in stature and in manner. There was an acidity about his voice which made him the reverse of popular, though when he held forth in the cosy parlour of the public-house there were few who failed to listen; for Jarney had travelled. Unlike Isaac Webster, he had not been a stay-at-home all his days, but had seen things and people which were strange for the most part to the old cronies who gathered together of an evening. No one dare dispute Jarney's statements, for to do so was to lay oneself open to a course of scathing, biting sarcasm, in which Jarney excelled.

Isaac coughed, finding that Jarney had failed to answer. 'I've seed a power of noses, I have, Mr. Jarney,' he repeated in his most solemn tones.

The boatman, comfortably quartered in a huge arm-chair in the centre of the circle about the blazing fire, twisted his eyes round till they were fixed on the speaker. He pulled the short clay which he was smoking out of his mouth with a hand bearing many a tar stain, and contemplated it with much interest. His lips curled back in what was meant to be a derisive smile, then back went the pipe between his toothless gums.

'You've seed a sight of noses, you have, Mr. Webster,' he growled. 'Well, so has we all. There's noses all round us most of the day. I could yarn to yer about a nigger man 'way out in the Caroline Islands who'd a nose that you couldn't pass in a day's walk, it war that big and attractive. But you was talkin' of this here Ebenezer Clayhill.'

'Him as ain't long come to these parts,' interposed another of the men gathered about the fire. 'Him as you're acting gardener to, Mr. Webster.'

'Or rather, him as has gone and married the lady as you've been gardener to this three years past,' ventured a third. 'Mrs. Harbor that was; now Mrs. Ebenezer Clayhill.'

Webster nodded at the circle. It was true enough that he was gardener at 'The Haven,' the house occupied by Mrs. Clayhill, and it was also true enough that that lady had recently married; for but a few months before she had been known as Mrs. Harbor. The folks at Effington, a little fishing hamlet along the Hampshire coast, were sufficiently acquainted with the lady already; for in a small place there is not much news, and what there is quickly becomes common property. But Mr. Clayhill was a recent importation, of whom the villagers were as yet almost ignorant, so that Isaac Webster, who, naturally enough, had better opportunities of knowing him than the others at Effington, had been called upon to give his opinion on his new master.

'Well, as I was sayin', when I was interrupted,' Isaac began again, glaring across at the old salt lounging in his chair, 'I was sayin' that the fust thing you notice is his nose, it's that big and red. I'd

swear to it in a court of law without a quiver. Then there's his eyes; ain't they sharp, just! For the rest of him, I don't know as there's much to say. He seems a pleasant-spoken gentleman, though I ain't so sure as he don't want already to cut down wages.'

The announcement, short as it was, provided food for conversation for the rest of that evening, and we may be sure that Mr. Ebenezer was as frankly and as completely discussed in the parlour of the 'Three Pigeons' as he had ever been in his life before. But we were saying that he was a man who impressed his personality upon every one, and Isaac was not by any means wrong when he stated that Ebenezer's nose was the chief characteristic. It arrested one's attention at the first instant, till one realised that further scrutiny would be a rudeness, and promptly fixed one's gaze on some other part of his person. Elsewhere there was not much that was favourable; for the gentleman who had so recently married Mrs. Harbor was some fifty years of age, and had a decidedly shifty air. His eyes were placed closer together than is customary, while his jowly cheeks, his pendulous eyelids, and the lines and seams about his face seemed all to accentuate the immediate impression of distrust which he inspired. For the rest, he was moderately tall, stout and broad-shouldered, and very bald.

Three months after his marriage, when he had settled down at 'The Haven,' Mr. Ebenezer Clayhill was engaged one day within his study. The morning post had brought him a number of bulky documents, and these lay spread out before him. One in particular seemed to occupy his attention, for he perused its contents for the third time at least, and sat regarding the lines thoughtfully. Slowly, as he took in the meaning of the document, his fat hands came together and he rubbed them over one another, as if he were particularly pleased. His small pig-like eyes lit up ever so little, while the lines across forehead and face smoothed themselves out a trifle.

'We have pleasure in informing you that this matter is now satisfactorily concluded,' he read, again beginning to go through the document. 'As we have advised you from time to time the question of Mr. Harbor's fate was one for the courts to deal with, and delay was inevitable. But we are now able to report that the Judge in chambers gave us leave to presume Mr. Harbor's death, on the evidence provided, and which, we may say, seemed to us to be absolutely conclusive. This being so, there is now no reason why Mrs. Harbor, as the executrix of the will of the late Mr. Harbor, should not at once proceed to obtain probate on it. For this purpose we shall hold ourselves at your disposal, and beg to remain. – Faithfully yours,  
*Jones & Jones,*  
*Solicitors.*

*P.S.*– We are in error in saying that Mrs. Harbor as executrix, etc. Of course, it should have been Mrs. Ebenezer Clayhill. We beg to apologise.'

The reader may wonder why such a short and apparently unimportant letter should occupy Mr. Ebenezer so greatly, and we hasten at once to supply that necessary information which will enable him to understand matters completely. After all, with every fact before him, the reader can hardly fail to comprehend Ebenezer's pleasure, for the letter before him practically relieved him of all further worry as to the wants of this life. A needy fellow till three months ago, Ebenezer, with that communication before him, felt that he had no longer any need to scheme, no cause to lay crafty plans and carry them out with much guile and cunning; for his wife would benefit under the will mentioned, and with her, as a natural consequence, Ebenezer himself.

But still Mr. Clayhill was not quite satisfied in his own mind as to this fortune upon which he could now almost put his hand; and for some three hours he paced his study, occupying himself sometimes in a listless, harassed manner with the documents on the table, while he awaited the coming of a member of the firm of solicitors who had written to him.

'Shan't feel quite sure till I've had a talk with this fellow,' he told himself, screwing his eyes up, while a deep line grooved his brow, which added not at all to his attractiveness. Indeed, at such

moments Ebenezer looked more like a malefactor than a peaceful country gentleman. 'Shan't feel comfortable or safe till I've had a chat, and not then till the money is in the bank. Ah, there's David. A hulking big lout to be sure! Seems to me the time has arrived when he should do something for his living.'

The ugly frown was accentuated as Mr. Ebenezer looked out of his window. The latter faced the wide, gravelled drive of 'The Haven,' and gave an uninterrupted view down it as far as the gate, and beyond to the edge of the village. And following his gaze one saw a lad mounted on a fine horse, riding towards the house. He was some fifty yards distant, so that a clear view of him was to be obtained, and though Ebenezer had ventured to term the youth hulking, there were few who would have agreed with him; for David Harbor was slim, if anything, and, as well as it is possible to judge of a youth when mounted, of a good height. One thing was very certain; he sat his horse splendidly, as if accustomed to the saddle, and though the animal was without doubt spirited, as he proved now that he was on the gravelled drive by curvetting and prancing, David managed him with hand and knee and voice as only an accomplished horseman can do. For the rest, the youth seemed to be some eighteen years of age, was decidedly fair, and by no means ill-looking. Even as Ebenezer regarded him with a scowl David wore a sunny smile, unconscious of the unfriendly eyes that were scrutinising him. But a second later he caught a view of Mr. Ebenezer, and at once the young face became serious and thoughtful, while David returned the scrutiny with an honest glance that caused the other to turn hastily away.

'A hulking lout is what I call him, and Sarah agrees,' muttered Ebenezer. 'That is a comfort. When I married her I had fears that this stepson of hers might create trouble between us. But I was wrong; Sarah thinks as little of him as I do. We'll soon send him about his business; then there'll be no riding of fine horses, or idling the hours away if I know it. David shall work for his living, as I had to. He shall learn what it is to be pinched, and then, if he does not behave himself, he'll be thrown completely on his own resources. What luck that old Harbor left things as he did!'

'Looks as if he'd like to eat me,' was the remark David made to himself as he rode round to the stables. 'I've seen a row coming these past two weeks since he and mother came back home. He doesn't like me any better than – but there, I'll not say it. Only I've a feeling that I'm not wanted here. I'm in the way; I'm expensive. My living costs money; that's what I'm being rapidly made to feel.'

He slid from his saddle, unbuckled the girths, and having placed it on a wooden horse outside the harness room, led the beast into the stable. Within five minutes of his disappearance there a cab drove up to the door, and Mr. Edwin Jones, the solicitor, was announced. At once he was ushered into Mr. Ebenezer's room, and was presently seated in an arm-chair. From that point of vantage he surreptitiously scrutinised Mr. Ebenezer.

'Queer old boy,' he told himself. 'Lor', what a nose! And I don't like his looks altogether. But then, he's a client; that's sufficient for me. Ahem!'

Mr. Ebenezer picked up the letter which had attracted so much of his attention.

'I wanted to ask some questions,' he said. 'There is now, I presume, no further doubt as to this matter. Mrs. Clayhill is entitled to proceed with the will left in your possession by Mr. Harbor?'

'Ahem! that is so,' admitted the solicitor. 'As mentioned in our letter, and carrying out your instructions, we applied to the courts, and the judge before whom the matter came has gone into the evidence fully, and has given leave to presume Mr. Harbor's death. That being so, the way is clear to prove the will and obtain probate. There can be no hitch, unless, of course, ahem! – unless another later will is forthcoming.'

'Quite so, quite so,' exclaimed Mr. Ebenezer, hurriedly, 'But there is no other will. Mr. Harbor left England three years ago for China. You are aware that he was fond of unearthing old matters dealing with buildings and *objets d'art*. He was attacked by Boxers and killed. He executed this will two years previously, on his marriage to Mrs. Clayhill, and, undoubtedly, he saw no reason to alter it.'

'Of course not, of course not,' came from the solicitor. 'Only, there is the son. This will leaves a small sum for his maintenance and schooling up to the age of twenty-one. Afterwards he comes in for two thousand pounds. Not much, Mr. Clayhill, for an only child, when the estate is so large, roughly eighty thousand pounds.'

The gentleman who was seated in the arm-chair coughed deprecatingly, and glanced swiftly across at Mr. Ebenezer. He did not like the ugly frown which showed on his client's face, as he surveyed him.

'Glad I'm not David,' he told himself. 'And from what I have learned I can't help feeling that Mr. Harbor must have executed a later will. But there you are; it is not to be found. We have no information about it, while our late client is undoubtedly dead, killed out in China. It's bad luck for David; I like the boy.'

'Perhaps,' he said, a moment later, 'you will obtain Mrs. Clayhill's signatures to these documents, when we can at once set about proving the will. As I am nominated as co-executor with Mrs. Clayhill, I can complete them when I return to the office. I shall of course leave the payment of David's allowance to Mrs. Clayhill.'

Mr. Ebenezer beamed when at length his visitor had gone. He rubbed his hands together craftily, and then blew his enormous nose violently.

'Well, Sarah, what do you think of that?' he asked, looking across at Mrs. Clayhill, who had joined him in his room. 'The matter is practically finished. The will is to be proved in the course of a few weeks, and then we can settle down. There will be no questions to ask, and none to answer.'

'And so far as I am concerned, no answers forthcoming,' replied his wife. 'After all, it is true that Edward wrote to me from China just before his death, saying that he was settling his affairs again, in other words that he was making a new will. But what is the good of mentioning that? If he did as he intimated, no new will has been found. Besides, I have reason to know that any alteration would not have been to my benefit. Edward had of late been a worry to me.'

At the back of her mind Mrs. Clayhill remembered how she had come to marry Edward Harbor. He was then forty years of age, and possessed of one boy, David. His wife had died some years before, and there was no doubt that Edward in selecting his second wife had chosen one whom he imagined would willingly travel with him. But, after a year or more of life in England, Mrs. Clayhill had resolutely refused to stir a foot out of the country. Edward, to his great sorrow, had to go alone, leaving David in his wife's charge. Moreover, there was little doubt but that once her husband was out of sight, Mrs. Clayhill had endeavoured to forget him, and that with some success, so that Edward received only the most fragmentary letters, with long intervals between. Taking all the circumstances into consideration, it was but natural that Edward Harbor, smarting under the treatment meted out to him by a wife, to whom at the time of their marriage he had willed almost all his possessions, should have made drastic alterations. Let us say at once that he had made a new will, only the latter, owing to his untimely death, had never reached the hands of his solicitors. Nor was there any record of it in China. Mrs. Clayhill, it seemed, was the only one who knew that a change had been made, and she had craftily not uttered a word on the subject. So it happened that David was to be robbed of his father's possessions, while his stepmother, who had disliked the lad from the beginning, with Mr. Clayhill, the husband she had acquired after the death of Mr. Harbor, were to come in for all the money, knowing all the while that, though such a step was legal, it did not represent Edward Harbor's wishes.

'And the boy – what of him?' asked Mrs. Clayhill tartly.

Ebenezer grinned; matters were going splendidly for him. 'Oh, David,' he said. 'He's got to learn what it is to work; I'll send him up to a city firm. No more idling or riding blood horses for him, my dear.'

It was a heartless arrangement, and one is bound to admit, from the acquaintance we have already of Mr. Ebenezer, it was to be expected of him. As for Mrs. Clayhill, though boasting some attractions, she was not, as the reader will have guessed, a fascinating woman. Where David was

concerned she could be a dragon, and we are stating but the truth when we say that, for the past three years, the lad had been glad to return to school to escape from a home which was that only in name to him.

'Ah, there he is,' suddenly exclaimed Mr. Ebenezer, as a heavy foot was heard in the hall, while, within a second, the door of the room was flung unceremoniously open, and David entered.

'Helloo!' he cried, cheerily. 'I'm after a book. Disturbed you, eh? Sorry.'

He turned on his heel, and prepared to leave, for he could see that the two who were now responsible for him were discussing some matter. 'Having another jaw,' he told himself. 'That's what they're always after now-a-days. Something to do with money, I suppose. Or it's me; shouldn't wonder. They ain't over fond of David Harbor.'

It was not his fault that he did not speak or think more respectfully of his parents. After all, though only related to him by the accident of marriage, they were his lawful guardians, and had they been kind, David would have been only too glad to behave as a son to them. Goodness knew, the lad sometimes ached for a happy home.

'David!' The word came in peremptory tones from Ebenezer. He perched himself in the centre of the hearth rug and blew his nose violently. Mrs. Clayhill sank languidly back in her chair, and regarded her stepson as if he bored her greatly. 'Come back, David.'

'Well? What is it?' David swung into the room again, and stood holding to the handle of the door.

'Shut the door. Now, I want to speak to you. You're eighteen?'

'No, seventeen and five months. They tell me I look eighteen.'

'Humph! In any case you're old enough to understand. You realise, of course, that I cannot be responsible for your upkeep.'

David staggered. He knew very little of monetary matters, but had always understood that his father was a rich man and had made ample provision for his family. 'I don't understand,' he replied.

'Let me put it plainly. Your father is dead; he has left a small sum with which to defray your expenses. That must be sufficient; you must now fend for yourself.'

'But,' gasped David, hardly able to gather the drift of the conversation, 'he has left a great deal more than that for the upkeep of the family. I am one of the family.'

'True,' admitted Ebenezer, ruefully, 'you are one of the family, but that does not give you leave to enjoy yourself and be idle. Your father specified only a sum for your expenses. The remainder of his possessions are left to your stepmother to do with as she likes. She does not intend that you should stay here longer and have a good time. You are to work for your living. You are to go to an office in London, where your success will depend on yourself entirely.'

'But – .' David was thunderstruck. He had no intention of idling. As a matter of fact he hoped soon to enter an engineering school, where there would be plenty of work for a keen young fellow. What staggered him most was Ebenezer's iciness and his statements with regard to the possessions left by Edward Harbor. 'But,' he gasped again, 'there is surely some error. I don't count on money left me by father. I will work for my living, and show that I can earn it the same as others. But he made a will in China. He wrote to me about it. Everything was left to me, with a handsome allowance to mother.'

The words came as a shock to the two conspiring to do our hero out of his patrimony. Till that moment Mrs. Clayhill had imagined that she was the only person to whom Edward Harbor had written. But she forgot David, or put him out of her calculations because of his youth; whereas, as a matter of fact, Edward had been more than open with his son.

'It is no use mincing matters, boy,' he had written. 'Money is more or less useless to me, for I love the wilds, the parts forsaken by man these many centuries. Still, I have, by the chance of birth, large possessions to dispose of, and in the ordinary course they would go, in great part, to your stepmother. But you are old enough to understand matters. We cannot agree. She will not bear exile even for a few months, for my sake, and, to make short work of an unpleasant matter, I fear I must

admit that I was mistaken in marrying her. As it is, I have reconsidered my affairs, and have recently remade my will. At the first opportunity I shall hand it into safe keeping. But here it must rest till I go down country. Needless to say, I have arranged that my property shall descend to you, with certain payments for your stepmother.'

'But – gracious me! Hear him!' cried Mrs. Clayhill, in a high falsetto.

'That is a lie,' declared Ebenezer, flatly, his eyes narrow, his brow furrowed, a particularly unpleasant look on his face. David flushed to the roots of his hair. He had never been called a liar, save once, by a boy bigger than himself, and him he had soundly thrashed. He stepped forward a pace, while his eyes flashed. Then he pulled himself together, and closed his lips firmly. A second later he was holding to the handle of the door again.

'It is the truth,' he said, firmly. 'I have the letter to prove it. He wrote telling me that he was sending the same information to my stepmother.'

This was a bomb in the heart of the enemy's camp with a vengeance. Mrs. Clayhill's face flushed furiously; she appeared to be on the verge of an attack of violent hysteria. Ebenezer, on the contrary, became as white as his own handkerchief. He glowered on David, and stuttered as he attempted to speak. It was, in fact, a very sordid affair altogether.

'David! How can you?' came from Mrs. Clayhill. 'I never had a letter. Your father made no change in his depositions.'

'In fact,' declared Ebenezer, bringing his hands together, and endeavouring to display an air of placidity, 'he left but one will, and that in favour of your stepmother. His death has been presumed by the courts, and now the will I speak of shall be administered. You are a pauper, more or less. You are dependent on a small allowance, payable by us, and on your own wits. You will employ the latter from this moment. I have accepted a post for you in a shipping office. You will live in rooms in London, and your hours of work will extend from eight-thirty in the morning to six at night. You begin immediately.'

To say that David was flabbergasted was to express his condition mildly. It had been his intention from an early age to become an engineer, and his father had encouraged his ambition. Suddenly he suspected that this work in London was only a plot to get him out of the way, and that his stepmother had received the letter of which he had spoken. It angered him to have his future ordered by a man almost a stranger to him, and one, moreover, who had taken no pains to hide his ill-feeling. Besides, David was proud and quick-tempered.

'I'll do nothing of the sort,' he exclaimed quickly.

'You disobey me, then?' demanded Ebenezer angrily.

'I decline to go into an office.'

'Then you leave the house to-morrow. Your allowance shall be paid to you regularly. You can fend for yourself.'

For a moment the two conspirators glared at David, while the latter held to the door. Even now he was loth to think evil of his stepmother, though there had never been any affection between them; for Mrs. Clayhill was essentially a worldly woman. Had she not been so she could not have sat there and seen this youth cheated of rights which she knew were his. She could not have allowed her second husband to proceed with the proving of a will which she knew thoroughly well did not represent her late husband's wishes. But she was a grasping woman, and had long since determined to oust David. Also she had in Ebenezer a cold-hearted scoundrel who backed her up completely.

'You will do as you are ordered or forfeit everything,' she cried, in shrill tones, that were a little frightened.

'Which means that you are not wanted very particularly here, and had better go,' added Ebenezer sourly. 'Take this post or leave it. It makes little difference to me; but idle and enjoy yourself here any longer, you shall not.'

David took in a deep breath; the situation was only beginning to dawn upon him. It was the climax that he had more than half expected, but which, boy-like, he had put out of mind. But here it was, naked and extremely sordid. He was not wanted; these people had no interest in Edward Harbor or in his son. In fact, that son stood in their way. Money was the cause of all the trouble. The two before him were conspiring to rob him, David, of the possessions intended for him by his father. Straightway David formed a resolution.

'You wish me to leave,' he said, as quietly as he could. 'I will go at once. You tell me that I am a pauper. Very well, I will work for myself; but I give you notice. I will search this matter out; it is not yet absolutely proved that father was killed. He might have been made a prisoner; his death has only been presumed. But I will make sure of it one way or the other. I will hunt for that will of which he wrote to me and to my stepmother. And when I find him or it I will return; till then, remember that I ask no help from either of you. I will fend for myself.'

He turned on his heel, closing the door noiselessly after him. Promptly he went to his room, packed his few valuables and a spare suit in a valise, not forgetting underclothing. Then he crossed to the stables and emerged a few moments later with his bicycle. A somewhat scared couple of conspirators watched him, as he pedalled down the drive and out through the gate.

'Pooh! Let him go. A good riddance!' blustered Ebenezer, blowing his nose.

'I'm afraid of him; he was always like that,' exclaimed Mrs. Clayhill tearfully. 'David is a most determined boy; he will search this matter to the bottom.'

'Which happens to be particularly deep,' ventured her husband. 'Come, Sarah, threatened people live long. Before he is anywhere near China we shall have the will proved, and the money will be ours. We can afford to laugh at the young idiot.'

They saw David swing out into the road and disappear past the village. From that moment for many a week, he was a dead letter to them. But distance did not help them. The fact that they were committing a wrong preyed on the newly wedded couple. In the course of a little while the memory of David had become to Ebenezer and his wife even more trying than his actual presence. The proving of the will, the free use of the money could not end the matter. Conscience spoke sternly and unceasingly to Mr. and Mrs. Clayhill.

## CHAPTER II

### The Road to London

It was approaching evening as David Harbor swung out of the drive gates of 'The Haven,' and turned his back upon the inhospitable house and the stepmother who had behaved so disgracefully to him. His head high, a queer sinking at the heart, but his courage undaunted for all that, he pedalled swiftly through the village of Effington, nodded to the sour old salt Jarney, who, by the way, always had a smile for David, sped past the 'Three Pigeons' public-house, where the local tittle-tattle of the place was dispensed, together with ale, and was soon out in the open country.

'Time to sit down and think a little,' he said to himself, resting on his pedals and allowing his machine to glide along down the incline till it came of its own accord to a rest. 'Now, we'll sit down here and think things out, and have a look into this affair. I must consider ways and means.'

He was a practical young fellow, was David Harbor, and already the seriousness of the move he had made was weighing upon him. Not that he was inclined to hesitate or to go back, not that at all, only the future was so clouded. His movements were so uncertain; the absence of some definite plan or course of procedure was so embarrassing.

'Three pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence halfpenny,' he said, emptying his purse, and counting out the money as he sat on a roadside boulder. 'Riches a month ago when I was at school, poverty under these circumstances, unless – unless I can get some work and so earn money. That's what I said I'd do and do it I will. Where? Ah, London!'

Like many before him, his eyes and thoughts at once swept in the direction of the huge metropolis, at once the golden magnet which attracts men of ambition and resource, and the haven wherein all who have met with dire misfortune, all who are worthless and have no longer ambition, can hide themselves and become lost to the world.

'Yes, London's the place,' said David, emphatically, pocketing his money. 'I'll ride as far to-night as I can, eat something at a pastrycook's, and sleep under a hay-stack. To-morrow I'll finish the journey. Once in the city I'll find a job, even if it's only stevedoring down at the docks.'

For a little while he sat on the boulder letting his mind run over past events; for he was still somewhat bewildered. It must be remembered that such serious matters as wills and bequests had not troubled his head till that day. Boy-like, he had had faith in those whose natural position should have prompted them to support the young fellow placed in their care. He had had no suspicions of an intrigue, whereby his stepmother wished to oust him from a fortune which his father's letter had distinctly said was to become his. He had imagined that things would go on as they were till he had finished with his engineering studies; then it would be early enough to discuss financial matters. His recent interview had been a great shock to him.

'I begin to see it all now,' he said. 'And I can understand now what Mr. Jones, the solicitor, meant when last I saw him. He wanted to warn me against Mr. Ebenezer, but did not dare to make any open statement. I'll go to him: I'll take that letter.'

He had taken care to carry away with him everything he prized most, and his father's correspondence was at that moment securely placed in an inside pocket. David laid his fingers on the letters, and then read the one in which Edward Harbor had referred to the disposal of his fortune.

'Yes, I'll take this to Mr. Jones,' repeated David, with decision. 'I've always liked him, and father trusted him implicitly. But I'll ask for no help; I mean to get along by myself, if only to show Mr. Ebenezer that I can be as good as my word. There; off we go again. No use in sitting still and moping.'

It was wonderful what a difference a plan made to him: David felt ever so much happier. The future, instead of appearing as a huge dark cloud before him, dwindled away till it was but a speck; his old, sunny looks came back to a face somewhat harassed a little while before, and thereafter David

pedalled at a fine pace, placing the miles behind him swiftly, and sending the colour to his cheeks. It was getting so dark that in a few minutes he would have to light his lamp when he detected a figure walking along the road in front of him, and as he came level with the man the latter hailed him.

'Helloo there,' came in cherry tones, 'how many miles do you make it to London?'

'Sixty-four,' answered David promptly. 'You're walking there?'

'Every inch of it,' came the hearty answer. 'I've done it before, and will do it again. Railways are too expensive for the likes of me to waste money on 'em. You off there too?'

David jumped from his saddle, and walked his machine beside the stranger, who was obviously a sailor. His baggy breeches told that tale distinctly, while the breeziness of the man, and his many nautical expressions would, even without the assistance of a distinctive dress, have made his profession more than probable.

'Got a week's shore leave, and mean to walk up to see the old people,' said the stranger. 'Stoker Andus I am, from the *Indefatigable*. Who are you? By the cut of your gib you'll be a gent same as our officers. Ain't that got it?'

David laughed at the man's breeziness and straight way of asking questions.

'I'm looking for a job,' he said promptly, 'though I believe I am what you have described. But I've had a row at home, and now I'm off to find work.'

The stoker, a man of some thirty years of age, came to an abrupt halt, and swung round to have a close look at David. 'Run away, has yer,' he exclaimed. 'Then, bust me, if you ain't a silly kid. I did the same once when I was about your age. Ran from a home as wanted me, ran from parents that knew what was best for me. I can see that I was a fool now that I'm older. Jest send her astern, mister, and let's get in and talk it over. Now, what's the rumpus? Done something you was expressly ordered not to, eh? Got into debt, perhaps. Been smokin' and takin' the governor's bacca? It's one of them, ain't it? And here are you a makin' your mother that wretched –'

'Heave to for a bit,' cried David, laughing in spite of himself, and unconsciously employing one of the stranger's nautical expressions. 'You think I'm a fool, eh? Think I'm treating some one badly?'

From the very first he had taken a fancy to the handsome, clean-shaven tar tramping his way to London, and he realised in a flash that the honest fellow, with experience of his own behind him to help, was endeavouring to give advice, and encourage what he considered to be a truant to return home. Brusquely and in true sailor fashion Andus answered him.

'If I'm aboard the right ship, and you've cleared off from a good home, then you are a fool, a precious big 'un, too,' he cried. 'And there ain't a doubt as you're treatin' some one badly; mostlike it's your mother. P'raps it's your father. Anyways, let's drop anchor hereabouts and put on a smoke. I can yarn when I'm smokin', and since it's dark now, there's no need for more hurry.'

He led the way to a gate, sat himself on the top rail, and having produced a cake of tobacco, a knife and a pipe, shredded some of the weed into the latter.

'Well,' he began again, when he had got the weed burning, and huge billows of smoke issuing from his lips. 'You've had a few seconds to think it over. Andus ain't a fool, mind you, youngster, and he ain't tryin' to give lessons to one as has heaps more eddication. But I've seed one as was sorry for running away from home. That's me. I know one as has never ceased to feel that he did wrong, and has suffered in consequence. That's me again, all the time. And I ain't a goin' to fall in alongside of another and keep me mouth shut when I know as he's headin' straight up for the same rocks and shoals, and is in danger of breakin' hisself to pieces. There you are. Take that from one who knows what he's talking about.'

He lapsed into silence for a while, puffing smoke from his lips, and occasionally looking down at David, who stood within a few feet of him. As for the latter, the more the sailor talked, the more he liked the man. There was an honest ring about his breezy tones, a direct manner about the words he used that captivated our hero. Not for one moment was he fearful that he himself would change his plans, whatever was said. No, David had now considered his movements very thoroughly. He told

himself that it was not he who had behaved badly. It was his stepmother and her husband. But, in case of error, he would put the facts before this open-minded sailor.

'Supposin' you was to stop here to-night, and then ride back to-morrow,' suggested Andus, coolly, as if he were saying the most commonplace thing. 'This home of yours ain't far, and you'd be there by breakfast time. They'd be so glad to see you that the row would be forgotten. You'd start in fresh again, with new paint above and below, and everything ship-shape. What do you say to that, youngster?'

'That your intention is a good one, and your advice the same under usual conditions,' declared David, warmly. 'But this isn't an ordinary running away. I'll tell you how I came to leave home.'

He sat down on the rail of the gate and told Andus quietly how his parents had treated him, and how he was sure that the two were conspiring to oust him out of property meant for him by his dead father. 'In any case,' he ended, 'I was not wanted. I was to leave the house and go into an office, though it was well known that I hoped to go to an engineering college. I refused the office, and was told to clear out. Now, tell me frankly what you think.'

The sailor dug the blade of his knife deep into the bowl of his pipe, and stirred the contents thoroughly before he ventured to reply. There was a deep line across his forehead, while his eyes were half closed. David could tell that easily, for the moon was up now, and the night was unusually bright. Then Andus struck flint and steel, and sucked flames into his pipe till our hero thought he would never cease.

'Tell me about this solicitor,' he suddenly demanded. 'He was a friend of your father's?'

'And of mine,' answered David. 'I like him. I am sure that he tried to warn me against the man who married my stepmother.'

'Then jest listen here, youngster,' cried Andus, breezily. 'I take back all the words I was flingin' at you. You ain't such a fool as I took you for. What's more, I'm precious nigh certain that it's you that's bein' done harm to, and not these here parents of yours. A precious fine couple to be sure! Heavin' overboard on a dirty night wouldn't be too much for 'em. Seems to me that they has the best of the argument at this moment. From what I've heard they has the handlin' of the money and the arrangement of things. They know everything, while you ain't got a one to help you. But if you was to see this solicitor you'd be better off. You get right off to him and ax fer his advice. Andus may be all very well for guiding a chap back to his home when he's makin' a fool of hisself, same as Andus did when he was young, but bust me if he's fit to advise here. Get right off to London.'

'I will; meanwhile we'll spend the night together. What were you going to do?' asked David, feeling better already for his chat with the sailor.

'Why, sling me hammock under one of these here straw stacks,' cried Andus. 'It'll be warm in there, and a chap can sleep better than in a strange bed. To-morrow I'll be up at the first streak of light, and headin' for the nearest village. I'll be able to eat a bit by then, and afterwards I'll leg it for London.'

'Then I propose that we leg it now for the nearest village, have a meal and then find a suitable stack under which to sleep. I'm real hungry; I've had little since breakfast.'

Andus fell in with the arrangement willingly, and together they tramped along the high road till they came to a village. There they obtained a meal of bread and meat, washed down with cocoa, for Andus was one of many, a rapidly increasing band in the Royal Navy, who are sworn teetotallers.

'And now for another smoke and a doss under a stack,' cried the sailor, as they left the village. 'The moon's that bright we might jest as well push on for a while till we get sleepy. Then we'll get into a harbour o' some sort, and lay to for the night. To-morrow afternoon you'll be in London, and with a bit of luck I'll be there by nightfall. I often get a carter or some such chap to give me a lift. Once a gent on a motor ran me clean through; but that was unusual luck.'

'I'll send you up by train,' declared David generously. 'I haven't much, but can spare enough for your ticket.'

'Then you jest won't,' came warmly from the sailor. 'I tell yer, sir, I don't forget those days when I was a fool and ran from home. Bust me! I hadn't too much cash, and well remember there wasn't a halfpenny to spare. You ain't got such a big cargo aboard that you can afford to heave some of it over. I'm a goin' to foot it.'

'You'll ride,' said David, with determination. 'It will bring me good luck to do a good turn to a friend picked up on the road. Besides, I shall have sufficient. I shall sell this bicycle the moment I get to London. Then I shall be able to draw from the solicitor some of the allowance I am entitled to. But I mean to work; I'll not hang about depending on an allowance. I'll make a way for myself, if only to show my stepmother that I can do so.'

The breezy sailor brought a hand down on his shoulders with such force that David coughed and choked.

'That's you all the time,' he shouted. 'I could see when I first took a squint at you through my weather eye that you wasn't one of the soft kind. The kind fer instance that they turns out of a dry canteen, or a grocery store. Makin' a way for yerself is one of the finest things a man can have to do, only there's so few as realise it. But you'll do it; I'm tryin' the same. There's advancement for every one as shows he means to work. But here's a lot of stacks. Pipes out; dowse all lights. We won't risk firing property that doesn't belong to us.'

They searched for a suitable spot, and very soon were stretched on a mass of loose straw which had been piled beside one of the ricks. Pulling a heap of it over their bodies a delicious feeling of warmth soon came to them, and in a twinkling they were asleep. The sun streaming on his face wakened David on the following morning.

'Now,' he shouted, waking Andus, 'a wash and then on for breakfast. We'll walk together as far as the nearest station.'

Half an hour later David had the satisfaction of seeing Andus enter a railway train, and of shaking his hand heartily as the latter steamed out.

'Don't you wait a little bit,' called out the hearty sailor, waving his hand in farewell. 'Go right off to that solicitor. Stick to your guns, and you'll come through in the end.'

Far happier for the meeting with this wayfarer, and for the chat he had had with him, David mounted his bicycle again, and pedalled briskly along the main road for London. He no longer felt that doubt and uncertainty that had oppressed him on the previous day. He had made his plans, and a man of the world, an honest fellow gifted undoubtedly with common sense, had approved of his actions. Henceforth he would push on without a halt and without hesitation.

'I'll sell the bicycle, find rooms in which to live, and insert an advertisement for work,' he told himself. 'Then I'll see Mr. Jones.'

It was an hour later before the even course of his journey was disturbed. He was running gaily before a strong breeze, with a hot sun streaming down upon him when in the far distance he saw a vehicle trundling along the road. Rapidly overhauling it, he soon saw that it was a brougham, with a coachman seated on the box, though whether there were passengers in the vehicle he could not say; but within a few minutes he came alongside, and, as he passed, caught a glimpse of two ladies within. Then he swept on, pedalled past a traction-engine engaged in hauling stones, and was soon on a clear road again. Then a loud shout reached his ears, followed by others. He turned his head and looked over his shoulder, with the consequence that the machine wobbled. Indeed, so occupied was David with what was taking place in rear that he neglected to guide his steed. In a moment therefore he ran into the ditch at the side of the road, and was flung headlong into a hedge.

'That comes of staring over one's shoulder,' he said, picking himself up at once. 'But there seems to have been an accident behind there. I saw the horse in that brougham rear as it got opposite the traction-engine. Then it dashed forward, and – why, the coachman has jumped from the box! The coward! He's left those ladies to be dashed to pieces – the coward!'

The distance was so short that he was able to take in the whole situation, and it was clear that the coachman on the box of the vehicle had lost his head and his nerve. David had watched him holding to his reins as the horse plunged; but the instant it bolted down the road the man had leaped from his seat, and striking the road heavily had rolled over and over into the ditch. Left to itself, the horse was coming along the road at a mad gallop, the brougham swaying behind him in an alarming manner, and threatening to capsize at any moment.

'George! nearly over that time,' gasped David. 'The horse is scared out of its wits. It'll not stop till it has smashed the carriage and those in it. Don't that coachman deserve to be kicked.'

He darted into the centre of the road, and watched the maddened creature bearing down upon him. Behind, in the neighbourhood of the traction-engine, he could see men waving their arms, and running along the road, while a little nearer the coachman was sitting up in the ditch, holding on to a damaged elbow. A head appeared at one of the carriage windows for an instant, and David caught a glimpse of a very frightened face. A scream even reached his ears; then he leaped back from the road and seized his bicycle.

'I'll dodge that carriage,' he told himself. 'I'd never be able to keep up with it at the rate the horse is going unless on my bicycle; but on the machine I could do it. Anyway, I'll have a try.'

He swung himself into the saddle and pedalled gently along. By now he could hear the scrunch of fast-revolving wheels on the macadam, while more than one shriek came from the interior of the carriage. Then the horse seemed to make directly for him. David spurred forward, his head over his shoulder, and darted across to the far side of the road, just escaping the feet of the maddened animal. In a twinkling the carriage drew abreast of him, and for a while he raced along beside it, noticing that on many an occasion it was within an ace of capsizing. Then a brilliant manoeuvre occurred to him.

'Couldn't possibly get aboard from the side or front,' he told himself. 'The pedal of the bicycle would catch something, and I should come a cropper beneath the wheels. I'll try the back; but it'll want doing. That brute is going all out.'

The runaway horse was indeed galloping as hard as he could, faster, in fact, than before, so that even had David wished to come alongside he found it impossible, for the carriage had now drawn slightly ahead. But with a desperate effort he lessened the distance, keeping directly behind the vehicle so as to escape the breeze, which at that pace was of his own making. Gradually he approached the rear of the carriage till he was almost between the wheels. Then, quick as a flash, he leaped from his saddle, abandoning his machine, and flung himself toward the back axle of the vehicle. His fingers fastened upon it, and an instant later he was jerked from his feet, and went dragging along the road. But he was not beaten. David was no weakling, and soon made an alteration in his position. With a jerk and a heave he regained his feet. A frantic spring took him on to the axle, and after that he felt that victory was before him.

'Over the top, on to the box, and then along the shafts,' he told himself. 'No use trying to clamber along the sides. This beastly thing is on the point of upsetting already, and with my weight added to one side would topple over. Here goes for the top.'

It was not an easy task he had set himself by any means, for the carriage wobbled dangerously, and there was no rail to cling to. But David made light of risks; he never even considered them. He stood on the axle now, and reaching up gripped the top. With a bound he was on it, and thereafter had all his work cut out to prevent being thrown off to either side. But slowly he won his way forward till near the box. Then a sudden swerve of the horse sent him sliding to the right, till legs and thighs left the roof of the vehicle. Even then he was not beaten. With a wriggle and a heave he flopped forward to the edge of the box seat, and as his body slid from the roof, he managed to grip the rail. One foot by good fortune met with a step, and thanks to that and his grip of the rail he was soon located where the driver had been. Once there David was in his element. He dragged the whip from its socket, stretched over the side of the box, and with a dexterous thrust of the stick managed to hook it under the reins, which were trailing along the road. In half a minute he had them in his hands.

And then began a battle which would have delighted the heart of a horse-master; for David coaxed and endeavoured to control the maddened beast with both voice and rein.

'Whoa! steady boy!' he called, pulling firmly on the mouth. 'Whoa! gently boy, gently!'

However, finding that nothing resulted, he leaned back in his seat, braced his feet, and began to pull in earnest, sawing at the beast's mouth. Within a minute the pace had lessened. Promptly he began to call to the horse.

'Whoa! gently boy, gently.'

In less than five minutes he had brought him to a standstill, and dropping from the box had the animal by the head, and was patting and soothing him.

'Please get out and stand at one side,' he called to the ladies. 'The traction-engine startled him and caused him to bolt. He is still a little nervous, but in a few moments he will be calm again. It would be better, however, to get out. Please hurry.'

To tell the truth David was half expecting the animal to bolt again, for even as he spoke it reared up dragging him from his feet. But he had the huge advantage of understanding horses, and, as is so often the case, the frightened brute seemed to realise that. Sweating heavily and still trembling, it finally stood still, allowing him to pat its neck. Meanwhile a lady had descended, and had assisted another to follow her. David looked at them curiously. Both were very white after such a terrifying experience, but the elder of the two seemed to be more indignant than frightened. She walked across to David and inspected him critically.

'How did you manage to get on to the carriage?' she asked; and then, when he had told her, 'I consider you to have behaved nobly. You saved our lives, not to mention the carriage. It was a brave act, and I and my daughter are more than obliged to you. As for our coachman he is a coward. I shall dismiss him promptly.'

A flush of anger came to her cheeks, and a little later she turned to face the delinquent. 'You can drive back alone. I will walk,' she said severely, as the man came up with David's bicycle. 'You are not fit to be driving ladies. You deserted your post in the most disgraceful manner. Come, Charlotte, perhaps this gentleman will walk with us.'

'I will drive you if you wish,' declared David promptly. 'The coachman can ride my bicycle. Which way, please?'

He hopped briskly into the driving seat, and picked up his reins in a manner which gave confidence. Then, the ladies having entered the vehicle and directed him, he set off down the road. Within half an hour he pulled up in front of a country mansion, enclosed in fine grounds. At once a groom was called from the stables, and David was invited to enter the house.

'You will lunch with us of course,' said the elder lady. 'I am Mrs. Cartwell. This is my daughter, and – ah, Richard come here.'

She beckoned to a young fellow crossing the hall at that moment and introduced him as her son. Then in a few words she explained the situation.

'By Jove! That was a fine thing to do,' exclaimed the young fellow, whom David took to be about twenty years of age. 'A real plucky thing. How on earth did you manage to clamber on to the carriage when it was going at such a pace, while you were on a bike? But let me thank you a thousand times for your action. You have undoubtedly saved mother's life.'

Very cordially did he shake David's hand, and thereafter did his utmost to put our hero at his ease and make him feel at home. Then, after lunch, he pressed him to stay a day or so, for the two young fellows took instantly to one another.

'Come,' he said, 'you've nothing in particular to do. Off for a bicycle tour I suppose? Stay here a day or two and have a little fishing with me.'

'Can't, though many thanks all the same,' answered David, wishing that he could remain. 'I'm not on a bicycle tour. I'm going to London to find work. I've some important business to do there.'

In a little while his new friends became aware of the fact that our hero was launching himself on the world, and though he did not tell them his reasons for leaving home, they realised that he was justified.

'If you cannot stay, you can at least remember the address of this house,' said Mrs. Cartwell. 'We shall be glad to receive a visit from you at any time, and I shall expect you to write. And now we will no longer detain you.'

They sent him away with further words of thanks, while Dick Cartwell accompanied him some five miles on the journey.

'Mind,' he said, as they gripped hands for the last time, 'we shall expect to see you again, and hope you will write. I feel that we haven't half thanked you.'

David waved the words aside, and straddled his bicycle. 'I don't want thanks,' he said abruptly. 'But I'd like to come down. I'll write when I've found work and am getting on a little. For the present I have no time and no right to laze and enjoy myself.'

He went off down the road waving to Dick, never dreaming that the two of them would come together again under strange circumstances. Pedalling hard, he made up for lost time, and just as the shades of evening were falling, found his way into the great city of London.

'Please direct me to some little house where I can obtain a lodging,' he asked of a policeman who was walking on the pavement.

The constable, a fine, burly fellow, surveyed our hero from head to foot. Then he smiled at him, and brought a massive hand on to his shoulder.

'Come along with me,' he said. 'My missus wants a lodger. I was told this morning when I went off on duty that I was to try and hear of one. You'd do for a time. How'd you like to come?'

David smiled back at him promptly. 'Splendid!' he cried. 'I'd be glad to come. I shall be saved heaps of trouble hunting for a room.'

That night he slipped into a cosy bed between the cleanest sheets feeling that fortune had been really kind to him; for since he left home he had done nothing but make friends. There was Andus, the breezy sailor, Mrs. Cartwell, to say nothing of Dick, her jovial son. And now there was the constable; for a nicer fellow than Constable Hemming did not exist, while his wife took a motherly interest in David. It was a good start in life; but would the future be equally prosperous?

## CHAPTER III

### Wanted a Job

The rattle of wheels in the street outside, and the brilliant rays of the morning sun awakened David on his first morning in London. In a twinkling he was up and dressed.

'Suppose you've come up to start life, sir,' said Constable Hemming when his lodger put in an appearance. 'Breakfast's ready, and you can have it at the back in the parlour, or here in the kitchen along with the missus and me.'

'Then I'll stop with you,' declared David, smiling. 'Yes, constable, I'm here to start life. I shall have to look round for work; but first of all I must go into the city to see a firm of solicitors. I shall have to find my way there.'

'I'll guide you,' came the answer. 'House rent is that dear towards the city that I have to come out here. Every morning I take a 'bus to the central police station and there get my orders. I'm on special duty these days. We're hunting for a gang of foreign burglars that have come to London to bother us; but what are you going to do? Medical student, eh?'

David shook his head vigorously. 'Nothing so grand,' he said. 'I have to find work of some sort, and I don't care what it is at first, so long as I can earn something with which to pay my way while I look round.'

The constable's eyes opened wide with astonishment, and for a little while he regarded his lodger critically, while his wife busied herself with putting the breakfast on the table. He remembered the conversation which he had had with her on the previous night. They had agreed without the smallest hesitation that David was a young gentleman used to more or less fine surroundings. There was nothing secret or underhand about him; but they did not imagine that he had left home with the intention of making his way alone in the world. This information that he must find some sort of work showed at once that he was dependent solely on himself.

'Why,' declared Hemming, 'you look as if you ought to be in an office, or in the army as an officer. Want to find work? What about your parents?'

Probably his official training caused him to regard David again, and this time with some suspicion.

'I left home hurriedly after a row,' said our hero promptly. 'I was told I was not wanted. There was a quarrel about money; I came away determined to make my own way.'

'But,' began the constable, like Andus, the breezy sailor, feeling that he ought to give some good advice here, advice culled from his own age and somewhat wide experience. 'But, look here, sir. Ain't you made a great mistake? Wouldn't it be better to think things over and turn back? Most like your parents are advertising for you. I should have to give information.'

David stopped him with a pleasant smile, lifting his hand as he did so. Then in a few short words he told the constable and his wife what had happened, refraining, however, from telling them about the will.

'Now,' he said, looking from one to the other.

'I take it all back; no chap with a bit of pride could do otherwise,' declared Hemming, warmly. 'So you want work, any sort of work?'

David nodded. 'Anything to tide me over for the time being,' he said. 'Ultimately I mean to leave the country.'

'You wouldn't sniff if I was to mention the job of lift-boy?' asked Hemming, somewhat bashfully, as if he were almost ashamed to introduce such a job to David's notice.

'Where? When is it open? Could I work the lift?' asked our hero promptly. 'To-day I could hardly begin; to-morrow I shall be free.'

'Then you can come along with me to the city,' said the constable, laughing at his eagerness. 'It so happens that an old soldier, who belongs to the corps of commissionaires, told me a night or two back that his firm would be wanting a young chap. It's one of the big London stores; we'll see what we can do for you.'

David thanked him warmly, and then, remembering his bicycle, mentioned it.

'I want to sell it,' he said. 'I have some ready money on me; but the machine will be useless here, and the cash I could get for it useful.'

'Of course, and I could take you to a place where a fair price would be given; but if you'll take my advice you'll wait a little. Supposing this London firm is a good way from your lodgings, a bicycle would be handy to take you to work; the machine'll come to no harm for the moment, and will fetch it's price whenever you want to part with it. You keep it for a while. Now, sir, if you're ready we'll set out.'

In five minutes the two were in the street, the constable looking fine and burly in his uniform, while the gentlemanly appearance of the young fellow walking beside him caused the neighbours to remark. They clambered on to a motor-bus at the end of the street, and made their way into the city. Then they descended close to the Mansion House, and were soon in conversation with the commissionaire.

'You mentioned a firm as wanted a young fellow for the lift,' said the constable. 'Is that job still going?'

The commissionaire looked David up and down with an experienced eye, and noted his straight figure, his good looks, and his general air of superiority. Then he nodded his head several times in succession.

'That job's still going,' he said, 'and a young chap same as this is just what's wanted; but he don't want to have kid gloves on his hands all the while. This firm's looking for a lad as can appear smart when he's in the lift, and can strip his livery off next moment and clean and tidy things. Chaps as don't care to dirty their fingers ain't wanted.'

'Then I'm your man,' David blurted promptly. 'I'm not afraid of dirtying my fingers with clean work – honest work I mean. As to smartness, there I can't pretend to judge.'

Hemming winked slyly at his friend, who went by the name of Tiller, while the latter again surveyed David with a critical eye, till the latter flushed red under the scrutiny. Then Sergeant Tiller's head began to wag forward and backward again, in a manner evidently characteristic of him, while a smile broke out on his face.

'You'll do I should say,' he declared. 'Ready to work now?'

David thought for a moment. 'Ready to begin at this moment,' he said. 'But I must see some one in the city during business hours to-day. To-morrow I could take to work steadily.'

'Then you can leave him to me, Hemming,' said the sergeant, 'I'll take him right along, and the chances are he'll get the post. I used to work for the same firm, and seeing as they knew that I had the best idea of what sort of young chap they wanted, they left it to me to find a man. One moment, mister, I'll get leave to be off for a while; then we'll take a 'bus along to Oxford Street. The firm I'm talking about have a big fashionable store close to Bond Street.'

Within an hour David and his new friend were at their destination, waiting within the huge glass doors of an establishment, the size and rich decoration of which filled our hero with amazement; for trips to London had not often come his way. Mrs. Clayhill, his stepmother, had never troubled to take him with her.

'There's thousands of pounds worth of things here,' whispered the sergeant, as they waited for an interview with the manager, 'and, very naturally, the firm is careful as to whom it employs. There's the lift yonder. The man working it should really be at the door. From that I take it that the hand who was here has left. That'll make 'em extra anxious to get a substitute. Ah, come along.'

David's heart fluttered a trifle as he was ushered into the sanctum of the manager; for he felt that the interview meant much to him. To be truthful, he would rather have begun his life at some post more in accordance with his upbringing; but then, he reflected, beggars must not be choosers, and so long as the work was honest, it would tide him over a difficult time. Besides, there was his interview with the solicitors. It would be fine to be able to declare that he had already found a job, and was in need of nothing. A second later he was before a diminutive man, dressed very smartly, who regarded him with the same critical eye as in the case of the sergeant.

'Just the young fellow, sir,' said the latter, nodding towards our hero. 'Constable Hemming introduced him to me. He's fresh to London, and this will be his first job.'

'Know anything about lifts and machinery?' demanded the manager sharply.

'Yes, sir; I've worked in the shops at school, and meant to become an engineer.'

David blurted the words out thoughtlessly, and then could have bitten his tongue off the next instant. For if he had been candid with other people, and described how he had left home, here, where he might be employed to work, he wished his past history to remain unknown. But he forgot that his whole appearance, his speech, his carriage, all told the tale of his upbringing. He did not see the old sergeant wink at the manager. He watched him bend forward and whisper.

'Constable tells me he was driven away from home, sir,' said the sergeant, in the manager's ear. 'The lad's as honest as they make them. I'll back him to give satisfaction. Give him a trial. He's the kind of lad you could turn on to anything; he's a gentleman all over.'

David would have flushed red could he have heard the words, but he was watching the manager. The latter looked closely at him again, smiled suddenly, and then asked a question.

'What wages?' he asked.

'Fifteen shillings a week,' answered our hero.

'Nonsense! We start our men with a pound a week. We will give you a month's trial. Hours eight-thirty in the morning till six. When can you come?'

'To-morrow, sir. I'd like to have a trial now, but I must see some one in the city this afternoon.'

'Then go to the lift and have a lesson. To-morrow we shall expect you. Have you a dark suit?'

David nodded promptly.

'Then come in that: we have livery which ought to fit you. Good-bye.'

It was a much-excited David who emerged from the manager's office. The sudden succession to a post at a pound a week made him feel giddy, it was such good fortune. He hardly heard the old sergeant explaining his errand to the lift-man. Almost unconsciously he shook hands with the former and thanked him for his help. Then he entered the lift, and watched his instructor as he ran it up and down. Ten minutes later he was controlling the affair himself, and within half an hour was efficient. That morning, he ran the elevator for some two hours all alone, to the entire satisfaction of his employers, conveying a number of purchasers to other parts of the building.

'You'll do,' declared the manager, when mid-day arrived. 'You're steady and keep your head. Don't forget, it is a strict rule that all doors be closed before the lift is moved. Accidents so easily happen. Now take a word of advice. Every one can see what you are. Don't talk; keep yourself to yourself and you'll make no enemies. To-morrow morning at half-past eight.'

He dismissed him with a nod, and very soon David was out in the street once more.

'And now for Mr. Jones, the solicitor,' he told himself. 'I don't feel half so bad about the interview as I did yesterday. That job makes such a difference. I'll telephone down to his address, and ask when he can see me.'

He went at once to a call office, and promptly was able to arrange to see the solicitor at two o'clock. Then he journeyed down into the city, ate heartily at a cheap restaurant, and finally went to Mr. Jones's office. It was a very astonished solicitor who received him.

'Why, you of all people!' he declared, as our hero entered. 'Sit down there. You've got something to tell me; something is troubling you, that I can detect at once. What is it?'

David at once told him how he had left home, and the cause for such action.

'I made up my mind to fend for myself,' he said. 'I decided to find work in London, and to decline the post in an office which Mr. Clayhill offered.'

There was a serious air on Mr. Jones's face as he listened. 'That was a bold course to pursue,' he said. 'Work is hard to find in this huge city. There are so many applicants; but, of course, there is your allowance. It will enable you to live for the time being.'

David shook his head promptly. 'I've got work already at twenty shillings a week,' he said. 'I want you and the others to understand that I mean to stand alone and fight my own battle. I mean to be independent; I'll not call for that allowance till I actually need it.'

'Then, my lad, all the more honour to you,' declared Mr. Jones, gripping his hand. 'But, of course, the allowance is yours. I shall make arrangements to have it at my own disposal, not at that of your stepmother's. So there was a scene, David? You were told to go. But why? Money, I suppose.'

In a few words David recounted what had happened, and how he had been told that he had next to no interest in his father's possessions.

'I knew that father had written home,' he declared. 'He sent me a letter saying that he proposed to change his will, and he wrote to my stepmother intimating the same. She denies this fact; but there is my letter.'

He drew it from his pocket and waited, watching Mr. Jones while the latter perused it. And slowly he saw the solicitor's expression become sterner and sterner.

'This is very serious, David,' he said at last, 'and though this letter proves without doubt that your father made a later will, and that your stepmother has deliberately obscured that fact, yet I fear that matters cannot be altered. This later will is not to be found. Evidence has come to hand which is so conclusive that the courts have presumed your father's death. Nothing can now prevent the execution of the will now in our possession.'

He looked thoughtfully at David for some few moments, and then pushed his spectacles back on to his furrowed forehead. 'Nothing can alter the matter now,' he added, 'unless this later will is found. That seems to me to be out of the question.'

'I think not. I intend to find it; I shall go to China.'

David's sudden and unexpected declaration took the breath from Mr. Jones. He pulled his spectacles from his forehead, wiped the glasses feverishly, and put them back on to his nose. He gripped the two arms of his chair before he replied.

'What!' he demanded. 'Go to China! But –'

'China is a vast country, yes,' agreed our hero, taking the words from his mouth; 'but I was in close correspondence with my father. I know precisely where he was staying, and the roads he travelled. That limits the part to be searched. How I shall go out there I do not know. It may take years to bring about; but go I will. Something tells me that I shall be fortunate.'

There was a long silence between them before Mr. Jones ventured to break it. At first he had been inclined to look upon David as a foolish young fellow; but he had some knowledge of the lad, and of his father before him, and knew our hero to be a steady-going individual. Moreover he had heard that he was practical, and extremely persistent. He conjured up in his mind's eye the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Ebenezer Clayhill, and turned from them with some amount of annoyance.

'The whole matter is very unfortunate,' he said at last, 'and were it not that I now feel that I have your interests to protect, I should be tempted to retire from the post of executor to which your father expressly appointed me. Of course, I shall have an interview with Mr. Ebenezer and Mrs. Clayhill, and, as I have said, I shall insist that I have the paying of your allowance. Further, I will consult one of my legal friends on your behalf. With this letter before him, it is possible he will advise you to apply to the courts to arrest the administration of the will by Mr. Ebenezer Clayhill and his wife, pending a further search. In that case you would have time to go to China, and traverse the ground covered by your father. But how you will manage to get there passes my comprehension.'

He looked across at David, and slowly his serious expression melted into a smile. He recollected some words which Mrs. Clayhill had let fall at an interview he had once had with her. Of David she had remarked, when Mr. Jones had asked after him, 'he is an obstinate boy. Once he has made up his mind to accomplish a thing, nothing will shake him. He is just like his father.' And there was David searching the solicitor's face, unconsciously wearing an expression of dogged resolution. The square chin, already at such a youthful age showing firmness of purpose, was set in bulldog fashion. The thin lips were closed in one strong line. The eyes never flinched nor wavered.

'George!' cried Mr. Jones, suddenly stirred out of his professional calm, 'I'll help you. I like your spirit immensely, and, unofficially of course, I believe that you are being victimised. If it's money, why –.'

David held up his hand promptly. 'No thank you, Mr. Jones,' he said, warmly. 'I am going to do this on my own. It's awfully kind of you to think of offering money; but I'll make what I want, and put it to my allowance if need be. If I can, I won't touch the latter. Those people at 'The Haven' shall see that I am equal to my word. But you are helping me enormously by discussing the matter. Consult with this friend of yours, and if he says that an application on my part, with this letter of my father's, can arrest the splitting up of all his possessions for the time being, then there is hope. I shall have some time. I may be able to find the will we know he made.'

Looking at the matter when left to himself, Mr. Jones could not but admit that there was something of the wild-goose chase about our hero's resolution to go to China. The finding of the will left by Mr. Edward Harbor, since murdered by Boxers, was so extremely improbable that the effort seemed but wasted energy, failure but a foregone conclusion.

'But, on the contrary, the boy might have luck,' he told himself. 'There is a Providence that watches over such young fellows when their own parents ill-treat them. Perhaps David will come across the document, perhaps he will not. In any case, travel to China will open his mind and help him in the future, and if that is so, the time will not be wasted. That he will go there I am absolutely certain.'

He had dismissed our hero with a warm and encouraging shake of the hand, and a promise to communicate with him; and less than a week had passed when David was in the solicitor's office again.

'I have consulted with my friend,' Mr. Jones told him, 'and he believes that an application to the courts would be successful. I shall have it made on your behalf, and, of course, I shall bear the expense. Some day you may be able to repay me. If not –.'

David stood up at once. 'I shall repay you without doubt,' he declared solemnly. 'I mean to get on in the world; some day I shall be able to spare the money.'

'And that "some day" will be soon enough. In the meanwhile I shall go to the courts. This letter of yours, which I shall take care of, will be put in as evidence, and the judge will be told that you are going to China. As a result he may very well order that the estate be left in the hands of trustees, the income to be given as in the will we have, while the estate itself will remain untouched for a certain period. In three weeks' time the case should come forward.'

During those days our hero worked very hard at the establishment where he had charge of the lift.

'We couldn't have obtained a smarter young fellow,' the manager had declared more than once, 'while nothing seems a trouble to him. He keeps his lift and his livery spotlessly clean, and is most careful with our clients. I shall raise his wages.'

And raise them he did, David receiving twenty-two shillings a week after he had been there a fortnight. Up and down he travelled all day long in his lift, announcing at each floor the various departments of the store to be found there. Sharp young fellow that he was, he soon knew the ins and outs of the establishment, and was a perfect mine of information. He looked up trains for the firm's clients, directed others to various parts of London, and always displayed willingness and politeness. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that he gained the esteem and confidence of his employers.

As to the other employees, he was on excellent terms with them, except in a very few cases, the latter being men who, like the rest, detected our hero's evident superiority, and being jealous endeavoured to make matters unpleasant for him.

'Call David Harbor,' sounded across the floor of the store one day, when the place was empty of customers, while our hero was engaged in cleaning his lift. Promptly he rolled down his sleeves, slipped on his livery jacket, and stepped briskly to the manager's office, wondering why he was wanted.

'Sit down,' said the latter, when he had entered and closed the door. 'Now, Harbor, I wish to be confidential. For six weeks past we have been missing a number of valuables.'

At the words David rose from his seat, flushing a furious red, while his eyes flashed at the manager.

'You don't mean to suggest that I –'

'Tut, tut,' came the interruption instantly. 'Sit down, Harbor. I said that valuables had been disappearing for the past six weeks. You have been here one month exactly; things were going before you came. Your arrival here has made no difference.'

David pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead; for the news, the sudden thought that he might be the suspected person, had thrown him into a violent heat. 'I'm glad you put it like that, sir,' he said. 'I began to feel uncomfortable.'

'And I endeavoured at once to show you that you were by no means the suspected person. I told you I wished to talk to you confidentially. Well now, there is some one engaged here, we believe, who is robbing the firm. Up till now our efforts to trace the miscreant have proved unavailing. We applied to the police. They advised us that some one, wholly trustworthy, Mr. Harbor, wholly trustworthy, and whose resolution and pluck we could count on, should be left here to watch. The directors asked me to suggest a name. I gave yours without hesitation.'

He sat back in his chair to watch the effect his news had on our hero, and smiled serenely when he saw the latter tuck his handkerchief away and assume his most business-like expression.

'Yes, sir,' said David promptly, awaiting further information.

'This is the plan. You and the police are to work together, and when every one has left this establishment, you will pass in again with the help of a key I shall hand you. You will patrol the various departments during the night, and slip out before the hands arrive in the morning. Your place at the lift will be taken by a substitute for the time being. It will be given out that you are ill. Of course, there might be some risk attached to the undertaking.'

'I'll chance that,' declared David at once. 'I should rather enjoy the experience, not that I am anxious to be a thief taker. Still, I am in your employ and will obey whatever orders are given me.'

'Then you consent?' asked the manager.

'Certainly: I shall obey your orders seeing that I am in your service.'

'But you could decline to take this risk if you wished. However, we have considered the matter. There will be a salary of a pound a night while you are watchman, and a liberal reward if the offender is apprehended. Now I want you to finish your work, and join me at the police station. Don't let other employees see you going there. We will make our final arrangements with the officials of the police.'

It may be imagined that David was somewhat excited after such an announcement. Not for one moment did he think of declining the task required of him; for he looked upon it as a duty. He obtained good wages, these people had been kind to him, and if he could serve them, all the better. Besides, it might lead to a better and more highly-paid post. He polished the brass of his lift, put aside his livery, and emerged from the building, leaving one of the officials to close the establishment. Then, taking a side street, he hurried to the police station. Once there the final arrangements were soon made. The manager already knew that David was lodging with a policeman, and to our hero's pleasure he learned that Constable Hemming was to take duty outside the store, being relieved by a friend. Both were to be provided with keys, while David was presented with a basket containing

food and drink. An electric torch was handed to him, as well as a life preserver and a whistle. Thus equipped he drove back to the establishment at ten that night, and slipped cautiously into the store.

Just keep moving and doing things all the while,' Hemming advised him. 'Lights are always kept going on all the floors, so that you'll have no difficulty in seeing. But it's wonderful how sleepy a fellow gets, especially when he's done the job on more than one occasion. Keep moving is the thing. Always remember to walk softly. If you spot anything funny, keep quiet, and come along to warn me. The end of a stick pushed through the letter-box will tell me I'm wanted. Don't get scared. It's only fools and babies as fly from their own shadows.'

Nevertheless David found the ordeal of promenading the huge store all alone in the silent hours of the night something of an ordeal. For there were a hundred minor sounds and queer noises to arrest his attention and rouse his suspicions. However, he mastered his fears, and soon began really to like the work. Nor did he forget the constable's advice. During the whole time he was on duty he never once sat down, save to eat a meal. All the rest of the time he was walking through the place, making not a sound with his cotton-padded soles, and because of the movement easily managing to keep awake. Indeed, so well did he sleep during the day when he returned with the constable, that he found no wish to rest at night. The exercise he took kept him wakeful and brisk, ready for anything. But a week came and went, and till then nothing had happened. It was on a Saturday night, soon after midnight, that our hero suddenly realised that another strange mixture of sounds was coming to his ear and echoing dully through the store. Instantly he was on the *qui vive*.

'Some one moving down below,' he told himself. 'Yes, in the basement: I'll slip down in that direction.'

Gripping his life preserver, and with the electric torch in his other hand, he stole across to the stairway, and crouching there peered over the banisters. No one was to be seen, and now his ear could not detect a noise. Then, suddenly, a sound reached him. It was a man whispering. Instantly David clutched the banister and lowered himself head foremost till he was able to look into the basement, in the centre of which one single light glimmered. Click! There was the sound of a muffled footstep, and then a sudden gleam of light over on the far wall. As David looked he saw the door of a huge cupboard, in which employees were wont to hang their hats and coats, slide open, while the figure of a man appeared. There was an electric torch in his hand, and with this he lit the way behind him. Then another figure appeared, and following him two others. They stepped into the store, carrying a heavy burden with them.

'At last,' said our hero, struggling back into the stairway. 'Time I went to warn Constable Hemming.'

## CHAPTER IV

### A Responsible Position

There was the muffled sound of many feet in the basement as David slipped across to the doorway of the store, where was situated the letter-box through which he would be able to pass a signal to Constable Hemming; and for a while he stood still listening.

'Better make absolutely sure that they are coming up here,' he told himself, tip-toeing back towards the head of the basement stairs. 'And there's another thing to consider. If they have entered through that cupboard, they will escape that way, unless, of course – my word! that would alter matters very materially.'

For at first sight, and remembering what he had read about other burglaries, David had taken it for granted that the men he had seen stepping into the basement had gained access to the cupboard through a hole in the wall. Then, suddenly, the idea had flashed across his brain that probably they had merely secreted themselves there during the day, unseen by any save, perhaps, an accomplice in the store. In which case their retreat was cut off.

'Out of the question,' he told himself, bending over the basement banisters. 'There is that heavy parcel. They couldn't have brought that in. No, they have broken through the wall in some manner. Let me see.'

In his mind's eye he inspected the surroundings of the store, but obtained little help from his review of the dwellings. For though a mixed property lay adjacent to the store, and, indeed, was attached to its walls, the majority of the premises were divided into numerous offices and workrooms, while there was an enormous number of tenants. However, his reflections were suddenly cut short, for one of the four men below suddenly put in an appearance, and came hurrying up the stairs, his rubber soles making not a sound. Instantly David took to his heels and ran across to the manager's office, the latter affording a safe asylum near to the door through which he was to give his signal. He bolted through the open swing-doors of the office, and turning round peered through the glass screen which helped to form it. His heart began to beat furiously; for the men had all reached the ground floor by now, and were advancing direct for the manager's office.

'They'll see me at once, of course,' thought David, on the verge of panic 'I can't get out without their catching sight of me. Where am I to hide?'

The answer came to him within the second as he ran his eyes round the office, for all the world as if he were a hunted animal. 'Ah, behind the bookcase. That'll do for me.'

Quite close to him, with its back placed within a foot of one wall of the office was a big desk, with a leather top, on which ink, paper, and pens were scattered. And posted on it, right at the back, was a small bookcase, filled with directories and a heterogeneous mixture of books and papers, besides a bale of leather samples. It afforded the only hiding-place possible, and David slid towards it eagerly. The space behind was barely sufficient to accommodate him, for our hero was inclined to be somewhat bulky, and showed promise of one day possessing broad shoulders and big limbs. However, by pushing firmly, he was able to roll the desk a couple of inches outward on the parquet flooring, and that without so much as a sound. He was hardly ensconced in the space behind when one of the strangers entered.

'Bring it in here, bring it in here,' David heard him say, with a peculiarly nasal accent, while the words were slurred as if a foreigner had given vent to them. 'There, lay it down, we are not ready for it yet. Bah! why not a light here of all places? There are lamps going all over the store, and the police know them and take no further notice. But here, where we want them, none. *Peste!* How stupid of the owners!'

There came a snigger from the man directly behind him, while David could hear the deep breathing of the two who were carrying the long, strange object.

'It's heavy, at any rate,' he told himself. 'Let's take a squint at 'em. Jolly glad I am that there isn't a lamp going here. The light would come through between the books and show me nicely. My word! This is a fine peep show! There are a dozen niches through which I can get a view. That's an electric torch. Ain't the chap careful to keep the light on the floor too! Every one of them wearing gloves. This is interesting.'

He almost forgot to think of himself and the undoubted danger of his own position. For the four men in the manager's office, one of them not more than the desk's width from David, occupied the greater part of his thoughts. It was true that there was no light in this particular part of the store; but, then, elsewhere there were electric lamps, and the illumination of the whole place and of this office in particular, though not brilliant, was ample for our hero. His eyes were used to the dimness, and as he stared between the books on their dusty shelves, he was able first of all to detect the fact that all four burglars wore kid gloves on their hands and rubber shoes on their feet. For the rest, three were undoubtedly of dark complexion and wore moustaches, while the fourth, the only one whose aspect was decidedly English, was clean-shaven. He leaned his back against the wall close to the bookcase, and breathed heavily while David surveyed his companions.

'Can't think why them cylinders are so heavy,' our hero heard him grumble. 'From the look of the things, with their rope coatings, you'd say as they was that light a child could play with 'em. But, my! they make a chap blow. Where's the safe?'

'S-s-sh, my friend. People will find us before we find the safe if you make such a bother,' declared the man who had led the way into the office, and who for a moment had used his electric torch. 'The safe is here, without doubt, seeing that it was here this morning, and such things are not moved as easily as are boxes. Behold the safe, my friend.'

Tucked away in his hiding-place David went hot all over, till beads of perspiration streamed from his forehead, and his clothing clung to him uncomfortably; for in the leader of the gang – for such the speaker seemed to be – he suddenly recognised an official of the store who had had some years of service with his employers, and who was an expert in the jewellery department.

'And is a burglar all the while,' thought David, common sense telling him that the man was an expert in this branch also; for otherwise, how could he wear such a business-like air? How could he appear so unconcerned, so used to midnight entries into closed premises? 'Queer,' thought our hero. 'It just shows his cunning. The articles which have been disappearing have not been stones or jewellery. Valuable furs have gone, and Henricksen has nothing to do with that department. So they're after the safe? I should laugh right out if it didn't happen to be distinctly dangerous; for our manager took care to empty it. There are useless books inside; nothing more.'

'Behold the safe, my friend,' said Henricksen again, triumphantly, his eyes flashing as he turned towards the clean-shaven man beside the bookcase, while his electric torch played on the huge mass of painted steel, wherein the most valuable jewels and the money of the store were wont to rest at night. 'You grumble at the weight of a couple of cylinders; let us see if you will grumble when we come to handle the gold. But we must be moving; there is big work before us, and it is now twenty minutes after midnight. Yes, precisely that time.'

His coolness was amazing. David saw him refer to a neat little watch strapped to his left wrist, and noted at the same moment that the gloves he wore were of reddish colour, while the left one was split up the back. Then his eyes went to the cylinders lying snugly on the floor, and from them to the other men.

'They might be any nationality,' he thought. 'To look at them now they don't appear to be ruffians, but there you are, old ideas are being exploded every day of the year. A criminal face does not always mean a murderer or a burglar. Some of the most cunning fellows known to the police of late have had quite a sanctimonious appearance. The well-groomed, gentlemanly criminal who is a

clever hypocrite has a better chance to-day than the man with the face of a bull dog, the forehead of a Cree Indian, and the narrow, half-closed eyes of a Chinese. What are they up to now?

He might well ask the question, for David was not used to burglarious enterprises. Up till this moment he had hardly dared to imagine how the men would endeavour to force the huge safe in the office. Then he remembered the cylinders, and remembering them, and drawing upon his slender engineering knowledge, he realised that modern methods are adopted not alone by scientists who mostly discover them, and by up-to-date manufacturers, but also by up-to-date malefactors. The oxy-acetylene flame, he knew, would eat its way into a mass of steel so tough that not even a finely-tempered drill would touch it. Also, that it would burn a path far sooner than the same could be formed by the aid of the best of tools. His past knowledge told him all that. But how would these men set about the task, and —

'That's not the sort of thing I want to be interested in just now,' he suddenly told himself. 'I want to get out of this, and without their knowing; how's that to be done? A fine fool I shall look if I have to watch their operations and see them get away without summoning those posted outside. How's it to be done?'

He might ask himself the question a thousand times, but yet there was no answer. Puzzle his wits as he might, he could see no way out of the difficulty. He was trapped; he was virtually a prisoner. A movement on his part would be fatal; these men were armed perhaps.

'Armed — that's a shooter, a magazine pistol!' He almost said the words aloud of a sudden, for his danger was brought full face before him. The man, Henricksen, pulled something from his trouser pocket and deposited it on the desk behind which David was crouching. The thing glittered in the feeble rays. It flashed brightly as the electric torch happened to cast a beam in its direction. It was a Browning pistol without a shadow of doubt. It brought David Harbor to a full stop for the moment; even his heart seemed to arrest its palpitations.

'Unstrap the rugs,' he heard Henricksen say, as if he were a mile off, 'fix the props, and let us get going. When all is ready Spolikoff will get along and watch the door and windows, while Ovanovitch will mount the stairs and clear every jewel that he thinks worth having. The Admiral will lend me a hand. Got those glasses, Admiral?'

The individual alluded to, he with the clean-shaven face, searched in an inner pocket, and produced two long cases. He placed them on the desk, and then proceeded to help his companions. Nor could there now be a doubt in David's mind that the gang was experienced and well drilled. There was not a hitch, not a false move in the proceedings. They went about the work like men who had done the same before, and who in each case knew what was required of them. A huge, thick rug or mat — David could not tell which — was unwound from the outside of the two rope-covered cylinders, and was quickly supported on four wooden legs, so contrived as to telescope at the will of the owners. A second rug was slung at one side, making a species of tent, the roof being meant without doubt to arrest the glare of the flame about to be employed, and keep it from reflecting on the ceiling. While the side curtain would keep the rays from the shop windows and from the eyes of curious or suspicious passers.

'And now for the burner,' Henricksen said, seating himself on a chair beneath the tent, and donning a pair of dark-coloured spectacles. 'Put on your pair of glasses, Admiral. I've known a man pretty nigh blinded by the glare of the flame, and in any case, supposing there was trouble, you wouldn't be able to see when you wanted to hook it. Fix those rubber tubes. We'll have things going nicely in a second.'

David took in a long breath as he watched the scene, and once more his eyes surveyed each member of the gang. 'Two Russians,' he told himself, looking at the dark moustached men told off to leave the office. 'Spolikoff and Ovanovitch. The sort of alien not wanted in this country, and the Admiral is, I suppose, an ex-sailor — a bad hat, dismissed from the lower deck, a confirmed criminal. The only Englishman amongst them — what an artful fellow Henricksen must be! Who would have

thought that the man employed in the jewellery store could be such a double-faced rascal! And there's his pistol.'

Yes, there it was, twinkling in the dim light, fascinating David, drawing his eyes in its direction every half minute, inviting him to inspect it further, rousing his envy, making his fingers itch to possess and handle it.

'Why not? With a long reach I could do it. Why not? It's a risk. I'll take it.'

It was typical of the lad that he should come to a sudden decision, and having so decided, should proceed to carry the task out with all his courage and determination. Was that not David's character? Had he not already shown courage and determination? What were Mrs. Clayhill's words on our hero? 'Stubborn and obstinate,' she had misrepresented him. 'Perseveres in a thing he has decided on; just like his father.'

At such times her none too pleasant features bore a somewhat ferocious aspect 'Ain't she just angry?' David used to say, as he went his way, deeming it best to absent himself for the moment. 'Just sparks flashing from her eyes. She doesn't seem as if she could be friendly. I must be an out and out obstinate fellow.'

And so he was. David was an obstinate fellow without a shadow of doubt, but with this saving clause – he was not selfish, and he was possessed of common sense; he could criticise his own actions and impulses. If he once, on maturer reflection, came to the conclusion that a certain decision was wrong, he had the sense to change it. His obstinacy was confined to matters wherein he felt that there could be no error. Witness his intention of fending for himself, of making his way alone in the world. David had that as a fixed and firm-rooted purpose before him now. His strong chin squared itself in the most emphatic manner whenever the matter crossed his mind, which was nearly always. But here was the pistol.

'I'll have it,' he told himself, his muscles tightening. 'One long stretch and there it is. Ah! they're turning their backs; I'll have a chance before very long.'

'Now the match; set the flame going,' he heard Henricksen say, and looking beneath the tent-like structure saw a sudden flash, and the profiles of this man and the 'Admiral.' The latter was holding a match towards the end of the long brass burner which Henricksen gripped in his hands. David noticed that two separate pipes converged towards the end into one, from which a small flame now spouted, while Henricksen controlled two taps, one for each of the tubes, with his fingers. Farther back a rubber tube went to each of those of metal leading to the burner, and ended at one of the cylinders, or rather, to put it in the correct order, began there, carrying the gas to the burner.

'You two get off,' said Henricksen, seeing that he had a flame. 'Spolikoff, keep moving up and down, and if you hear a latch click, sit down as tight as possible. The police look into the store every time they pass, and might see you. Admiral, pull that rug round a bit. The light will break too much round the corner.'

What a clever criminal he was! David marvelled that it could be the same sleek, suave man who waited in the jewellery department, and enticed customers to buy the things he offered. Then his eyes closed suddenly, for Henricksen's fingers manipulated the taps of his burner, and at once a fierce flame spouted out, casting about it a dazzling light. Peering round the corner of the rug which the 'Admiral' had drawn towards him, and shading his eyes behind an enormous directory, David caught a glimpse of the intensely hot jet of flame playing on the door of the safe in the neighbourhood of the lock. It seemed that he could actually see the paint peeling off, while, almost at once, the metal beneath became white hot. In less time than he could have believed it possible it seemed to be pitting, as if the flame were devouring portions of it. Then, very suddenly, the 'Admiral' pulled at the rug again, and the glare and the figures beneath the tent were obliterated. David gently removed one of the ponderous volumes, stretched his arm through the opening, and possessed himself of the Browning revolver.

'So far, so good!' he thought. 'Now to get out of the place. Wonder whether I could climb over the glass partition? No, wouldn't do; I should be seen by Henricksen at once.'

He forgot for the second that the ruffian who went by that name, and who in his everyday life was looked upon as a clever and capable salesman in the store, was at that moment wearing dark spectacles, through which he could see nothing but the glare of the acetylene flame. David failed to remember that, even armed with those glasses, the glare was such that a man manipulating the blow-pipe would require a few moments rest to accustom his eyes to lesser illumination. Then the thought occurred to him. He stretched his neck round the edge of the bookcase, and caught a glimpse of the flame. Its brilliance was intense. It caused his pupils to contract with painful suddenness, and turning his head away, he found that everything was a dark blank. For the moment his own eyes were useless. The experience emboldened him.

'I'll creep out and across the office behind the tent,' he said. 'Then I'll dodge the Russian Spolikoff. Ah! what's that?'

A motor horn sounded suddenly out in the street, and he heard the rattle of a passing automobile. The next instant there came a sharp click, which was easily heard above the gentle roar of the oxy-acetylene flame. Promptly the glare died down. Henricksen had manipulated the taps and had shut down the gas.

'Stay still,' David heard him whisper to the man known as the 'Admiral.' 'It's a policeman inspecting. He won't see the glare; he couldn't with this tent. What's he making all that noise about?'

It was Constable Hemming without a doubt, and if the truth had been guessed at, the honest fellow had suddenly become fearful for the safety of our hero. There was a second constable on duty with him, patrolling the outskirts of the store, and the latter had reported a sudden glare within. Hemming was sceptical; but he went at once to the letter-box, and opened the flap with a loud click. Yes, there did seem to be a glare over the manager's office, he thought, but it died away at once.

'He's been having a feed,' he suggested to his comrade. 'Switched on a light in the office for a while, and then turned it out again. He'll have heard the latch go, he'd have shouted if there was trouble.'

But the sound he had made had been sufficient to alarm Henricksen and his comrades. David saw the 'Admiral' suddenly crouch close to the floor and grope in his pocket. Henricksen tore his glasses from his eyes, and emerging from the tent, groped on the desk for the weapon he had left there. A growl escaped him as he failed to find it. His fingers ran over the leather surface, over the pens and ink bottle and paper, but still they were unsuccessful. Then he turned to his comrade.

'That fellow made a heap of noise,' he said. 'I thought he might be suspicious. Suppose he didn't see or hear Spolikoff; but where's my Browning? I could swear that I left it on the desk here.'

'I saw you,' came the answer. 'You put it down close to the ink bottle: ain't it there?'

'Not a sign of it. Can't very well see yet, for that glare is terrific in spite of smoked glasses. But I've run my fingers everywhere, and there's no shooter. Spolikoff's taken it perhaps.'

Meanwhile, David had crouched behind the bookcase again, and for the moment almost shivered. It was true that he was now armed; but would that help him against such miscreants, considering he was like a rat in a trap, hemmed in the closest quarters? He even thought wildly of making a dash for the outside of the manager's office, and was bracing his muscles for the effort, when a dusky figure came sliding in through the glass doorway, to be detected instantly by our hero, but not so by the others, for their backs were in that direction, while even if it had been otherwise their eyes were still hardly fit for such a task.

'S-s-shish!' said the man, whispering. 'It's Spolikoff. A policeman came to the opening and rattled. I dived down and sat still; then I managed to get to a place where I could see through a chink in the shutters. Two constables were talking outside. I saw them part and walk away along the pavement. It's all clear again.'

The 'Admiral' gave vent to a sigh of relief, and wiped the sweat from his forehead, while Henricksen turned round and stared hard at the man, still unable to see him.

'You get back to that peep hole right away,' he commanded gruffly, 'and watch out for the police. Give us a signal when they're coming. I'm afraid they may see the glare. Did you walk off with my shooter?'

Spolikoff denied the charge promptly. 'Here's my own,' he said. 'But perhaps Ovanovitch took it; he has a way of borrowing things! I will go and ask him.'

'You'll just get right off to that peep hole,' he was commanded. 'Ovanovitch can hand over the gun when he comes down. Should say he'll not be long; that place upstairs don't take long clearing. My! won't this be a haul! I've done the firm in for a thousand pounds already during the past six weeks. Monday's their day for banking, and I reckon we shall clear double the amount once we get this safe open. Get along, Spolikoff. Now, Admiral, put your back to it; we've a long job before us.'

David breathed more easily as Henricksen gave up for the moment his quest for the revolver. Then he watched the two men creep into the tent again, and drag the side curtain still more round them. He waited till the glare of the flame once more reached his eyes, and then began to slide along to the far side of the bookcase. Bang! crash! A volume which had been resting unbeknown to him on the very edge of the desk toppled over at the movement, and went to the floor with a thud. Henricksen and his comrade darted from beneath their covering as if they had been shot.

'What was it? What was it?' the former asked breathlessly, evidently scared by the noise. 'Something fell quite close to us. Look about.'

But that was just exactly what they found a difficulty in doing, for they had again donned their smoked spectacles, and had had their flame playing on the safe. However, the 'Admiral' dropped on to his knees and went groping about the floor close to the desk till his fingers came in contact with the fallen book. A low guffaw broke from him.

'Here's what's caused all the pother,' he laughed. 'In searching for that shooter you must have just balanced the book on the edge of the desk. Of course it went bang: it would do – just to scare us. Blessed if these glasses don't bother a fellow. Even now I can't see a thing; it's all feeling. But it's a book all right, no mistake about it.'

Another growl came from Henricksen: he hated such interruptions. True, he had had to put up with them before in the course of his criminal career, but he imagined that by now he was hardened. It angered him to find himself so easily scared. For the moment, too, he was almost suspicious; the strange disappearance of his revolver, coupled with the fallen book, tended to alarm him.

'I'm jumpy to-night,' he told himself, with an oath. 'Fact is, if I am ever to be taken I'd fifty times rather have it elsewhere, and not here where I'm at home as it were. Come along, let's get to at the job; it'll take a couple of hours to work round this lock.'

A couple of hours: then David had plenty of time before him. Should he stay where he was, and not risk further movement till matters had settled down a little?

To be absolutely candid regarding him, there was doubt in his mind on this occasion, doubt engendered by fear of what might happen. And who, remembering all the circumstances, could feel surprise? Where he was there was security. He had already had it proved to him that the back of the bookcase was an excellent hiding-place. Why not stay there in safety, then? Why not wait a little and see what turned up?

'Bah!' – he could have kicked himself – 'Funking, are you?' he almost growled aloud. 'Putting your tail between your legs because you are afraid of these men – afraid when you've got a revolver! Gurr!'

He flicked beads of perspiration from the corners of his eyes, and once more squeezed stealthily along behind the case. Yet again he caught the glare of the oxy-acetylene flame, while the gentle buzz of the jet struck upon his ear. Another motor car passed in the street with a gurr and a blast from its horn; then there was silence. David reached the edge of the case, looked cunningly about him, and

stole straightway to the door. He turned to watch the glare, and caught a glimpse of the 'Admiral's' leg as it showed beyond the curtain. Then he stared into the main portion of the store looking eagerly for Spolikoff, but without success.

'Got to dodge him,' he told himself. 'Got to reach the door and give the alarm. Supposing I do? What'll happen?'

He was now some fifteen paces from the office, and stood for a few seconds considering the question. What would the burglars do once the alarm was given, and Constable Hemming had placed his key in the lock and thrown the door open?

'It's as clear as daylight,' thought David. 'They'll run below right away. Perhaps they'll shoot as they go. In any case, they'll be out and away before the police can guess what they're doing. I've got to put a stop to that.'

He stole forward again in the direction of the door, wondering what course he ought to pursue; then, as if doubtful, he turned towards the entry to the stairway leading to the basement.

'Why not?' he asked himself. 'I'll go down there and –'

His hair almost stood on end; his heart seemed to stop abruptly and his muscles felt paralysed all in one brief second; for a figure was coming towards him, a dusky figure, sidling silently across the floor; and in a flash he recognised the man. It was Spolikoff, the Russian, sent by Henricksen to keep watch and ward.

## CHAPTER V

### London's Alien Criminals

If ever David Harbor had felt inclined to play the coward it was at the precise moment, on this adventurous night when he came so abruptly, and so unexpectedly, face to face with one of the men who were engaged in robbing his employers' store. Behind him, in the office, he had left Henricksen and the ruffian known as the 'Admiral' busily engaged with their oxy-acetylene flame, eating a hole into the safe which they hoped and imagined was well filled with gold. Upstairs was the man Ovanovitch, clearing the cases of all their portable valuables, while here, on the main floor, was Spolikoff, a Russian – a man given naturally to deeds of violence – placed there to watch for the very police whom it was our hero's object to summon. The very man from whom he wished to keep farthest away was stealing towards him in the semi-darkness.

David drew in a deep breath. His hand clutched the revolver he had managed to secure. With an effort he controlled his muscles.

'Run! Shout for help!' some one seemed to scream in his ear. 'Steady,' he told himself, summoning all his pluck. 'Steady, my boy; play the game. No use bolting; he'll be just as surprised as I am.'

But, as it turned out, there was no question of surprise. While David was prepared for anything – to shoot at the man, to knock him to the ground with his fist, to rush over towards the door and bang upon it – Spolikoff sidled up to him, and spoke in a whisper that almost cloaked his foreign accent.

'That you, Admiral?' he asked. 'They've passed again, those policemen; but I didn't signal. There's no need; no one can see the glare now. You've pulled the curtain round so well.'

David nodded. He was wondering whether he could trust himself to answer the fellow, for it was obvious that his own identity was not even suspected. Then, emboldened by that fact, he answered the man in a hoarse whisper.

'I came along out here to make sure. It's fine, ain't it? Them police couldn't suspect that we'd got a hot flame going against the safe. Look here, my boy, Henricksen wants you to go along up to Ovanovitch and give him a hand. When you've cleared the jewels, get away up to the next floor. He says some new furs came in yesterday, and you could carry away in your arms enough to keep you for a year. Get along quick.'

The Russian looked at him for a moment as if he suspected, though, as a matter of fact, he was merely puzzling to translate the meaning of the words, for as yet he was not an excellent English scholar.

'Get along up and help Ovanovitch, yes,' he repeated. 'Then – I did not follow – you said?'

'S-s-sh! The police!'

There came a sudden rattle at the letter-box, whereat both he and the Russian sank promptly to the ground, while David imagined that a faint light over by the office lessened. Then there was silence again. A heavy footfall was heard on the pavement, and after it, silence once more. Slowly he and the Russian rose to their feet.

'What was it?' asked the man. 'You said I was to help Ovanovitch.'

'Listen,' whispered David, speaking very plainly, 'help Ovanovitch with the jewels.'

'Yes, yes; I have that'

'Then take him to the floor up above.'

'Floor up above. Yes, yes; I have that too.'

'Where you will find some valuable furs brought in only yesterday.'

'Only yesterday, furs; valuable furs. Yes; go on.'

'You can carry enough away on your arm to make you rich for a year. Got it?'

Spolikoff nodded vigorously, and gave expression to some guttural words of approval.

'Now?' he asked. 'You watch here?'

'Yes,' said David, 'Go at once; no need to hurry back.'

His hand was shaking ever so little as he took the Russian by the sleeve and urged him towards the stairs; for the feeble light above the place had suddenly shown him another figure. The man was descending the stairs, and was almost at the bottom. David could see that a bundle was suspended over his back. It was Ovanovitch without doubt, descending now that his task was completed.

'Tell him; go up at once,' David managed to whisper, though his tongue almost stuck to the roof of his mouth. 'I am going back to Henricksen.'

He slid off at once, slipped behind a huge showcase, and then stared back through the glass at the two Russians. And as he did so the tight feeling about his chest and neck slowly lessened. He drew in the first comfortable breath he had taken for some minutes. A sigh almost escaped him; for Spolikoff had been absolutely deceived. It was clear that he was not in the smallest degree suspicious. He had taken our hero for the Admiral, and was obeying instructions in a manner almost child-like. He went at once to Ovanovitch, and for a few seconds they whispered on the stairs. Then they turned their backs to the ground floor and went up two steps at a time, as if eager to get to their destination.

'Got 'em,' David could have shouted, though he restrained himself, hugging his arms instead. 'Got 'em, I do believe. Now for the rest of the business.' His brain had been working hard in the last few minutes, and already he had mapped out a course of procedure. After all, that was exactly like the young fellow; his friends knew him to be exceedingly practical. Edward Harbor, his father, had endeavoured to train his boy to conduct matters of any moment with sense and discretion.

'Decide first of all what you're going to do,' he had often said. 'Don't start without a plan, all haphazard, and find when you are half way through that matters aren't promising. Stand away a bit, as it were, and have a clear view; then make your plans, and set to at the business.' Practical? Of course it was. Common sense management? Who can doubt it? A little advanced for one of David's age? Certainly, if you wish so to describe it. But that is worth remedying. Others can be trained as our hero had been, and the training has its undoubted advantages; for a practical young fellow is of infinitely greater value in these strenuous days than a lad always wool-gathering, who lacks energy and initiative, who begins a task only to fail, who succeeds only where a course of procedure has been already laid down, and when previous practice has made perfect. It is the uncertainties we want to train our lads to face, as well as the hum-drum certainties of this life.

'Got 'em,' David ejaculated again, in a deep whisper. 'Now to close the holes and divide the conspirators. First downstairs – that is the main burrow I have to see to.'

He had lost all his trepidation now. True, he was more than a little excited; but his hand no longer shook. He had seen already the possibilities of making a gigantic success of what had at first appeared to be an enormously difficult task. Straightway he stole across to the stairway leading to the basement, and tripped down three steps at a time. Then he ran across to the cupboard through which the four men had gained access to the store. Out came his electric torch, and a beam was flashed into the interior.

'As I thought: these fellows must have hired a house or a room in one of the buildings lying up against this place, and have knocked a hole clean through the wall. Then they cut through the back of the cupboard. No; no they didn't; they bored holes through the wood in a big circle, and so managed to remove a piece without making a sound. If they had employed a saw I should have heard them. Now, I shut the cupboard, and lock the door.'

It was not a flimsy affair, this cupboard, but a strongly built piece of furniture, firmly attached to the wall, and having doors which slid along in grooves. David gently moved the doors into place, found a key in the lock, and shot the bolt to. Then he tried to open the cupboard. It was closed and defied his efforts.

'Number one loop hole gone,' he said. 'Now for the warning and number two.'

He had planned out the whole course of movement, and came hopping up the stairs again, three at a time. A quick glance told him that the oxy-acetylene flame was still in use. A dull glow on the ceiling told its tale without shadow of error, while as he listened a gentle buzz came to his ear. From the upper floor there was not so much as a sound. At once he crossed to the door, and pulled the flap of the letter-box open. Click! Down went the glare over by the manager's office. Lying prone on the floor, and staring in that direction, David saw a man's head protruding from the opening. Then the fellow stepped out and stood listening. A whisper came to his ear, and at once the Admiral – for he it was without doubt – slid back into the manager's office to help in the task of forcing the safe. The reflection on the ceiling told its tale again promptly.

'Out with the life preserver, and then upstairs,' said David. 'No time to wait; those fellows will have found their furs by now.'

Very craftily he pushed the end of the life preserver through the flap, and left it wedged in position. Then he ran across the floor to the stairs and raced up them. Passing the first floor, he was soon at the entrance to the second. And as he reached it his eyes fell on the two figures of the Russians. They were staggering along the centre passage between the glass show cases, their arms piled with furs. They were thirty paces away, perhaps, whispering as they came.

Dare he do it? Dare he pull the door of this portion of the store to in their faces?

David closed his teeth with a firm click; his chin assumed that very bulldog squareness for which he was notorious. He stepped coolly into the opening, gripped the iron fire door, with which the entrance to every one of the departments of the store was furnished, and brought it to with a bang. The hand-operated latch went to its socket with a scrunch. The door was fast. Number two loop hole was closed. The burglars were inevitably separated.

'And now for the last move.'

Conscious that the noise he had made might well have reached Henricksen, and yet hopeful that it had not done so, David descended the stairs faster than ever before in his life. He reached the ground floor just as a sound came from the letter-box. He fancied he heard voices outside. He was sure that the oxy-acetylene flame was working, and at that second watched as its reflection seemed to be wiped away from the ceiling above the manager's office. Then he did a smart thing. He opened the outside doors of the lift with a bang, leaped in, and ran the elevator up till it was half way through the gap leading to the first floor. He brought it to a rest there with a sudden jerk, and throwing himself flat on its floor, levelled his weapon at the door of the manager's office. And by then there was a commotion in that direction. Two figures come helter-skelter from the opening, their hands held before them, their smoked glasses already torn from their faces. At the same instant there came the sound of a key in a lock, and then the main entrance of the store was burst open.

'Stop there, Henricksen and the Admiral!' David shouted. 'Stop where you are or I fire. Constable, hold the door, I have closed the other places.'

Ping! Bang! From some point up above our hero, there came a revolver shot, and he heard the missile thud against the roof of the elevator and tinkle on to the floor near him. Ping! A second came, and then he felt the elevator moving. It was ascending. Some one had put it into operation from above. At once he guessed what had happened. The two Russians, shut into the fur department, had heard the lift working. They had torn the doors open, and reaching through had gripped the rope by means of which it was operated. David at once sprang to his feet and gripped the handle which operated the rope. Instantly he brought the machine to a stop, and turning the handle again, brought the elevator back to its former position, a shot coming from above as he did so. Then he cast his eyes into the store, and at once took in the position, which had altered in the space of a few seconds. There were two constables at the door, Hemming and another, the latter of whom was at that moment lustily blowing his whistle. At the entrance to the stairs leading to the basement stood the Admiral, a revolver in his hands, while the other rascal was nowhere visible; but a minute later he came racing up the stairs, and burst into the department.

'Give me the shooter,' he cried, breathlessly. 'They've shut the cupboard below and boxed us in. Give it me. I'm not afraid to use it.'

He seized the weapon from his comrade's hand, and in an instant there was a flash. The constable blowing his whistle staggered into the doorway. David at once leaned forward, levelled his own weapon, and pulled on the trigger. And in the space of a second he had ejected three bullets in the direction of Henricksen; for his was an automatic pistol, the class of weapon that wants careful controlling, and which will fire seven shots in less number of seconds, automatically moving a fresh cartridge into position after each shot. Certainly the bullets astounded David, and Henricksen also. He swung round, and then our hero knew what it was to be under fire. Something hissed past his cheek. The hair on his head stirred restlessly. A red-hot brand appeared to have been of a sudden thrust right through his body. But he was game to the last. He leaned over a little, fixed his revolver sights as well as he was able, and pressed his trigger again.

An instant later Henricksen went staggering up against one of the glass show cases. He upset the whole affair, and came crashing to the floor with glass smashing and splintering all about him; then his comrade darted forward, and stooped to pick up the weapon which he had dropped.

'Stand away from that place,' David commanded hoarsely. 'I'll drop you, Admiral, as sure as you move a step. Now, hands up above your head.'

'Admiral, Admiral, what's that?' came from the doorway. 'Where are you, David Harbor?'

'In the lift, half way up,' our hero called out, wondering vaguely at the weakness of his own voice. 'Half way up, Hemming. The man who fired at you, and whom I have just sent down is Henricksen, one of the employees here. The fellow with his arms up is known as the Admiral.'

'Phew.' There came a shrill whistle from Hemming. 'The Admiral did you say? Wanted in a dozen capitals. Swindler, forger, burglar, everything.'

'And two Russians upstairs, whom I have trapped in the fur department. Now, Hemming, got those handcuffs?'

Feeling curiously shaky David touched the handle of the lift again, and brought it down to the floor level, unmindful of the shots which still came from above. And all the while he held his weapon directed at the man standing so close to Henricksen.

'Now, Hemming,' he called out. 'Shut the door, or he might try to bolt. Slip the handcuffs on him; but first of all, switch on the lights just inside the door.'

It was all done in a few moments. Constable Hemming was a sharp officer, and was not above taking advice or instructions from any one. He flooded the store with light with one movement of his finger. Then there came the metallic ring of steel. Something bright flashed under the electric lamps, while the officer strode across the floor, banging the door behind him. Click. One of the bracelets went over the wrist of the disconsolate Admiral.

'Come you along here,' commanded Hemming, dragging the man across to a radiator, bolted to the floor. 'Put that other hand there. Now, move if you can. You'll have to take the house with you.'

He passed the end of his chain through an interval in the radiator, and clicked the bracelet over the man's other wrist, leaving the Admiral firmly chained to the place.

'What now?' he demanded. 'Guess you've made a haul here. The Admiral! Gosh! The most wanted of 'em all! This is a doing!'

'Get to the door and open it. First, though, pick up that shooter,' said David. 'Don't forget that we have those Russian fellows upstairs.'

'Russians! Who? Where?' demanded Hemming, his face expressing unbounded surprise.

'Spolikoff and Ovanovitch, two men of about thirty years of age, dark complexioned, wearing black moustaches,' answered David, staggering out of the lift. 'They've done nothing but fire down on me. The top of the lift is like a sieve.'

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