

Cavendish Bragshaw pushed his way into the little group of which the two gentlemen formed the centre, and poked a jewelled snuff-box towards his friends.

The ceremony of snuffing having been completed with elaborate ritual he said eagerly, "Let's put some go into this little impromptu. I'll back the ebony for a hundred," he added, glancing round and pulling out a betting-book.

"I should think so, too," Sir Harry Tempest laughed. "The odds are easily three to one."

"I'll take the black and lay them," cried Fletcher Reid.

"So will I," shouted Bragshaw.

Sir John Dering smiled.

"I'll take you, Bragshaw, in hundreds."

Sir Harry Tempest also took the price offered by Fletcher Reid. The betting was somewhat perfunctory. The sporting contingent went from group to group, and the two bets set the tone of a dull market. For the most part the sportsmen fancied the black, whom they knew, to beat a man whose strangeness to them was proof of his inexperience. A babel of conversation rose round the ring; the chances of the men were eagerly considered, and above the noise the odds of three to one were roared out, but not frequently accepted. As the noise rose higher there was a movement in one of the little groups near the ring. The black man, in his eagerness to get on with the fight, had finished his toilet rapidly, and, half running towards the ring, climbed through the ropes and stood in the centre, a glistening, sinister figure, an ugly, coal-black statue.

"That's the stuff for my money," yelled Cavendish

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