

'It's perf'ly awful,' said Matt.

'All right,' said Jack, 'Now I'll tell you what I propose. It wasn't brought up to the store until after dark—I suppose they were ashamed—and it is on the sidewalk beside their store, to be put down down cellar as soon as the clerks come in the morning.' Then Jack put his lips down to Matt's ear, and whispered, 'Let's spill it for them?'

'Gracious!' whispered Matt, 'how can we?'

'Easily enough,' said Jack. 'We'll bore a gimlet hole in each barrel, and it'll have midnight to run. I've got a gimlet. You slip out of the house about twelve o'clock, and so will I; we'll meet at the church steps, and then unchain the demon only to destroy him forever.' (Jack's last clause was quoted verbatim from a temperance address to which he had lately listened.)

'I'm your man,' said Matt.

'I knew you would be,' Jack replied; 'I could have done it alone, but I was sure you'd enjoy helping, and I'm not the sort of fellow that goes back on a friend, you know. Twelve o'clock sure,—does your clock strike the hours?'

'Yes.'

'So does ours. Can you keep awake until then? If you can't I'll give you half of my cloves to eat. I've saved them the past few Sunday nights when I haven't been sleepy in church.'

Matt accepted the proffered assistance, and Jack departed, while Matt went into the house and to bed with the firm conviction that he was too excited to sleep any for a week to come. It was nine when he retired, and at the stroke of ten he had not had occasion to touch the cloves except to nibble the blossom end from one, just to have a pleasant taste in his mouth. It was many hours apparently before the clock struck eleven; had it not been for the loud persistent ticking Matt would have believed the old timepiece had stopped. As it was he had fully made up his mind that the striking weight had not been wound, when suddenly the hammer rattled off eleven. Between eleven and twelve, Matt ate all the cloves, pinched himself nearly black and blue, pulled his hair, rubbed his ears, and did everything else he had ever heard of as an antidote to sleepiness. Finally he dressed himself and descended, intending to be at the front door when the clock should strike. As he stepped from the last stair his foot fell upon the family cat, who habitually reposed upon a rug lying just there, and the cry which that cat uttered was more appalling to Matt than the roar of

a royal Bengal tiger would have been. Matt's parents, however, had clear consciences so the agonized scream did not seem to awaken them. Then Matt's heart beat so violently that he began to wonder why the sound of its throbs did not shake the house. He tiptoed to the door, but his shoes squeaked, and though he experimented, by setting down his feet, heel first, by walking on the outer edge of his shoes, and then upon the inner, the squeak continued. Then he sat upon the floor and removed his shoes, when, to his great relief, the clock struck twelve. Why that clock did not rouse him with its clamour every night and every time it struck was a great mystery to him as he softly opened the door, closed it, sped away in his stocking feet, and determined to smuggle a bit of soap out of the house and settle with those stockings before they went to the family washtab.

Reaching the church, Matt was sure he saw a shadow hold up a gaunt forefinger by way of warning, but this speedily resolved itself into Jack, who was elevating the gimlet, and who approached and whispered—

"In hoc signo vinces," as old Constantine says in the "Universal School History."

Both boys hugged every fence and wall until they reached the offending barrels; then Matt's heart began pumping again, receiving some sympathy from that of Jack. The last-named youth suddenly whispered,

'Want to strike the first blow?'

'I guess not,' said Matt, flattening himself as closely as possible against the wall of the store.

'You thought of it first.'

Jack knelt before one of the barrels, bored a hole as low as possible, and a small stream of liquid and a strong smell of whiskey appeared instantly and at the same time. Then another hole was bored at the top to admit air, and the industry of the stream increased suddenly, as Jack learned by a jet which struck his own trousers and made itself felt on the skin beneath. Matt operated upon the second barrel, Jack unlocked the demon in the third, and so the boys proceeded alternately, until while over the sixth barrel Matt's enthusiasm interfered with his steadiness of hand and he broke the gimlet.

'That's too bad,' whispered Jack, 'I guess we'd better leave, but old Hoccamine won't find five empty barrels a very small hint to stop outraging the sentiments of the inhabitants of this town.'

Both boys made haste to depart, wasting no time in formal adieux. As soon as they had reached the church and cemetery, in