

Pericord leaned forward, his long sallow face quivering with excitement. His white nervous hands darted here and there among the wires. Brown stood impassive with critical eyes. There was a sharp burr from the machine. The huge yellow wings gave a convulsive flap. Then another. Then a third, slower and stronger, with a fuller sweep. Then a fourth which filled the barn with a blast of driven air. At the fifth the bag of bricks began to dance upon the trestles. At the sixth it sprang into the air, and would have fallen to the ground but the seventh came to save it, and fluttered it forward through the air. Slowly rising, it flapped heavily around in a circle, like some great clumsy bird, filling the barn with its buzzing and whirring. In the uncertain yellow light of the single lamp it was strange to see the loom of the ungainly thing, flapping off into the shadows, and then circling back into the narrow zone of light.

The two men stood for a while in silence. Then Pericord threw his long arms up into the air. "It acts!" he cried. "The Brown-Pericord Motor acts!" He danced about like a madman in his delight. Brown's eyes twinkled, and he began to whistle.

"See how smoothly it goes, Brown!" cried the inventor. "And the rudder, how well it acts! We must register it to-morrow."

His comrade's face darkened and set. "It is registered," he said, with a forced laugh.

"Registered?" said Pericord. "Registered?" And he repeated the word first in a whisper, and then in a kind of scream. "Who has dared to register my invention?"

"I did it this morning. There is nothing to be excited about. It is all right."

"You registered the motor! Under whose name?"

"Under my own," said Brown sullenly. "I consider that I have the best right to it."

"And my name does not appear?"

"No, but—"

"You villain!" screamed Pericord. "You thief and villain!" You would steal my work! You would filch my credit! I will have that patent back, if I have to tear your throat out." A sombre fire burned in his black eyes, and his hands writhed themselves together with passion. Brown was no coward, but he shrank back as the other advanced upon him.

"Keep your hands off!" he said, drawing a knife from his pocket. "I will defend myself if you attack me."

"You threaten me?" cried Pericord, whose face was livid with anger. "You are a bully as well as a cheat. Will you give up the patent?"

"No, I will not."

"Brown, I say, give it up!"

"I will not. I did the work."

Pericord sprang madly forward with blazing eyes and clutching fingers. His companion writhed out of his grasp, but was dashed against the packing-case, over which he fell. The lamp was extinguished, and the whole barn plunged into darkness. A single ray of moonlight, shining through a narrow chink, flickered over the great waving fans as they came and went.

"Will you give up the patent, Brown?"

There was no answer.

"Will you give it up?"

Again no answer. Not a sound save the humming and creaking overhead. A cold pang of fear and doubt struck through Pericord's heart. He felt aimlessly about in the dark and his fingers closed upon a hand. It was cold and unresponsive. With all his anger turned to icy horror he struck a match, set the lamp up, and lit it.

Brown lay huddled up upon the other side of the packing-case. Pericord seized him in his arms, and with convulsive strength lifted him across. Then the mystery of his silence was explained. He had fallen with his right arm doubled up under him, and his own weight had driven the knife deeply into

his body. He had died without a groan. The tragedy had been sudden, horrible and complete.

Pericord sat silently on the edge of the case, staring blankly down, and shivering like one with the ague, while the great Brown-Pericord motor boomed and hurtled above him. How long he sat there can never be known. It might have been minutes or it might have been hours. A thousand mad schemes flashed through his dazed brain. It was true that he had been only the indirect cause. But who would believe that? He glanced down at his blood-spattered clothing. Everything was against him. It would be better to fly than to give himself up, relying upon his innocence. No one in London knew where they were. If he could dispose of the body he might have a few days clear before any suspicion would be aroused.

Suddenly a loud crash recalled him to himself. The flying sack had gradually risen with each successive circle until it had struck against the rafters. The blow displaced the connecting gear, and the machine fell heavily to the ground. Pericord undid the girdle. The motor was uninjured. A sudden, strange thought flashed upon him as he looked at it. The machine had become hateful to him. He might dispose both of it and the body in a way that would baffle all human search.

He threw open the barn door, and carried his companion out into the moonlight. There was a hillock outside, and on the summit of this he laid him reverently down. Then he brought from the barn the motor, the girdle and the phlanges. With trembling fingers he fastened the broad steel belt around the dead man's waist. Then he screwed the wings into the sockets. Beneath he slung the motor-box, fastened the wires, and switched on the connection. For a minute or two the huge yellow fans flapped and flickered. Then the body began to move in little jumps down the side of the hillock, gathering a gradual momentum, until at last it heaved up into the air and soared heavily off into the moonlight. He had not used the rudder, but had turned the head for the south. Gradually the weird thing rose higher, and sped faster, until it had passed over the line of cliff, and was sweeping over the silent sea. Pericord watched it with a white drawn face, until it looked like a black bird with golden wings half shrouded in the midst which lay over the waters.

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In the New York State Lunatic Asylum there is a wild-eyed man whose name and birthplace are alike unknown. His reason has been unseated by some sudden shock, the doctors say, though of what nature they are unable to determine. "It is the most delicate machine which is most readily put out of gear," they remark, and point, in proof of their axiom, to the complicated electric engines, and remarkable aeronautic machines which the patient is fond of devising in his more lucid moments.

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