

Baum Lyman Frank

# The Master Key



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**The Master Key**

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# The Master Key An Electrical Fairy Tale Founded Upon the Mysteries of Electricity

## WHO KNOWS?

These things are quite improbable, to be sure; but are they impossible?

Our big world rolls over as smoothly as it did centuries ago, without a squeak to show it needs oiling after all these years of revolution. But times change because men change, and because civilization, like John Brown's soul, goes ever marching on.

The impossibilities of yesterday become the accepted facts of to-day.

Here is a fairy tale founded upon the wonders of electricity and written for children of this generation. Yet when my readers shall have become men and women my story may not seem to their children like a fairy tale at all.

Perhaps one, perhaps two – perhaps several of the Demon's devices will be, by that time, in popular use.

Who knows?

*"In wonder all philosophy began; in  
wonder it all ends; and admiration  
fills up the interspace. But the first  
wonder is the offspring of ignorance:  
the last is the parent of adoration."*

*– Coleridge.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### ROB'S WORKSHOP

When Rob became interested in electricity his clear-headed father considered the boy's fancy to be instructive as well as amusing; so he heartily encouraged his son, and Rob never lacked batteries, motors or supplies of any sort that his experiments might require.

He fitted up the little back room in the attic as his workshop, and from thence a network of wires soon ran throughout the house. Not only had every outside door its electric bell, but every window was fitted with a burglar alarm; moreover no one could cross the threshold of any interior room without registering the fact in Rob's workshop. The gas was lighted by an electric fob; a chime, connected with an erratic clock in the boy's room, woke the servants at all hours of the night and caused the cook to give warning; a bell rang whenever the postman dropped a letter into the box; there were bells, bells, bells everywhere, ringing at the right time, the wrong time and all the time. And there were telephones in the different rooms, too, through which Rob could call up the different members of the family just when they did not wish to be disturbed.

His mother and sisters soon came to vote the boy's scientific craze a nuisance; but his father was delighted with these evidences of Rob's skill as an electrician, and insisted that he be allowed perfect freedom in carrying out his ideas.

"Electricity," said the old gentleman, sagely, "is destined to become the motive power of the world. The future advance of civilization will be along electrical lines. Our boy may become a great inventor and astonish the world with his wonderful creations."

"And in the meantime," said the mother, despairingly, "we shall all be electrocuted, or the house burned down by crossed wires, or we shall be blown into eternity by an explosion of chemicals!"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the proud father. "Rob's storage batteries are not powerful enough to electrocute one or set the house on fire. Do give the boy a chance, Belinda."

"And his pranks are so humiliating," continued the lady. "When the minister called yesterday and rang the bell a big card appeared on the front door on which was printed the words: 'Busy; Call Again.' Fortunately Helen saw him and let him in, but when I reproved Robert for the act he said he was just trying the sign to see if it would work."

"Exactly! The boy is an inventor already. I shall have one of those cards attached to the door of my private office at once. I tell you, Belinda, our son will be a great man one of these days," said Mr. Joslyn, walking up and down with pompous strides and almost bursting with the pride he took in his young hopeful.

Mrs. Joslyn sighed. She knew remonstrance was useless so long as her husband encouraged the boy, and that she would be wise to bear her cross with fortitude.

Rob also knew his mother's protests would be of no avail; so he continued to revel in electrical processes of all sorts, using the house as an experimental station to test the powers of his productions.

It was in his own room, however, – his "workshop" – that he especially delighted. For not only was it the center of all his numerous "lines" throughout the house, but he had rigged up therein a wonderful array of devices for his own amusement. A trolley-car moved around a circular track and stopped regularly at all stations; an engine and train of cars moved jerkily up and down a steep grade and through a tunnel; a windmill was busily pumping water from the dishpan into the copper skillet; a sawmill was in full operation and a host of mechanical blacksmiths, scissors-grinders, carpenters, wood-choppers and millers were connected with a motor which kept them working away at their trades in awkward but persevering fashion.

The room was crossed and recrossed with wires. They crept up the walls, lined the floor, made a grille of the ceiling and would catch an unwary visitor under the chin or above the ankle just when he

least expected it. Yet visitors were forbidden in so crowded a room, and even his father declined to go farther than the doorway. As for Rob, he thought he knew all about the wires, and what each one was for; but they puzzled even him, at times, and he was often perplexed to know how to utilize them all.

One day when he had locked himself in to avoid interruption while he planned the electrical illumination of a gorgeous pasteboard palace, he really became confused over the network of wires. He had a "switch-board," to be sure, where he could make and break connections as he chose; but the wires had somehow become mixed, and he could not tell what combinations to use to throw the power on to his miniature electric lights.

So he experimented in a rather haphazard fashion, connecting this and that wire blindly and by guesswork, in the hope that he would strike the right combination. Then he thought the combination might be right and there was a lack of power; so he added other lines of wire to his connections, and still others, until he had employed almost every wire in the room.

Yet it would not work; and after pausing a moment to try to think what was wrong he went at it again, putting this and that line into connection, adding another here and another there, until suddenly, as he made a last change, a quick flash of light almost blinded him, and the switch-board crackled ominously, as if struggling to carry a powerful current.

Rob covered his face at the flash, but finding himself unhurt he took away his hands and with blinking eyes attempted to look at a wonderful radiance which seemed to fill the room, making it many times brighter than the brightest day.

Although at first completely dazzled, he peered before him until he discovered that the light was concentrated near one spot, from which all the glorious rays seemed to scintillate.

He closed his eyes a moment to rest them; then re-opening them and shading them somewhat with his hands, he made out the form of a curious Being standing with majesty and composure in the center of the magnificent radiance and looking down upon him!

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE DEMON OF ELECTRICITY**

Rob was a courageous boy, but a thrill of fear passed over him in spite of his bravest endeavor as he gazed upon the wondrous apparition that confronted him. For several moments he sat as if turned to stone, so motionless was he; but his eyes were nevertheless fastened upon the Being and devouring every detail of his appearance.

And how strange an appearance he presented!

His jacket was a wavering mass of white light, edged with braid of red flames that shot little tongues in all directions. The buttons blazed in golden fire. His trousers had a bluish, incandescent color, with glowing stripes of crimson braid. His vest was gorgeous with all the colors of the rainbow blended into a flashing, resplendent mass. In feature he was most majestic, and his eyes held the soft but penetrating brilliance of electric lights.

It was hard to meet the gaze of those searching eyes, but Rob did it, and at once the splendid apparition bowed and said in a low, clear voice:

"I am here."

"I know that," answered the boy, trembling, "but *why* are you here?"

"Because you have touched the Master Key of Electricity, and I must obey the laws of nature that compel me to respond to your summons."

"I – I didn't know I touched the Master Key," faltered the boy.

"I understand that. You did it unconsciously. No one in the world has ever done it before, for Nature has hitherto kept the secret safe locked within her bosom."

Rob took time to wonder at this statement.

"Then who are you?" he inquired, at length.

"The Demon of Electricity," was the solemn answer.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Rob, "a demon!"

"Certainly. I am, in truth, the Slave of the Master Key, and am forced to obey the commands of any one who is wise and brave enough – or, as in your own case, fortunate and fool-hardy enough – to touch it."

"I – I've never guessed there was such a thing as a Master Key, or – or a Demon of Electricity, and – and I'm awfully sorry I – I called you up!" stammered the boy, abashed by the imposing appearance of his companion.

The Demon actually smiled at this speech, – a smile that was almost reassuring.

"I am not sorry," he said, in kindlier tone, "for it is not much pleasure waiting century after century for some one to command my services. I have often thought my existence uncalled for, since you Earth people are so stupid and ignorant that you seem unlikely ever to master the secret of electrical power."

"Oh, we have some great masters among us!" cried Rob, rather nettled at this statement. "Now, there's Edison –"

"Edison!" exclaimed the Demon, with a faint sneer; "what does he know?"

"Lots of things," declared the boy. "He's invented no end of wonderful electrical things."

"You are wrong to call them wonderful," replied the Demon, lightly. "He really knows little more than yourself about the laws that control electricity. His inventions are trifling things in comparison with the really wonderful results to be obtained by one who would actually know how to direct the electric powers instead of groping blindly after insignificant effects. Why, I've stood for months by Edison's elbow, hoping and longing for him to touch the Master Key; but I can see plainly he will never accomplish it."

"Then there's Tesla," said the boy.

The Demon laughed.

"There is Tesla, to be sure," he said. "But what of him?"

"Why, he's discovered a powerful light," the Demon gave an amused chuckle, "and he's in communication with the people in Mars."

"What people?"

"Why, the people who live there."

"There are none."

This quiet statement almost took Rob's breath away, and caused him to stare hard at his visitor.

"It's generally thought," he resumed, in an annoyed tone, "that Mars has inhabitants who are far in advance of ourselves in civilization. Many scientific men think the people of Mars have been trying to signal us for years, only we don't understand their signals. And great novelists have written about the Martians and their wonderful civilization, and –"

"And they all know as much about that little planet as you do yourself," interrupted the Demon, impatiently. "The trouble with you Earth people is that you delight in guessing about what you can not know. Now I happen to know all about Mars, because I can traverse all space and have had ample leisure to investigate the different planets. Mars is not peopled at all, nor is any other of the planets you recognize in the heavens. Some contain low orders of beasts, to be sure, but Earth alone has an intelligent, thinking, reasoning population, and your scientists and novelists would do better trying to comprehend their own planet than in groping through space to unravel the mysteries of barren and unimportant worlds."

Rob listened to this with surprise and disappointment; but he reflected that the Demon ought to know what he was talking about, so he did not venture to contradict him.

"It is really astonishing," continued the Apparition, "how little you people have learned about electricity. It is an Earth element that has existed since the Earth itself was formed, and if you but understood its proper use humanity would be marvelously benefited in many ways."

"We are, already," protested Rob; "our discoveries in electricity have enabled us to live much more conveniently."

"Then imagine your condition were you able fully to control this great element," replied the other, gravely. "The weaknesses and privations of mankind would be converted into power and luxury."

"That's true, Mr. – Mr. – Demon," said the boy. "Excuse me if I don't get your name right, but I understood you to say you are a demon."

"Certainly. The Demon of Electricity."

"But electricity is a good thing, you know, and – and –"

"Well?"

"I've always understood that demons were bad things," added Rob, boldly.

"Not necessarily," returned his visitor. "If you will take the trouble to consult your dictionary, you will find that demons may be either good or bad, like any other class of beings. Originally all demons were good, yet of late years people have come to consider all demons evil. I do not know why. Should you read Hesiod you will find he says:

'Soon was a world of holy demons made,  
Aerial spirits, by great Jove designed  
To be on earth the guardians of mankind.'"

"But Jove was himself a myth," objected Rob, who had been studying mythology.

The Demon shrugged his shoulders.

"Then take the words of Mr. Shakespeare, to whom you all defer," he replied. "Do you not remember that he says:

'Thy demon (that's thy spirit which keeps thee) is  
Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable.'

"Oh, if Shakespeare says it, that's all right," answered the boy. "But it seems you're more like a genius, for you answer the summons of the Master Key of Electricity in the same way Aladdin's genius answered the rubbing of the lamp."

"To be sure. A demon is also a genius; and a genius is a demon," said the Being. "What matters a name? I am here to do your bidding."

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE THREE GIFTS**

Familiarity with any great thing removes our awe of it. The great general is only terrible to the enemy; the great poet is frequently scolded by his wife; the children of the great statesman clamber about his knees with perfect trust and impunity; the great actor who is called before the curtain by admiring audiences is often waylaid at the stage door by his creditors.

So Rob, having conversed for a time with the glorious Demon of Electricity, began to regard him with more composure and less awe, as his eyes grew more and more accustomed to the splendor that at first had well-nigh blinded them.

When the Demon announced himself ready to do the boy's bidding, he frankly replied:

"I am no skilled electrician, as you very well know. My calling you here was an accident. So I don't know how to command you, nor what to ask you to do."

"But I must not take advantage of your ignorance," answered the Demon. "Also, I am quite anxious to utilize this opportunity to show the world what a powerful element electricity really is. So permit me to inform you that, having struck the Master Key, you are at liberty to demand from me three gifts each week for three successive weeks. These gifts, provided they are within the scope of electricity, I will grant."

Rob shook his head regretfully.

"If I were a great electrician I should know what to ask," he said. "But I am too ignorant to take advantage of your kind offer."

"Then," replied the Demon, "I will myself suggest the gifts, and they will be of such a character that the Earth people will learn the possibilities that lie before them and be encouraged to work more intelligently and to persevere in mastering those natural and simple laws which control electricity. For one of the greatest errors they now labor under is that electricity is complicated and hard to understand. It is really the simplest Earth element, lying within easy reach of any one who stretches out his hand to grasp and control its powers."

Rob yawned, for he thought the Demon's speeches were growing rather tiresome. Perhaps the genius noticed this rudeness, for he continued:

"I regret, of course, that you are a boy instead of a grown man, for it will appear singular to your friends that so thoughtless a youth should seemingly have mastered the secrets that have baffled your most learned scientists. But that can not be helped, and presently you will become, through my aid, the most powerful and wonderful personage in all the world."

"Thank you," said Rob, meekly. "It'll be no end of fun."

"Fun!" echoed the Demon, scornfully. "But never mind; I must use the material Fate has provided for me, and make the best of it."

"What will you give me first?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"That requires some thought," returned the Demon, and paused for several moments, while Rob feasted his eyes upon the gorgeous rays of color that flashed and vibrated in every direction and surrounded the figure of his visitor with an intense glow that resembled a halo.

Then the Demon raised his head and said:

"The thing most necessary to man is food to nourish his body. He passes a considerable part of his life in the struggle to procure food, to prepare it properly, and in the act of eating. This is not right. Your body can not be very valuable to you if all your time is required to feed it. I shall, therefore, present you, as my first gift, this box of tablets. Within each tablet are stored certain elements of electricity which are capable of nourishing a human body for a full day. All you need do is to toss one into your mouth each day and swallow it. It will nourish you, satisfy your hunger and build up your

health and strength. The ordinary food of mankind is more or less injurious; this is entirely beneficial. Moreover, you may carry enough tablets in your pocket to last for months."

Here he presented Rob the silver box of tablets, and the boy, somewhat nervously, thanked him for the gift.

"The next requirement of man," continued the Demon, "is defense from his enemies. I notice with sorrow that men frequently have wars and kill one another. Also, even in civilized communities, man is in constant danger from highwaymen, cranks and policemen. To defend himself he uses heavy and dangerous guns, with which to destroy his enemies. This is wrong. He has no right to take away what he can not bestow; to destroy what he can not create. To kill a fellow-creature is a horrid crime, even if done in self-defense. Therefore, my second gift to you is this little tube. You may carry it within your pocket. Whenever an enemy threatens you, be it man or beast, simply point the tube and press this button in the handle. An electric current will instantly be directed upon your foe, rendering him wholly unconscious for the period of one hour. During that time you will have opportunity to escape. As for your enemy, after regaining consciousness he will suffer no inconvenience from the encounter beyond a slight headache."

"That's fine!" said Rob, as he took the tube. It was scarcely six inches long, and hollow at one end.

"The busy lives of men," proceeded the Demon, "require them to move about and travel in all directions. Yet to assist them there are only such crude and awkward machines as electric trolleys, cable cars, steam railways and automobiles. These crawl slowly over the uneven surface of the earth and frequently get out of order. It has grieved me that men have not yet discovered what even the birds know: that the atmosphere offers them swift and easy means of traveling from one part of the earth's surface to another."

"Some people have tried to build air-ships," remarked Rob.

"So they have; great, unwieldy machines which offer so much resistance to the air that they are quite useless. A big machine is not needed to carry one through the air. There are forces in nature which may be readily used for such purpose. Tell me, what holds you to the Earth, and makes a stone fall to the ground?"

"Attraction of gravitation," said Rob, promptly.

"Exactly. That is one force I refer to," said the Demon. "The force of repulsion, which is little known, but just as powerful, is another that mankind may direct. Then there are the Polar electric forces, attracting objects toward the north or south poles. You have guessed something of this by the use of the compass, or electric needle. Opposed to these is centrifugal electric force, drawing objects from east to west, or in the opposite direction. This force is created by the whirl of the earth upon its axis, and is easily utilized, although your scientific men have as yet paid little attention to it.

"These forces, operating in all directions, absolute and immutable, are at the disposal of mankind. They will carry you through the atmosphere wherever and whenever you choose. That is, if you know how to control them. Now, here is a machine I have myself perfected."

The Demon drew from his pocket something that resembled an open-faced watch, having a narrow, flexible band attached to it.

"When you wish to travel," said he, "attach this little machine to your left wrist by means of the band. It is very light and will not be in your way. On this dial are points marked 'up' and 'down' as well as a perfect compass. When you desire to rise into the air set the indicator to the word 'up,' using a finger of your right hand to turn it. When you have risen as high as you wish, set the indicator to the point of the compass you want to follow and you will be carried by the proper electric force in that direction. To descend, set the indicator to the word 'down.' Do you understand?"

"Perfectly!" cried Rob, taking the machine from the Demon with unfeigned delight. "This is really wonderful, and I'm awfully obliged to you!"

"Don't mention it," returned the Demon, dryly. "These three gifts you may amuse yourself with for the next week. It seems hard to entrust such great scientific discoveries to the discretion of a mere boy; but they are quite harmless, so if you exercise proper care you can not get into trouble through their possession. And who knows what benefits to humanity may result? One week from to-day, at this hour, I will again appear to you, at which time you shall receive the second series of electrical gifts."

"I'm not sure," said Rob, "that I shall be able again to make the connections that will strike the Master Key."

"Probably not," answered the Demon. "Could you accomplish that, you might command my services forever. But, having once succeeded, you are entitled to the nine gifts – three each week for three weeks – so you have no need to call me to do my duty. I shall appear of my own accord."

"Thank you," murmured the boy.

The Demon bowed and spread his hands in the form of a semi-circle. An instant later there was a blinding flash, and when Rob recovered from it and opened his eyes the Demon of Electricity had disappeared.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TESTING THE INSTRUMENTS**

There is little doubt that had this strange experience befallen a grown man he would have been stricken with a fit of trembling or a sense of apprehension, or even fear, at the thought of having faced the terrible Demon of Electricity, of having struck the Master Key of the world's greatest natural forces, and finding himself possessed of three such wonderful and useful gifts. But a boy takes everything as a matter of course. As the tree of knowledge sprouts and expands within him, shooting out leaf after leaf of practical experience, the succession of surprises dulls his faculty of wonderment. It takes a great deal to startle a boy.

Rob was full of delight at his unexpected good fortune; but he did not stop to consider that there was anything remarkably queer or uncanny in the manner in which it had come to him. His chief sensation was one of pride. He would now be able to surprise those who had made fun of his electrical craze and force them to respect his marvelous powers. He decided to say nothing about the Demon or the accidental striking of the Master Key. In exhibiting to his friends the electrical devices he had acquired it would be "no end of fun" to mark their amazement and leave them to guess how he performed his feats.

So he put his treasures into his pocket, locked his workshop and went downstairs to his room to prepare for dinner.

While brushing his hair he remembered it was no longer necessary for him to eat ordinary food. He was feeling quite hungry at that moment, for he had a boy's ravenous appetite; but, taking the silver box from his pocket, he swallowed a tablet and at once felt his hunger as fully satisfied as if he had partaken of a hearty meal, while at the same time he experienced an exhilarating glow throughout his body and a clearness of brain and gaiety of spirits which filled him with intense gratification.

Still, he entered the dining-room when the bell rang and found his father and mother and sisters already assembled there.

"Where have you been all day, Robert?" inquired his mother.

"No need to ask," said Mr. Joslyn, with a laugh. "Fussing over electricity, I'll bet a cookie!"

"I do wish," said the mother, fretfully, "that he would get over that mania. It unfits him for anything else."

"Precisely," returned her husband, dishing the soup; "but it fits him for a great career when he becomes a man. Why shouldn't he spend his summer vacation in pursuit of useful knowledge instead of romping around like ordinary boys?"

"No soup, thank you," said Rob.

"What!" exclaimed his father, looking at him in surprise, "it's your favorite soup."

"I know," said Rob, quietly, "but I don't want any."

"Are you ill, Robert?" asked his mother.

"Never felt better in my life," answered Rob, truthfully.

Yet Mrs. Joslyn looked worried, and when Rob refused the roast, she was really shocked.

"Let me feel your pulse, my poor boy!" she commanded, and wondered to find it so regular.

In fact, Rob's action surprised them all. He sat calmly throughout the meal, eating nothing, but apparently in good health and spirits, while even his sisters regarded him with troubled countenances.

"He's worked too hard, I guess," said Mr. Joslyn, shaking his head sadly.

"Oh, no; I haven't," protested Rob; "but I've decided not to eat anything, hereafter. It's a bad habit, and does more harm than good."

"Wait till breakfast," said sister Helen, with a laugh; "you'll be hungry enough by that time."

However, the boy had no desire for food at breakfast time, either, as the tablet sufficed for an entire day. So he renewed the anxiety of the family by refusing to join them at the table.

"If this goes on," Mr. Joslyn said to his son, when breakfast was finished, "I shall be obliged to send you away for your health."

"I think of making a trip this morning," said Rob, carelessly.

"Where to?"

"Oh, I may go to Boston, or take a run over to Cuba or Jamaica," replied the boy.

"But you can not go so far by yourself," declared his father; "and there is no one to go with you, just now. Nor can I spare the money at present for so expensive a trip."

"Oh, it won't cost anything," replied Rob, with a smile.

Mr. Joslyn looked upon him gravely and sighed. Mrs. Joslyn bent over her son with tears in her eyes and said:

"This electrical nonsense has affected your mind, dear. You must promise me to keep away from that horrid workshop for a time."

"I won't enter it for a week," he answered. "But you needn't worry about me. I haven't been experimenting with electricity all this time for nothing, I can tell you. As for my health, I'm as well and strong as any boy need be, and there's nothing wrong with my head, either. Common folks always think great men are crazy, but Edison and Tesla and I don't pay any attention to that. We've got our discoveries to look after. Now, as I said, I'm going for a little trip in the interests of science. I maybe back to-night, or I may be gone several days. Anyhow, I'll be back in a week, and you mustn't worry about me a single minute."

"How are you going?" inquired his father, in the gentle, soothing tone persons use in addressing maniacs.

"Through the air," said Rob.

"Where's your balloon?" inquired sister Mabel, sarcastically.

"I don't need a balloon," returned the boy. "That's a clumsy way of traveling, at best. I shall go by electric propulsion."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Joslyn, and the mother murmured: "My poor boy! my poor boy!"

"As you are my nearest relatives," continued Rob, not noticing these exclamations, "I will allow you to come into the back yard and see me start. You will then understand something of my electrical powers."

They followed him at once, although with unbelieving faces, and on the way Rob clasped the little machine to his left wrist, so that his coat sleeve nearly hid it.

When they reached the lawn at the back of the house Rob kissed them all good-by, much to his sisters' amusement, and turned the indicator of the little instrument to the word "up."

Immediately he began to rise into the air.

"Don't worry about me!" he called down to them. "Good-by!"

Mrs. Joslyn, with a scream of terror, hid her face in her hands.

"He'll break his neck!" cried the astounded father, tipping back his head to look after his departing son.

"He'll break his neck!" cried the astounded father

"Come back! Come back!" shouted the girls to the soaring adventurer.

"I will – some day!" was the far-away answer.

Having risen high enough to pass over the tallest tree or steeple, Rob put the indicator to the east of the compass-dial and at once began moving rapidly in that direction.

The sensation was delightful. He rode as gently as a feather floats, without any exertion at all on his own part; yet he moved so swiftly that he easily distanced a railway train that was speeding in the same direction.

"This is great!" reflected the youth. "Here I am, traveling in fine style, without a penny to pay any one! And I've enough food to last me a month in my coat pocket. This electricity is the proper stuff, after all! And the Demon's a trump, and no mistake. Whee-ee! How small everything looks down below there. The people are bugs, and the houses are soap-boxes, and the trees are like clumps of grass. I seem to be passing over a town. Guess I'll drop down a bit, and take in the sights."

He pointed the indicator to the word "down," and at once began dropping through the air. He experienced the sensation one feels while descending in an elevator. When he reached a point just above the town he put the indicator to the zero mark and remained stationary, while he examined the place. But there was nothing to interest him, particularly; so after a brief survey he once more ascended and continued his journey toward the east.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon he reached the city of Boston, and alighting unobserved in a quiet street he walked around for several hours enjoying the sights and wondering what people would think of him if they but knew his remarkable powers. But as he looked just like any other boy no one noticed him in any way.

It was nearly evening, and Rob had wandered down by the wharves to look at the shipping, when his attention was called to an ugly looking bull dog, which ran toward him and began barking ferociously.

"Get out!" said the boy, carelessly, and made a kick at the brute.

The dog uttered a fierce growl and sprang upon him with bared teeth and flashing red eyes. Instantly Rob drew the electric tube from his pocket, pointed it at the dog and pressed the button. Almost at the same moment the dog gave a yelp, rolled over once or twice and lay still.

"I guess that'll settle him," laughed the boy; but just then he heard an angry shout, and looking around saw a policeman running toward him.

"Kill me dog, will ye – eh?" yelled the officer; "well, I'll just run ye in for that same, an' ye'll spend the night in the lock-up!" And on he came, with drawn club in one hand and a big revolver in the other.

"You'll have to catch me first," said Rob, still laughing, and to the amazement of the policeman he began rising straight into the air.

"Come down here! Come down, or I'll shoot!" shouted the fellow, flourishing his revolver.

Rob was afraid he would; so, to avoid accidents, he pointed the tube at him and pressed the button. The red-whiskered policeman keeled over quite gracefully and fell across the body of the dog, while Rob continued to mount upward until he was out of sight of those in the streets.

"That was a narrow escape," he thought, breathing more freely. "I hated to paralyze that policeman, but he might have sent a bullet after me. Anyhow, he'll be all right again in an hour, so I needn't worry."

It was beginning to grow dark, and he wondered what he should do next. Had he possessed any money he would have descended to the town and taken a bed at a hotel, but he had left home without a single penny. Fortunately the nights were warm at this season, so he determined to travel all night, that he might reach by morning some place he had never before visited.

Cuba had always interested him, and he judged it ought to lie in a southeasterly direction from Boston. So he set the indicator to that point and began gliding swiftly toward the southeast.

He now remembered that it was twenty-four hours since he had eaten the first electrical tablet. As he rode through the air he consumed another. All hunger at once left him, while he felt the same invigorating sensations as before.

After a time the moon came out, and Rob amused himself gazing at the countless stars in the sky and wondering if the Demon was right when he said the world was the most important of all the planets.

But presently he grew sleepy, and before he realized what was happening he had fallen into a sound and peaceful slumber, while the indicator still pointed to the southeast and he continued to move rapidly through the cool night air.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE CANNIBAL ISLAND**

Doubtless the adventures of the day had tired Rob, for he slept throughout the night as comfortably as if he had been within his own room, lying upon his own bed. When, at last, he opened his eyes and gazed sleepily about him, he found himself over a great body of water, moving along with considerable speed.

"It's the ocean, of course," he said to himself. "I haven't reached Cuba yet."

It is to be regretted that Rob's knowledge of geography was so superficial; for, as he had intended to reach Cuba, he should have taken a course almost southwest from Boston, instead of southeast. The sad result of his ignorance you will presently learn, for during the entire day he continued to travel over a boundless waste of ocean, without the sight of even an island to cheer him.

The sun shone so hot that he regretted he had not brought an umbrella. But he wore a wide-brimmed straw hat, which protected him somewhat, and he finally discovered that by rising to a considerable distance above the ocean he avoided the reflection of the sun upon the water and also came within the current of good breeze.

Of course he dared not stop, for there was no place to land; so he calmly continued his journey.

"It may be I've missed Cuba," he thought; "but I can not change my course now, for if I did I might get lost, and never be able to find land again. If I keep on as I am I shall be sure to reach land of some sort, in time, and when I wish to return home I can set the indicator to the northwest and that will take me directly back to Boston."

This was good reasoning, but the rash youth had no idea he was speeding over the ocean, or that he was destined to arrive shortly at the barbarous island of Brava, off the coast of Africa. Yet such was the case; just as the sun sank over the edge of the waves he saw, to his great relief, a large island directly in his path.

He dropped to a lower position in the air, and when he judged himself to be over the center of the island he turned the indicator to zero and stopped short.

The country was beautifully wooded, while pretty brooks sparkled through the rich green foliage of the trees. The island sloped upwards from the sea-coast in all directions, rising to a hill that was almost a mountain in the center. There were two open spaces, one on each side of the island, and Rob saw that these spaces were occupied by queer-looking huts built from brushwood and branches of trees. This showed that the island was inhabited, but as Rob had no idea what island it was he wisely determined not to meet the natives until he had discovered what they were like and whether they were disposed to be friendly.

So he moved over the hill, the top of which proved to be a flat, grass-covered plateau about fifty feet in diameter. Finding it could not be easily reached from below, on account of its steep sides, and contained neither men nor animals, he alighted on the hill-top and touched his feet to the earth for the first time in twenty-four hours.

The ride through the air had not tired him in the least; in fact, he felt as fresh and vigorous as if he had been resting throughout the journey. As he walked upon the soft grass of the plateau he felt elated, and compared himself to the explorers of ancient days; for it was evident that civilization had not yet reached this delightful spot.

There was scarcely any twilight in this tropical climate and it grew dark quickly. Within a few minutes the entire island, save where he stood, became dim and indistinct. He ate his daily tablet, and after watching the red glow fade in the western sky and the gray shadows of night settle around him he stretched himself comfortably upon the grass and went to sleep.

The events of the day must have deepened his slumber, for when he awoke the sun was shining almost directly over him, showing that the day was well advanced. He stood up, rubbed the sleep from his eyes and decided he would like a drink of water. From where he stood he could see several little brooks following winding paths through the forest, so he settled upon one that seemed farthest from the brushwood villages, and turning his indicator in that direction soon floated through the air to a sheltered spot upon the bank.

Kneeling down, he enjoyed a long, refreshing drink of the clear water, but as he started to regain his feet a coil of rope was suddenly thrown about him, pinning his arms to his sides and rendering him absolutely helpless.

At the same time his ears were saluted with a wild chattering in an unknown tongue, and he found himself surrounded by a group of natives of hideous appearance. They were nearly naked, and bore spears and heavy clubs as their only weapons. Their hair was long, curly, and thick as bushes, and through their noses and ears were stuck the teeth of sharks and curious metal ornaments.

These creatures had stolen upon Rob so quietly that he had not heard a sound, but now they jabbered loudly, as if much excited.

Finally one fat and somewhat aged native, who seemed to be a chief, came close to Rob and said, in broken English:

"How get here?"

"I flew," said the boy, with a grin.

The chief shook his head, saying:

"No boat come. How white man come?"

"Through the air," replied Rob, who was rather flattered at being called a "man."

The chief looked into the air with a puzzled expression and shook his head again.

"White man lie," he said calmly.

Then he held further conversation with his fellows, after which he turned to Rob and announced:

"Me see white man many times. Come in big boats. White men all bad. Make kill with bang-sticks. We kill white man with club. Then we eat white man. Dead white man good. Live white man bad!"

This did not please Rob at all. The idea of being eaten by savages had never occurred to him as a sequel to his adventures. So he said rather anxiously to the chief:

"Look here, old fellow; do you want to die?"

"Me no die. You die," was the reply.

"You'll die, too, if you eat me," said Rob. "I'm full of poison."

"Poison? Don't know poison," returned the chief, much perplexed to understand him.

"Well, poison will make you sick – awful sick. Then you'll die. I'm full of it; eat it every day for breakfast. It don't hurt white men, you see, but it kills black men quicker than the bang-stick."

The chief listened to this statement carefully, but only understood it in part. After a moment's reflection he declared:

"White man lie. Lie all time. Me eat plenty white man. Never get sick; never die." Then he added, with renewed cheerfulness: "Me eat you, too!"

Before Rob could think of a further protest, his captors caught up the end of the rope and led him away through the forest. He was tightly bound, and one strand of rope ran across the machine on his wrist and pressed it into his flesh until the pain was severe. But he resolved to be brave, whatever happened, so he stumbled along after the savages without a word.

After a brief journey they came to a village, where Rob was thrust into a brushwood hut and thrown upon the ground, still tightly bound.

"We light fire," said the chief. "Then kill little white man. Then eat him."

With this comforting promise he went away and left Rob alone to think the matter over.

"This is tough," reflected the boy, with a groan. "I never expected to feed cannibals. Wish I was at home with mother and dad and the girls. Wish I'd never seen the Demon of Electricity and his wonderful inventions. I was happy enough before I struck that awful Master Key. And now I'll be eaten – with salt and pepper, probably. Wonder if there'll be any gravy. Perhaps they'll boil me, with biscuits, as mother does chickens. Oh-h-h-h-h! It's just awful!"

In the midst of these depressing thoughts he became aware that something was hurting his back. After rolling over he found that he had been lying upon a sharp stone that stuck out of the earth. This gave him an idea. He rolled upon the stone again and began rubbing the rope that bound him against the sharp edge.

Outside he could hear the crackling of fagots and the roar of a newly-kindled fire, so he knew he had no time to spare. He wriggled and pushed his body right and left, right and left, sawing away at the rope, until the strain and exertion started the perspiration from every pore.

At length the rope parted, and hastily uncoiling it from his body Rob stood up and rubbed his benumbed muscles and tried to regain his lost breath. He had not freed himself a moment too soon, he found, for hearing a grunt of surprise behind him he turned around and saw a native standing in the door of the hut.

Rob laughed, for he was not a bit afraid of the blacks now. As the native made a rush toward him the boy drew the electric tube from his pocket, pointed it at the foe, and pressed the button. The fellow sank to the earth without even a groan, and lay still.

Then another black entered, followed by the fat chief. When they saw Rob at liberty, and their comrade lying apparently dead, the chief cried out in surprise, using some expressive words in his own language.

"If it's just the same to you, old chap," said Rob, coolly, "I won't be eaten to-day. You can make a pie of that fellow on the ground."

"No! We eat you," cried the chief, angrily. "You cut rope, but no get away; no boat!"

"I don't need a boat, thank you," said the boy; and then, as the other native sprang forward, he pointed the tube and laid him out beside his first victim.

At this act the chief stood an instant in amazed uncertainty. Then he turned and rushed from the hut.

Laughing with amusement at the waddling, fat figure, Rob followed the chief and found himself standing almost in the center of the native village. A big fire was blazing merrily and the blacks were busy making preparations for a grand feast.

Rob was quickly surrounded by a crowd of the villagers, who chattered fiercely and made threatening motions in his direction; but as the chief cried out to them a warning in the native tongue they kept a respectful distance and contented themselves with brandishing their spears and clubs.

"If any of your fellows come nearer," Rob said to the fat chief, "I'll knock 'em over."

"What you make do?" asked the chief, nervously.

"Watch sharp, and you'll see," answered Rob. Then he made a mocking bow to the circle and continued: "I'm pleased to have met you fellows, and proud to think you like me well enough to want to eat me; but I'm in a bit of a hurry to-day, so I can't stop to be digested." After which, as the crowd broke into a hum of surprise, he added: "Good-day, black folks!" and quickly turned the indicator of his traveling machine to the word "up."

Slowly he rose into the air, until his heels were just above the gaping blacks; but there he stopped short. With a thrill of fear he glanced at the indicator. It was pointed properly, and he knew at once that something was wrong with the delicate mechanism that controlled it. Probably the pressure of the rope across its face, when he was bound, had put it out of order. There he was, seven feet in the air, but without the power to rise an inch farther.

This short flight, however, had greatly astonished the blacks, who, seeing his body suspended in mid-air, immediately hailed him as a god, and prostrated themselves upon the ground before him.

The fat chief had seen something of white men in his youth, and had learned to mistrust them. So, while he remained as prostrate as the rest, he peeped at Rob with one of his little black eyes and saw that the boy was ill at ease, and seemed both annoyed and frightened.

So he muttered some orders to the man next him, who wriggled along the ground until he had reached a position behind Rob, when he rose and pricked the suspended "god" with the point of his spear.

"Ouch!" yelled the boy; "stop that!"

He twisted his head around, and seeing the black again make a movement with the spear, Rob turned his electric tube upon him and keeled him over like a ten-pin.

The natives, who had looked up at his cry of pain, again prostrated themselves, kicking their toes against the ground in a terrified tattoo at this new evidence of the god's powers.

The situation was growing somewhat strained by this time, and Rob did not know what the savages would decide to do next; so he thought it best to move away from them, since he was unable to rise to a greater height. He turned the indicator towards the south, where a level space appeared between the trees; but instead of taking that direction he moved towards the northeast, a proof that his machine had now become absolutely unreliable. Moreover, he was slowly approaching the fire, which, although it had ceased blazing, was a mass of glowing red embers.

In his excitement he turned the indicator this way and that, trying to change the direction of his flight, but the only result of his endeavor was to carry him directly over the fire, where he came to a full stop.

"Murder! Help! Fire and blazes!" he cried, as he felt the glow of the coals beneath him. "I'll be roasted, after all! Here; help, Fatty, help!"

The fat chief sprang to his feet and came to the rescue. He reached up, caught Rob by the heels, and pulled him down to the ground, away from the fire. But the next moment, as he clung to the boy's feet, they both soared into the air again, and, although now far enough from the fire to escape its heat, the savage, finding himself lifted from the earth, uttered a scream of horror and let go of Rob, to fall head over heels upon the ground.

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