

## 20. The Unhappy Fate of the Demon

Again the atmosphere quickened and pulsed with accumulating vibrations. Again the boy found himself aroused to eager expectancy. There was a whirl in the air; a crackling like distant musketry; a flash of dazzling light--and the Demon stood before him for the third time.

"I give you greetings!" said he, in a voice not unkindly.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Demon," answered the boy, bowing gravely.

"I see you have returned safely from your trip," continued the Apparition, cheerfully, "although at one time I thought you would be unable to escape. Indeed, unless I had knocked that tube from the rascally Turk's hand as he clambered to the top of the wall, I believe you would have been at the Yarkand oasis yet--either dead or alive, as chance might determine."

"Were you there?" asked Rob.

"To be sure. And I recovered the tube for you, without which you would have been helpless. But that is the only time I saw fit to interfere in any way."

"I'm afraid I did not get a chance to give many hints to inventors or scientists," said Rob.

"True, and I have deeply regretted it," replied the Demon. "But your unusual powers caused more astonishment and consternation than you, perhaps, imagined; for many saw you whom you were too busy to notice. As a result several able electricians are now thinking new thoughts along new lines, and some of them may soon give these or similar inventions to the world."

"You are satisfied, then?" asked Rob.

"As to that," returned the Demon, composedly, "I am not. But I have hopes that with the addition of the three marvelous devices I shall present you with to-day you will succeed in arousing so much popular interest in electrical inventions as to render me wholly satisfied with the result of this experiment."

Rob regarded the brilliant apparition with a solemn face, but made no answer.

"No living person," continued the Demon, "has ever before been favored with such comforting devices for the preservation and extension of human life as yourself. You seem quite unappreciative, it is true; but since our connection I have come to realize that you are but an ordinary boy, with many boyish limitations; so I do not condemn your foolish actions too harshly."

"That is kind of you," said Rob.

"To prove my friendliness," pursued the Demon, "I have brought, as the first of to-day's offerings this Electro-Magnetic Restorer. You see it is shaped like a thin metal band, and is to be worn upon the brow, clasping at the back of the head. Its virtues surpass those of either the fabulous 'Fountain of Youth,' or the 'Elixir of Life,' so vainly sought for in past ages. For its wearer will instantly become free from any bodily disease or pain and will enjoy perfect health and vigor. In truth, so great are its powers that even the dead may be restored to life, provided the blood has not yet chilled. In presenting you with this appliance, I feel I am bestowing upon you the greatest blessing and most longed-for boon ever bequeathed of suffering humanity."

Here he held the slender, dull-colored metallic band toward the boy.

"Keep it," said Rob.

The Demon started, and gave him an odd look.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I told you to keep it," answered Rob. "I don't want it."

The Demon staggered back as if he had been struck.

"Don't want it!" he gasped.

"No; I've had enough of your infernal inventions!" cried the boy, with sudden anger.

He unclasped the traveling machine from his wrist and laid it on the table beside the Demon.

"There's the thing that's responsible for most of my troubles," said he, bitterly. "What right has one person to fly through the air while all his fellow-creatures crawl over the earth's surface? And why should I be cut off from all the rest of the world because you have given me this confounded traveling machine? I didn't ask for it, and I won't keep it a moment longer. Give it to some one you hate more than you do me!"

The Demon stared aghast and turned his glittering eyes wonderingly from Rob to the traveling machine and back again, as if to be sure he had heard and seen aright.

"And here are your food tablets," continued the boy, placing the box upon the table. "I've only enjoyed one square meal since you gave them to me. They're all right to preserve life, of course, and answer the purpose for which they were made; but I don't believe nature ever intended us to exist upon such things, or we wouldn't have the sense of taste, which enables us to enjoy natural food. As long as I'm a human being I'm going to eat like a human being, so I've consumed my last Electrical Concentrated Food Tablet--and don't you forget it!"

The Demon sank into a chair, nerveless and limp, but still staring fearfully at the boy.

"And there's another of your unnatural devices," said Rob, putting the Automatic Record of Events upon the table beside the other things. "What right have you to capture vibrations that radiate from private and secret actions and discover them to others who have no business to know them? This would be a fine world if every body could peep into every one else's affairs, wouldn't it? And here is your Character Marker. Nice thing for a decent person to own, isn't it? Any one who would take advantage of such a sneaking invention as that would be worse than a thief! Oh, I've used them, of course, and I ought to be spanked for having been so mean and underhanded; but I'll never be guilty of looking through them again."

The Demon's face was frowning and indignant. He made a motion to rise, but thought better of it and sank back in his chair.

"As for the Garment of Protection," resumed the boy, after a pause, "I've worn it for the last time, and here it is, at your service. I'll put the Electric Tube with it. Not that these are such very bad things in themselves, but I'll have none of your magical contrivances. I'll say this,

however: if all armies were equipped with Electrical Tubes instead of guns and swords the world would be spared a lot of misery and unnecessary bloodshed. Perhaps in time; but that time hasn't arrived yet."

"You might have hastened it," said the Demon, sternly, "if you had been wise enough to use your powers properly."

"That's just it," answered Rob. "I'm NOT wise enough. Nor is the majority of mankind wise enough to use such inventions as yours unselfishly and for the good of the world. If people were better, and every one had an equal show, it would be different."

For some moments the Demon sat quietly thinking. Finally the frown left his face and he said, with animation:

"I have other inventions, which you may use without any such qualms of conscience. The Electro-Magnetic Restorer I offered you would be a great boon to your race, and could not possibly do harm. And, besides this, I have brought you what I call the Illimitable Communicator. It is a simple electric device which will enable you, wherever you may be, to converse with people in any part of the world, without the use of such crude connections as wires. In fact, you may--"

"Stop!" cried Rob. "It is useless for you to describe it, because I'll have nothing more to do with you or your inventions. I have given them a fair trial, and they've got me into all sorts of trouble and made all my friends miserable. If I was some high-up scientist it would be different; but I'm just a common boy, and I don't want to be anything else."

"But, your duty--" began the Demon.

"My duty I owe to myself and to my family," interrupted Rob. "I have never cultivated science, more than to fool with some simple electrical experiments, so I owe nothing to either science or the Demon of Electricity, so far as I can see."

"But consider," remonstrated the Demon, rising to his feet and speaking in a pleading voice, "consider the years that must elapse before any one else is likely to strike the Master Key! And, in the meanwhile, consider my helpless position, cut off from all interest in the world while I have such wonderful inventions on my hands for the benefit of mankind. If

you have no love for science or for the advancement of civilization, DO have some consideration for your fellow-creatures, and for me!"

"If my fellow-creatures would have as much trouble with your electrical inventions as I had, I am doing them a service by depriving them of your devices," said the boy. "As for yourself, I've no fault to find with you, personally. You're a very decent sort of Demon, and I've no doubt you mean well; but there's something wrong about our present combination, I'm sure. It isn't natural."

The Demon made a gesture of despair.

"Why, oh why did not some intelligent person strike the Master Key!" he moaned.

"That's it!" exclaimed Rob. "I believe that's the root of the whole evil."

"What is?" inquired the Demon, stupidly.

"The fact that an intelligent person did not strike the Master Key. You don't seem to understand. Well, I'll explain. You're the Demon of Electricity, aren't you?"

"I am," said the other, drawing himself up proudly.

"Your mission is to obey the commands of whoever is able to strike the Master Key of Electricity."

"That is true."

"I once read in a book that all things are regulated by exact laws of nature. If that is so you probably owe your existence to those laws." The Demon nodded. "Doubtless it was intended that when mankind became intelligent enough and advanced enough to strike the Master Key, you and all your devices would not only be necessary and acceptable to them, but the world would be prepared for their general use. That seems reasonable, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps so. Yes; it seems reasonable," answered the Demon, thoughtfully.

"Accidents are always liable to happen," continued the boy. "By accident the Master Key was struck long before the world of science was ready for it--or for you. Instead of considering it an accident and paying no

attention to it you immediately appeared to me--a mere boy--and offered your services."

"I was very anxious to do something," returned the Demon, evasively. "You've no idea how stupid it is for me to live invisible and unknown, while all the time I have in my possession secrets of untold benefit to the world."

"Well, you'll have to keep cool and bide your time," said Rob. "The world wasn't made in a minute, and while civilization is going on at a pretty good pace, we're not up to the Demon of Electricity yet."

"What shall I do!" groaned the Apparition, wringing his hands miserably; "oh, what shall I do!"

"Go home and lie down," replied Rob, sympathetically. "Take it easy and don't get rattled. Nothing was every created without a use, they say; so your turn will come some day, sure! I'm sorry for you, old fellow, but it's all your own fault."

"You are right!" exclaimed the Demon, striding up and down the room, and causing thereby such a crackling of electricity in the air that Rob's hair became rigid enough to stand on end. "You are right, and I must wait--wait--wait--patiently and silently--until my bonds are loosed by intelligence rather than chance! It is a dreary fate. But I must wait--I must wait--I must wait!"

"I'm glad you've come to your senses," remarked Rob, drily. "So, if you've nothing more to say--"

"No! I have nothing more to say. There IS nothing more to say. You and I are two. We should never had met!" retorted the Demon, showing great excitement.

"Oh, I didn't seek your acquaintance," said Rob. "But I've tried to treat you decently, and I've no fault to find with you except that you forgot you were a slave and tried to be a master."

The Demon did not reply. He was busily forcing the various electrical devices that Rob had relinquished into the pockets of his fiery jacket.

Finally he turned with an abrupt movement.

"Good-by!" he cried. "When mortal eyes next behold me they will be those of one fit to command my services! As for you, your days will be passed in obscurity and your name be unknown to fame. Good-by,-- forever!"

The room filled with a flash of white light so like a sheet of lightning that the boy went reeling backwards, half stunned and blinded by its dazzling intensity.

When he recovered himself the Demon of Electricity had disappeared.

Rob's heart was very light as he left the workshop and made his way down the attic stairs.

"Some people might think I was a fool to give up those electrical inventions," he reflected; "but I'm one of those persons who know when they've had enough. It strikes me the fool is the fellow who can't learn a lesson. I've learned mine, all right. It's no fun being a century ahead of the times!"