

"I am on to the Count—hic! My Count! See? an'—hic!—an'—he'll win too," he continued, with erratic freedom.

That did not convey much information. The Count might be of any nationality—a winner at a pigeon shoot, a game of tennis, or a law suit. My salvage was voluble, but I gleaned little from his elliptical harangue. It seemed likely that the Count was a patron of the ring, and my young friend a clever boxer in his service.

"Where does the Count hail from?" I asked, thinking if I could identify that nobleman, I might take the boy home.

"From Australia, of course. Where do all the good'uns come from? He's own son to Lord Harry; got by the Devil he was."

Surely was the servant worthy of the master, I thought; also was the pedigree correct, no doubt. I took a look out of the window. We were going right now I knew, for I recognized the streets.

"So the Count's a good master, is he?" I said, thinking to humour my highly connected companion.

"Bet your life he doesn't *master* me!" he answered; "he bosses the rest of 'em, but when I give him a lift in the ribs he knows what time o' day it is."

"I shouldn't wonder," I added, as I thought of the crack on the jaw he had given me.

"He's a dandy though; when he's out to win you can bet your life on him."

"Win what?" I asked.

"Anything he's in for; short or long, it's all the same to him if he's out for the stuff. The guys'll be playin' Sir Michael next week; but if you see the Count with his shoes off, an' *me* there, you can stake your life he'll get all there is in sight."

"Is this—ah—Sir Michaela—a friend of the Count's?"

"Bet yer life; they're half-brothers."

No doubt it was quite simple—to him; but to me it was very perplexing. Why the Count should play with his

shoes off, whatever it was they were going to play, and what his half-brother, the baronet, had to do with it all, was more than I could understand. However, according to my young friend, that would give him the advantage, so that he would beat Sir Michael easily.

Perhaps the Count also boxed, and it might be that he was going to have a set-to with Sir Michael, and the young game-cock with me was his trainer. Ah! that seemed a likely solution. Obviously with his shoes off the Count would be spryer on his feet; and yet—

"But doesn't the Count ever hurt his feet going without his shoes that way?" I asked, by way of keeping my friend awake.

"That's just it," he said, aroused to fresh interest by my query, and he lurched forward so that his nose rubbed with soft persuasion up and down my shirt front; then he broke off suddenly to vilify me as an ass, for his nose had rasped against a shirt stud, cutting a gash diagonally across the tip. "That's just it," he continued, when he had exhausted his vocabulary of unpleasant words, and got back to the question again, "that's just *why* his shoes only come off when he's out for the dust. He's a trifle tender on his pins, an' you won't see him without his shoes more'n once or twice in the season. But when you do—look out! My word!"

"He must be plucky," I suggested, thinking of a barefooted aristocrat wading through Calcutta dust.

"There never was a gamer one," he answered laconically.

Just then the gharry stopped; the driver's head appeared at the door. "The Sahib's house has arrived," he said, in the beautifully decorative language of the East. "*Ghar men hai!*" Ah! that was the word I had been trying to think of, *Ghar men* (house), when the devil-god had whispered in my ear, "*Jahannam.*"

It was only by the promise of refreshment that I succeeded in getting my charge out of the gharry. He