

7. The Demon Becomes Angry

When Rob had been hugged and kissed by his mother and sisters, and even Mr. Joslyn had embraced him warmly, he gave them a brief account of his adventures. The story was received with many doubtful looks and much grave shaking of heads, as was quite natural under the circumstances.

"I hope, my dear son," said the father, "that you have now passed through enough dangers to last you a lifetime, so that hereafter you will be contented to remain at home."

"Oh, Robert!" cried his mother, with tears in her loving eyes, "you don't know how we've all worried about you for the past week!"

"A week?" asked Rob, with surprise.

"Yes; it's a week to-morrow morning since you flew into the air and disappeared."

"Then," said the boy, thoughtfully, "I've reached home just in time."

"In time for what?" she asked.

But he did not answer that question. He was thinking of the Demon, and that on the afternoon of this very day he might expect the wise and splendid genius to visit him a second time.

At luncheon, although he did not feel hungry, he joined the family at the table and pleased his mother by eating as heartily as of old. He was surprised to find how good the food tasted, and to realize what a pleasure it is to gratify one's sense of taste. The tablets were all right for a journey, he thought, but if he always ate them he would be sure to miss a great deal of enjoyment, since there was no taste to them at all.

At four o'clock he went to his workshop and unlocked the door. Everything was exactly as he had left it, and he looked at his simple electrical devices with some amusement. They seemed tame beside the wonders now in his possession; yet he recollected that his numerous wires had enabled him to strike the Master Key, and therefore should not be despised.

Before long he noticed a quickening in the air, as if it were suddenly surcharged with electric fluid, and the next instant, in a dazzling flash of light, appeared the Demon.

"I am here!" he announced.

"So am I," answered Rob. "But at one time I really thought I should never see you again. I've been--"

"Spare me your history," said the Demon, coldly. "I am aware of your adventures."

"Oh, you are!" said Rob, amazed. "Then you know--"

"I know all about your foolish experiences," interrupted the Demon, "for I have been with you constantly, although I remained invisible."

"Then you know what a jolly time I've had," returned the boy. "But why do you call them foolish experiences?"

"Because they were, abominably foolish!" retorted the Demon, bitterly. "I entrusted to you gifts of rare scientific interest--electrical devices of such utility that their general adoption by mankind would create a new era in earth life. I hoped your use of these devices would convey such hints to electrical engineers that they would quickly comprehend their mechanism and be able to reproduce them in sufficient quantities to supply the world. And how do you treat these marvelous gifts? Why, you carry them to a cannibal island, where even your crude civilization has not yet penetrated!"

"I wanted to astonish the natives," said Rob, grinning.

The Demon uttered an exclamation of anger, and stamped his foot so fiercely that thousands of electric sparks filled the air, to disappear quickly with a hissing, crinkling sound.

"You might have astonished those ignorant natives as easily by showing them an ordinary electric light," he cried, mockingly. "The power of your gifts would have startled the most advanced electricians of the world. Why did you waste them upon barbarians?"

"Really," faltered Rob, who was frightened and awed by the Demon's vehement anger, "I never intended to visit a cannibal island. I meant to go to Cuba."

"Cuba! Is that a center of advanced scientific thought? Why did you not take your marvels to New York or Chicago; or, if you wished to cross the ocean, to Paris or Vienna?"

"I never thought of those places," acknowledged Rob, meekly.

"Then you were foolish, as I said," declared the Demon, in a calmer tone. "Can you not realize that it is better to be considered great by the intelligent thinkers of the earth, than to be taken for a god by stupid cannibals?"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Rob. "I wish now that I had gone to Europe. But you're not the only one who has a kick coming," he continued. "Your flimsy traveling machine was nearly the death of me."

"Ah, it is true," acknowledged the Demon, frankly. "The case was made of too light material. When the rim was bent it pressed against the works and impeded the proper action of the currents. Had you gone to a civilized country such an accident could not have happened; but to avoid possible trouble in the future I have prepared a new instrument, having a stronger case, which I will exchange for the one you now have."

"That's very kind of you," said Rob, eagerly handing his battered machine to the Demon and receiving the new one in return. "Are you sure this will work?"

"It is impossible for you to injure it," answered the other.

"And how about the next three gifts?" inquired the boy, anxiously.

"Before I grant them," replied the Demon, "you must give me a promise to keep away from uncivilized places and to exhibit your acquirements only among people of intelligence."

"All right," agreed the boy; "I'm not anxious to visit that island again, or any other uncivilized country."

"Then I will add to your possessions three gifts, each more precious and important than the three you have already received."

At this announcement Rob began to quiver with excitement, and sat staring eagerly at the Demon, while the latter increased in stature and sparkled and glowed more brilliantly than ever.