

Morrison's
Machine
a Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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"When Charles the First was King"



OAK ST. HDSF

Morrison's Machine

By

J. S. Fletcher

Author of

'When Charles the First was King,' 'The Builders'
'The Paths of the Prudent'
Etc.



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MORRISON'S MACHINE

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF A GREAT IDEA

THE workshop had closed its doors for the day, and the whirring of its wheels and throbings of its engines had given place to a profound silence. It was difficult to realise that only ten minutes had elapsed since the wheels had ceased to whirr and the engines to throb, so quiet was the place now that the last man had passed out on his way to home and rest. In the vague light of the March evening little could be seen of the long, low shed in which so much human labour had been uniting itself with mechanical appliance during a day of toil, but here and there the faint glow of a gas-jet threw a wavering gleam over burnished steel or shining brass, and showed that nothing

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but dawn and the touch of a human hand on valve or lever was needed to transform the quiet scene into a picture of busy industry. Under the arched roof, through the glass slides of which one or two stars were already beginning to shine, lay a potentiality as great as that of an army which lies sleeping ere it awakes in sudden response to the call to arms.

It may be that some such thoughts as these half formed themselves in Richard Morrison's brain as he sat in the dimly-lighted counting-house of the workshop, waiting a summons from the inner room, where his employer, careless himself of how many hours he laboured, still sat at his desk. Morrison had come from the draughtsmen's room on the stroke of six, and had tapped, in obedience to previous orders, at Mr Wridsdale's private door, only to be bidden to wait without. He had sat down obediently to watch workpeople pass out into the street, clerks close their desks and go home, and in this way fifteen minutes had passed, and still Mr Wridsdale did not call him. Morrison made no complaint; he sat facing the door which looked into the

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workshop, his arms caressing a long roll of papers as if it had been a baby, his eyes fixed on a gas-jet burning dimly in the distance. He knew that when the door of that inner room opened, and the master's voice called him, he would experience a sudden throbbing of the heart, a sudden shyness, a sudden feeling of mental stupefaction that would make his knees tremble under him and give his voice a curious shakiness. But he smiled as he thought of these things, and his long, thin fingers patted the roll of paper with a caressing touch. He had that in his hands, he said to himself, which would not only astonish Mr Wridsdale, but make his own name known the wide world over. He felt his heart leap as he formed this last thought. It meant so much—to him, to his sister Lucy, to Mr Wridsdale, to the great captains of industry, to the vast multitude of workers. And it was all his—his—his idea, his notion, his *darling* invention, the work of his own brain, the result of his own labour, the thing on which he had lavished love in the shape of long, sleepless nights of work and thought. He laughed softly and proudly as he thought of it,

laughed as a young mother laughs when she sees her first-born stretch sturdy limbs in promise of strength to come.

He began to think as the minutes passed by of how the thing had come to be. He had always been of an inventive turn of mind, had made many useful and more useless things as a lad, and had suffered in the flesh many a time because of his irrepressible juvenile habit of taking things to pieces for the express purpose of putting them together again. It was in the very nature of things that he should find himself, almost as soon as he was in his teens, an inmate of Mr Wridsdale's workshop; it was in the nature of things, too, that ere he was out of his teens he knew everything that could be learnt there, and had proved himself a clever mechanic and a skilful draughtsman. The old hands watched him keenly, and wagged their heads as they saw him poke and potter and ponder until he had solved some secret which had baffled him. But as one secret had been solved after another, there had come upon Morrison the desire to invent, the burning fever of the true inventor to fashion some great machine such

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as the world had never known the like of, some wonderful thing which should revolutionise the conditions of trade and labour, and after that his mind had never rested. He had performed his duties with mechanical regularity and efficiency, but the folk about him saw a curious light at the back of his deep-set eyes which astonished them. It was the light seen in the eyes of a pilgrim who presses forward, heeding nothing, to the longed-for object of his devotion.

And for Morrison the shrine was at last reached. The thing had been born within him, the divine idea had passed from conception to generation, until on one memorable night, when his mind was sharpened by long vigils, he had seen it through and through, from first to last, and knew in the seeing it that he had triumphed. The machine was to Be—and it was to be His—the first great, stalwart child of his brain. He had reeled under the joy and the greatness of its promise—and then he had set to work silently, strenuously, to see it into the world. And at last here it was on the rolls of paper which he held in his arms—the diagrams and drawings, the

calculations and dimensions and figures which represented, when they were all put together, the perfect thing he had conceived.

Still the minutes passed and Morrison's thoughts transformed themselves into day-dreams. Utterly ignorant of almost every side of life though he was, he knew that money is power. He had seen it proved that with money a man may do great things; without it, little. He knew that his invention meant the possession of money to him—much money, heaps of money, untold money. He began to think of what he would do with that money. Certainly he would build a workshop—a workshop in which the wonderful inventions that he meant to devote his life to making should be fashioned and perfected. It should be stocked with every appliance known to the age—nobody should ever have seen anything like it. He conjured up a picture of it in his mind's eye and saw the picture as plainly as if it stood before his bodily vision. And he would give much money to his sister, and she and her sweetheart, George Broadclough, should be married, and live in a good house—

'Come in, Morrison!'

He turned to find Mr Wridsdale holding open the door of the inner room and speaking in a rather tired, somewhat impatient manner. The sudden feeling of nervousness which he had anticipated came over him as he rose from his seat and advanced into the room, but he held his precious papers closely to him and strove to be calm.

'I'm sorry to have kept you waiting so long, Morrison,' said the master, 'but I've had so much correspondence to attend to personally that I really couldn't help it. Sit down.'

'I didn't mind waiting, Mr Wridsdale,' said Morrison. 'I—I was quite comfortable.'

Wridsdale laughed. He was one of those men who would have chafed to death under half-an-hour's forced inactivity, and he had little regard for any man who could calmly wait another's pleasure without showing impatience.

'Well?' he said, pointing to the roll of papers. 'I suppose you have something there which you wish me to see? What is it this time?'

Morrison untied the roll of papers with fingers which trembled somewhat. Now that

he was at last to speak of his invention to a human being, to tell for the first time the story of his two years' thought and labour, he became suddenly aware that it was difficult to find words in which to express all that he wished to say. He glanced at Wridsdale with an air of diffidence.

'These—these,' he began lamely, 'these are the drawings and plans, sir, of a—a machine which I have invented.'

'A machine, eh, Morrison? What sort of machine?'

Morrison was still fumbling with the roll of papers; his nervousness had increased. With an effort he unrolled a large sheet of paper and suddenly laid it open on the desk before his employer. He tapped the drawing upon it with a forefinger that trembled slightly.

'That machine, Mr Wridsdale,' he said quietly. His confidence came back to him as he looked at the pictured result of his long labour, and he pulled himself together and held his head up with some pride. '*That* machine, sir,' he repeated with emphasis.

The great machine-maker looked down at the drawing before him, and a slight gasp

escaped his lips as he saw the words, written with that scrupulous care which distinguished all that Morrison ever did, beneath it. He glanced up at his draughtsman's face with eyes that were half-astounded, half-incredulous.

'Good God, man!' he burst out. 'Do you know what—what that means if you've really done it? Do you know—do you realise?'

Morrison nodded his head slowly; his eyes fixed themselves dreamily upon the drawing.

'I know, Mr Wridsdale. I realise—and I've done it.'

'You've done it?—you! You mean that—that you've really made the machine—made a machine that will revolutionise—'

The inventor raised his hand deprecatingly.

'No, sir, no; that's what I came to you about, if I may explain.'

'Yes, yes,' said Wridsdale, testily. 'Yes, explain.'

Morrison laid his hand on the rest of his precious papers.

'That's the finished drawing of the machine, Mr Wridsdale,' he said. 'And these are the details. If you'll go through them carefully with me, you'll find that the thing is perfect—'

yes, perfect. I can swear to the perfection of every detail, every movement. The machine can be built from—'

'Stop!' said Wridsdale. He turned the drawings over one by one, scrutinising each rapidly, but with a thoroughness that bespoke the intelligent examiner. 'Now, Morrison,' he said, 'draw that chair up and go through these things with me, point by point.'

Morrison obeyed with a glad heart. His nervousness vanished. He knew that the notion, the mere elementary notion, the almost inchoate idea of the great machine had already fastened itself upon his employer's mind, and he knew the character of that mind sufficiently to know that it never wasted a moment on trifles, and that it now meant to have the initial idea expanded into the perfect comprehension. He bent over the papers lying on the desk before Wridsdale, and began his explanation.

The clock on the mantelpiece of Wridsdale's room struck the hour twice, and still master and man remained deeply engrossed in their task—arguments, discussions, explanations following each other in continuous succession. A watchful observer, had there been one there,

would have found a curious pleasure in watching these two men. The machine-maker, nearly middle-aged, somewhat tall and burly of figure, well-dressed and appointed, formed a striking contrast to the shabbily-attired, untidy, slight-boned and shock-headed man standing at his side. Not less striking was the contrast between the faces and movements of the two men. The mass of unkempt black hair tumbling in all directions over Morrison's head made his thin face look almost cadaverous; the fire in his eyes, as he talked with voluble enthusiasm, gave him something of the air of a prophet or a poet. Wridsdale's florid, well-fed countenance, on the other hand, displayed nothing but the keen instincts of the self-possessed man of business. There was nothing of enthusiasm in his cold grey eye, no desire of much speech in his firmly-cut lips, but every look betrayed quick intelligence, and every word he spoke was to the purpose. He listened and heard and stored everything in his brain as it came to his ears.

At last there was no more to be said. The master rolled up the papers with a quick movement of his fingers and rose from his seat.

He walked across the room with a rapid step, then turned and faced the man.

'You have not mentioned this idea to a soul, Morrison?' he said, coming to a standstill before the inventor.

'Not to anyone, Mr Wridsdale—not even to my sister. You're the first man to hear of it.'

'Ah!' Wridsdale breathed sharply. 'Well?' he said questioningly, 'and now, what do you want to do?'

'I want to make the machine,' answered Morrison. His agitation came back to him; he began to twist his long, bony fingers one over the other, and a faint flush of colour came into his pale face. 'That's what I want, sir—to make the machine. I know the details are perfect, but I want to see the machine itself, to see it as it will be, to set it working, to—'

'Yes, yes,' said Wridsdale, 'I understand. And you want me to make it?'

Morrison's face fell.

'No,' he replied slowly. 'I want to make it myself. Nobody but myself could make it. Nobody but myself must make it, Mr Wridsdale. And no one must know of it until it's made. I know it's all right—it's perfect—'

but I want to make it and see it work before—'

'What is it you propose, Morrison?' said Wridsdale, again interrupting him.

'I thought that if you would give me facilities, and material, and time—'

'All three, willingly. But you'll want something else than that, Morrison,' said the machine-maker, meaningly. 'You'll want secrecy. Now, listen to me. You shall have, from to-morrow morning, the small workshop by the draughtsmen's room, and it shall be kept strictly for your use. None but you and I shall enter it until the thing's finished. Whatever material you want you'll get in the sheds. Anything you want specially made you'll get the men to make. But remember—not a word to anyone—not even to your sister—until your work's done. After that we must discuss matters further. How long will this take you?'

'A month,' answered Morrison.

'Well, your time's your own until it's done. By-the-bye, leave the drawings with me until to-morrow. I should like to look them through again. Good-night, Morrison.'

' Good-night, Mr Wridsdale,' said the inventor. He passed out of the room slowly, and in the outer office half-paused as if there were something he had forgotten to say, then the striking of a clock roused him, and he went away quickly into the darkness outside.

CHAPTER II

THE INVENTOR'S FIRESIDE

UTTERLY absorbed in his thoughts and plans, Morrison neither perceived the coldness of the night nor the fact that a steady rain was falling. He trudged along the gloomy street which led from Wridsdale's Works into the heart of Blackford without regard to weather or surroundings, and though two or three people spoke to him as they caught sight of his pale face in the yellow glare of the gas-lamps, he returned no salutation. Everybody who lived along that street, tenanted chiefly by Wridsdale's workpeople, knew the inventor. Most of them regarded him as being highly eccentric, some of them secretly thought him a little mad. Every morning saw him approaching the workshop at a rapid pace; every evening saw him returning homeward just as rapidly. He invariably walked in the same fashion, his head bent forward as if in

deep thought, his hat pulled down over his forehead, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers, or, when his sister had made him put it on, into those of his overcoat. Under his arms he usually carried books or rolls of paper, and as he walked he talked to himself. People knew all these traits and tricks, and though they bade him good-morning or good-night, they never expected any greeting in return. It was well understood that he was so absorbed and pre-occupied that he recognised little of any immediate surroundings save those of the work to which his whole life and thought was devoted.

The square which stands in the heart of modern Blackford, and from whence several streets branch off to the various suburbs of the town, was full of light as Morrison turned into it. Never looking to right or left, he darted across it at his usual swift pace, dodging cabs, tramcars and people with an unerring precision which seemed strangely at variance with the absent-mindedness of his appearance. But as he turned into another road, he was suddenly brought up by a tall

young man advancing from the opposite direction, who forcibly laid hands on his shoulder and wheeled him sharply round into the light of a neighbouring lamp. Morrison looked up.

'Oh! ah! George, is it?' he said. 'I'm just on my way home, George. Are you going there to-night?'

'I've just come from there,' said George. 'Lucy sent me to meet you. Look there, you star-gazing chap, what's that look like?'

He held out an overcoat as he spoke and regarded the inventor with an expression of amusement.

'It—it appears to be an overcoat,' said Morrison, half-doubtfully.

'Your overcoat, you old donkey! Here,' said George, 'on with it, man; don't you know it's raining; you're pretty wet now.'

Morrison struggled into the coat: his hands immediately sought the pockets, and he hitched his shoulders with a familiar shrug which George had seen a thousand times.

'I hadn't noticed it,' he said, looking about him. 'Dear me, it is raining! You shouldn't have come come out, George; you must be quite damp.'

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George laughed and pushed him forward, marching on at his side as if he were a policeman guarding an acquiescent prisoner.

'Come along home,' he said indulgently. 'Lucy's had your supper ready since half-past six, and it's past ten now. I'll tell you what, Richard, my boy, you'll go out some day and come back without your head, that's what you'll do.'

Morrison looked up at his companion and smiled—the smile of a child which has conceived a great admiration for something very much stronger and taller and more powerful than itself. To him his sister's lover was the most beautiful man in the world—a being of strength and wisdom, a species of elder brother who knew a great many things which he himself would never know since he would never have time to learn them. It fitted in with his absorbed temperament that the things of which George Broadclough knew so much and could talk of so pleasantly—the very ordinary affairs, pleasures and subjects which occupy a young and healthy man's mind—were to him as far-away matters which he could never reach nor comprehend. He liked

to hear George hold forth on the virtues of this cricket eleven, or that football fifteen, or describe his adventures during his last holiday, and he often sat in admiring silence while the young man informed Lucy and himself as to the correct state of politics, and pointed out where the Government for the time being was making mistakes, and how he, George, would obviate them. To Morrison, indeed, absorbed, idealistic, lost in dreams and essentially absent-minded, George Broadclough, quick of tongue and thought, always ready to say and do, was an amazing person.

'That's what you'll do, some day, old chap!' repeated George, cheerily. 'Go and leave your head behind you somewhere—see if you don't.'

'That's your fun, you know, George,' answered Morrison, with his quiet smile. 'I—I believe I am a little preoccupied just now. In fact, I'd quite forgotten that I ought to have been home at half-past six.'

'I'll tell you what, Richard,' said George; 'don't you put in such a lot of extra time for old Wridsdale. I don't think he appreciates devotion from anybody. At anyrate, I'm not

going to stick in that counting-house a moment longer than is necessary to the strict performance of my duties. Does it never strike you that you won't do your health any good by working so late? And going without food so long, too—I'm sure it's dangerous.'

'I—I haven't been working to-night, George. I remained behind to have a conversation with Mr Wridsdale.'

'That must have been extremely pleasant,' remarked George. 'I hope the results of it may be as profitable to you as I am sure they will be to Wridsdale.'

Morrison looked at his friend wistfully.

'I'm afraid you don't like Mr Wridsdale, George,' he said.

'There is certainly not much affection wasted upon him by me,' answered George. 'Though why on earth I don't like him, seeing that he finds me in bread and butter to the tune of three poor pounds per week, I'm sure I don't know. Case of Dr Fell, I suppose. Hello, Richard, there's Lucy at the door—she must have got anxious about you.'

The inventor and his sister lived in one of

a row of small houses turning off from a suburban road and separated from the little street of which they formed one side by miniature gardens wherein nothing ever grew. They were very small, unpretentious dwellings—two rooms below, two rooms above, and a narrow hall wherein it was just possible to turn round by means of skilful manœuvring—but to the two men who entered the particular one at whose door a girl stood watching they formed the immediate surroundings of the most delightful spot on earth—made so, of course, by the fact that the girl lived there. It mattered nothing to either of them that the night was cold and wet, and that all around them lay the smoke and grime of a great manufacturing town—the gleam of firelight in which the girl's figure stood framed, and the presence of the girl herself, blotted out everything but thoughts of home and love and contentment.

'Here he is, Lucy,' said George, pushing the inventor forward. 'I caught him red-handed in the square, apprehended him straight away, and marched him off. What's to be done with him?'

'He ought to be whipped and sent to bed,'

said the girl, retreating into the house. 'Richard, how dare you go out without your overcoat?'

'Yes, how dare you?' said George, closing the door and pushing Morrison into the little living-room.

'I—it didn't rain this morning, you know, Lucy,' said Morrison. 'At least I—I believe it didn't.'

'I wonder if you'd have known if it did?' she said, laughing and pulling at his coat. 'George, get a cloth and rub him down, and then rub yourself down—you're damp, too. Now, Richard, off with those boots this instant and then wash your hands. I suppose you have had nothing to eat for hours.'

'No, Lucy, I haven't,' Morrison admitted. 'Now I come to think of it, I believe I am rather hungry.' He sniffed the air. 'Something,' he remarked, 'something smells good.'

'Something,' said Lucy, 'is good. Something was very much better at half-past six, if only somebody had been here to eat it. I'll tell you what it is, Richard, I shall go down to Mr Wridsdale's works myself some day and tell him that I won't have you staying there until these late hours.'

'Hooray!' said George. 'That's exactly what ought to be done.'

'You see, there was something of a special reason to-night, Lucy,' said Morrison. 'Something—'

'Oh, go and wash your hands and come back to your supper!' said Lucy, pushing him into the little kitchen, and shutting the door upon him. She turned to George and smiled. George smiled too and looked at her meaningly.

'It is usual,' he said, coming up to the fire-side, 'for the cook to—er—tip the policeman when his duty is properly performed.'

'Very well,' said Lucy, 'which will the policeman have from the cook—a kiss or a glass of ale?'

'The policeman,' said George, possessing himself of her waist, 'will kiss the cook first and enjoy the well-earned refreshment afterwards. It is also customary,' he added when the first part of these ceremonies had been performed, 'for the cook to kiss the policeman'—here there was a further interval—'not merely once, or even twice, or thrice—but unto as many times as he, or she, or both—'

Lucy drew away from her lover with a laugh

as Morrison re-entered the room. She pushed Richard into a chair, set his meal before him, and bade him eat and drink, warning him of the dreadful things which usually happen to persons who neglect to cultivate proper habits. The inventor ate and drank and laughed at his sister's motherly scoldings, and at George's terrible stories illustrating the awful folly of working overtime and going without meals. He was used to all of it, and would not have been happy without some such accompaniment to his arrival home.

'And what might the special reason be which kept you so late to-night, Richard?' asked Lucy when Morrison had finished his supper and they were all sitting round the hearth. 'Something for Mr Wridsdale's benefit, I expect?'

Morrison lifted his head and looked at his sister. She sat in a low chair between him and George, her hands busied with her sewing, her face bent above it, her whole attitude suggestive of a thorough and placid contentment. He looked round about him—everything in the little room was bright and clean and homelike and typical of housewifely care,

and George himself, smoking his pipe in the easy-chair across the hearthrug, helped to strengthen the homeliness and comfort. Lucy and George—these two made the inventor's world. In his opinion Lucy was the perfection of womanhood—the good, kindly, warm-hearted, fireside-loving woman destined to make those about her happy and to be happy herself. He had never asked himself if she was pretty or handsome, and had never compared her with other women: he only knew that to him as brother and to George as lover she was queen of their world. He began to wonder as he looked at her and George if all that money which he was going to give them would add to their happiness. Would a palace, for instance, be any happier a place than that little room where they three had spent so many pleasant evenings, all conscious of each other's love and friendship? It had taken so little to make them happy—

Lucy looked up at her brother and smiled.

'Dreaming again, Richard,' she said. 'Come, you didn't answer my question.'

'I'm sorry, Lucy,' he said, starting out of his thoughts. 'I got thinking. I—oh, I had

to see Mr Wridsdale on a very important matter—very important. We talked it over very exhaustively, and somehow the time passed.'

'And what was it?' inquired Lucy.

Morrison hesitated.

'Well,' he said slowly, 'I promised Mr Wridsdale that I would not mention the matter even to you. It is one on which it is necessary to observe the strictest secrecy, you see.'

'How mysterious! Somehow, one doesn't associate Mr Wridsdale with mysteries, though,' said Lucy. 'Do you, George?'

'There are mysteries and mysteries,' replied George, oracularly. 'One sort of mystery fits in with one person; another sort with another. I believe I could bring myself to believe that Wridsdale is a person of mystery, but of what exact species of mystery I should not like to say, being an extremely cautious person in—'

'Pooh, talk!' interrupted Lucy. 'Well, Richard, when are we to hear of this mystery?'

Morrison threw back his head and stared at the ceiling.

'In a month, I hope, Lucy,' he replied. 'Perhaps—that is, I think I might tell you and

George something of it without breaking any promise. The fact is, I've completed the invention of a machine—a most wonderful machine, George!—a machine which will set the whole mechanical world astir. I can't tell you anything about it beyond that, and that Wridsdale is giving me facilities for making it. I'm to have a whole month's time, all to myself, for its making. Nobody could have been kinder than Wridsdale was about that, George. And—and at the end of the month you shall both know everything, and see the finished machine—Morrison's machine, eh, Lucy?'

'And when it's finished, Richard?' said Lucy.

'Ah!' The inventor drew a long breath and stretched out his arms as if he wanted more space. 'Ah! when it's finished—well, just wait and see!'

'Is it your machine, Richard?' asked George.

'My machine? Mine? Why, of course it is! It—'

'I meant it's not yours and Wridsdale's?'

'Mine and Wridsdale's? Of course not, George. It's mine all through—every bit—every idea—every detail.'

'And it's to revolutionise—why, Richard, you'll be a rich man!' said Lucy.

'We shall all be rich,' he said contentedly. 'All of us—you and George and I—all millionaires.'

He spoke seriously, nodding his head as if he already saw the wealth on the table before his eyes. George laughed and rose to his feet.

'I'll go home and dream of that,' he said, holding out his hand to Morrison. 'Good-night, Richard, old chap, and let me give you a tip—don't work too hard at this wonderful machine of yours—don't. If you do, you'll be getting—but there, I know it's no good advising you; you're a demon for hard labour. Lucy, come and see me off the premises—the cook always accompanies the policeman to the area steps.'

When Lucy came back to the fireside five minutes later she found the inventor staring into its flames with wide eyes. She brushed the thick hair away from his forehead and stooped down and kissed him. Morrison smiled and patted her hand.

'Ah, Lucy!' he said. 'Wait till you see my machine!'

CHAPTER III

MIDNIGHT MEDITATIONS

FOR some time after Morrison had left him Mark Wridsdale remained in his private office, wrapped in deep thought. He walked up and down the room, his brow knit, his hands clasping and unclasping each other behind his back. Now and then his lips moved as if he were repeating formulæ or figures; once or twice he went to his desk and made notes or calculations, rising again to resume his slow, pre-occupied march from one side of the room to the other. It was not until the clock had chimed the half-hour after Morrison's departure that the machine-maker paused in his walk and looked hurriedly at his watch. He glanced from it to the clock as if in some surprise. After a moment's hesitation he touched a bell—the sound of its ringing came from somewhere far off in the deserted workshop. Wridsdale sat down at his desk and began

covering a sheet of paper with notes and figures.

A curious, uncertain, stumping noise presently sounded from the counting-house without—the noise made in walking by a man who possesses one long leg and one short one. Wridsdale heard it and showed no consciousness; he went on scribbling at his paper and did not lift his head when the door opened. It was a strange figure which the open doorway framed—a figure so misshapen and twisted of build and limb as to present at first the appearance of some grotesque animal rather than of a human being. A massive head, covered by an old cap from beneath the battered peak of which a pair of brilliant eyes looked out, strong shoulders, hunched and bent, a twisted body inclining to the left side, where a short leg was painfully apparent, long arms reaching, as the man stood in a waiting attitude, to a point nearer his feet than his knee—these were the unsightly features which Wridsdale would have seen had he looked up when the door opened. But the machine-maker did not look up; he was absorbed in his calculations and had apparently forgotten that he had rung the bell.

He went on noting down figure after figure, and the man in the doorway stood, statue-like, waiting, with his eyes fixed on the rapidly-moving pen.

'Are you there, Todd,' said Wridsdale at last.

'I've been here exactly five minutes,' answered Todd. Then he added in a tone that precluded all further argument, 'By the clock—your clock.'

'I didn't ask how long you had been there,' said Wridsdale. 'I asked if you were there.'

'Well, I am here,' retorted the other. 'Anybody could see that if they used their eyes.'

A very faint smile curved the machine-maker's determined lips. He wrote down some more figures on the paper before him ere he spoke again. Todd remained motionless: one long arm hung at his side, the hand of the other rested on the handle of the door.

'I want you to go across to the inn,' said Wridsdale, looking up at last. 'Ask the landlady to send me some supper in here—a chop and some stale bread.'

'And a glass of toast-and-water,' said Todd. 'I know. Chop, stale bread, toast-and-water, all right. Are you going to stay here for some time?'

'Well, what if I am?'

'Oh, nothing—I don't care. But if you are I shall have to bring some coal from the engine-house; your scuttle's empty.'

'Well then, I am—an hour or two, at anyrate.'

'All right,' said the misshapen man, nodding his head. 'Supper—coals.'

He pulled the door to and stumped off heavily through the counting-house. He unlocked the street entrance, let himself out, and locked the door behind him ere he crossed the road towards the lights of an inn at the opposite side. Into its open door he shambled, elbowing his way through two or three loungers until he reached a bar-window, behind which stood a comfortable-looking landlady. Todd nodded confidentially to her.

'Usual thing, Mrs Crabtree,' he said. 'Governor's supper, you know what. Don't forget the toast-and-water. Toast-and-water, ugh! Tell the girl to knock hard when she brings it.'

As Todd made this communication his eyes fixed themselves on a certain bottle which stood conveniently to hand, and they grew brighter as he saw the landlady follow their gaze.

'You'll take a taste, Stumpy,' she said kindly, laying hold of the bottle. 'It's rather cold to-night, isn't it? I'll send Mr Wridsdale's chop across in a quarter of an hour. I expect he's working late—he's a rare 'un to work.'

'Thankee, Mrs Crabtree. Here's your good health,' said Stumpy Todd, emptying the preferred glass at a draught. 'Ah! that's good, better than toast-and-water. Let the girl knock hard.'

He stumped heavily out of the house and across the road again, elbowing aside anybody who chanced to be in his way, without ceremony or consideration. He let himself into the workshop again and secured the entrance, and Wridsdale, still busy with his calculations, heard him approaching his door. The latter opened, and the two unequal legs fought out their never-ending difference across the floor.

'Coal-scuttle,' said Todd, and laid hold of the article in question and went away again. The stumping sound died gradually out of hearing along the emptiness of the long shed, and in a few minutes came into evidence once more. The door opened. 'Coals,' said the misshapen man, depositing his burden. He

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went outside and sat down in the counting-house until a loud knocking sounded at the street entrance. 'Crabtree's girl,' he said to himself, and went to the door and took in the supper tray. This he carried into Wridsdale's private room and set on a small table near the fire. He drew up a chair and turning to his master said, 'Supper,' in a voice calculated to wake a sound sleeper. Wridsdale moved uneasily and said, 'Right, right, Todd!' somewhat testily. The man waited for a minute and then said, 'Supper!' again, this time in a voice which might have been heard all over the building. The machine-maker uttered an impatient exclamation and left his desk. Todd retreated to the door. 'Getting cold,' he said, pointing to the chop, and closed the door upon his grotesque figure.

Wridsdale sat down to his simple meal, and ate and drank slowly. He was a plain liver, thinking little of either food or drink, and it was easy to see that as he consumed his chop, and sipped his toast-and-water, his mind was utterly oblivious that he was doing the one or the other. His mind, indeed, at that moment was speculating in a half-dreamy fashion upon

certain vagaries of life, or human nature, or of whatever influence it is that controls both. It was not often that Wridsdale speculated on these things—he was essentially a sternly practical man of business, and it was only at rare times that he ever allowed himself to wonder or speculate about anything.

But this, as he confessed to himself, was indeed a rare occasion—an occasion which comes but seldom in the life of any man. Another man, his servant, had placed in his hands a secret, a great, wonderful secret—a secret so wonderful that if it were revealed to the world that night there would be such a to-do ere noon of the following day as the scientific and mechanical worlds had not known for half a century. Wridsdale had no doubt as to how the working out of the secret would result; his long training and his unerring precision in grasping the meaning of detail and idea had helped him to arrive at a speedy conclusion as to the making of Morrison's machine. He was as confident as the inventor himself that, all going well, that very wonderful machine would be actually made in a few short weeks, and that the inventors and mechanics of the

world would be filled with amazement to find that at last something had become actual fact which many a mechanical genius had dreamt about—and had left a mere dream still.

And that something would be known as Morrison's machine.

Wridsdale smiled—a strange, inscrutable smile—as he thought of this. It was that thought which had made him begin speculating on the vagaries of life, on the curious fashion in which Nature, or Providence, or whatever it is that gives out gifts to men, bestows talents and capabilities, and other matters good to possess. Why—why had that blind chance which seemed to influence this distribution given that glorious idea, that perfect inspiration to Richard Morrison instead of to Mark Wridsdale? He smiled again and shook his head, and again asked himself, Why?

It seemed absolutely unreasonable to Wridsdale that a man like Richard Morrison should have been so wonderfully gifted as to conceive the notion of such a machine. It would have been wonderful, he said to himself, if he had even thought of it as a mere inchoate idea; that he should struggle with

a well-known scientific difficulty, and triumphantly overcome it, was nothing short of marvellous. And yet, he further said to himself, was it not true that madness and genius not seldom went together? He had always regarded Morrison as being a little mad, or, if not mad, at anyrate so eccentric as to be easily mistaken for a harmless madman, and the events of the evening had not dispossessed him of the idea. No! it was a momentary flash of that highest form of genius which is little removed from insanity in which Morrison had conceived this daring notion, he said to himself—it was the thoroughness of his training that had enabled him to work it out. And Morrison owed that thoroughness to him—Wridsdale.

He had finished his supper by this time and had lighted a cigar, and he stood with his back to the fire, looking at the roll of papers which Morrison had left lying in his desk. He began to recall the young man's career. He remembered Morrison's father, a steady old Scotsman, who had spent half a century in a neighbouring cotton-mill, coming to him and telling him that Richard had a rare turn for machines and the like, and

begging him to take the lad into his workshop. He remembered the lad coming; he remembered thinking him a bit of a fool, and speedily discovering that he had quick fingers and a perfect genius for mechanical work. He remembered how he had constantly come across him, while Morrison was yet a boy, engaged in satisfying himself why such an effect was produced by such a cause, or in taking some decrepit machine to pieces in order to find out all about its motion and properties. As years had gone on, he had proved Morrison to be a first-rate workman, but he had never altered his first personal opinion of him as being a bit of a fool, or eccentric, or half mad. Apart from machinery, Morrison knew nothing; nobody ever saw him reading a newspaper, or anything, indeed, but a scientific book, or knew him to hold converse on aught but the subject closest at mind. His manner was against him, too; he had the shyness, the awkwardness, the timidity in address and speech which almost invariably distinguishes the student. Decidedly, said Wridsdale to himself, decidedly, anybody who did not know much of him would consider Morrison a bit of an ass.

And yet this was the man within whose grasp lay the potentiality of vast stores of wealth. What the invention of Morrison's machine meant to Morrison nobody knew better than Wridsdale. It would revolutionise a certain trade ; there would be such a demand for it as it was almost confusing to think of ; its inventor, if he pleased, might roll in wealth. Wridsdale laughed, a little bitterly, as he tried to connect the thought of Morrison with the thought of wealth. He knew everything about Morrison's antecedents and his present position ; he knew all about the little house in the suburban street wherein Lucy officiated as mistress and maid, and he contrasted his employee's present modest establishment with one which readily presented itself to his mind's eye when he thought of the royalties that would accrue from the machine. And he laughed again, more bitterly than before, as he made the contrast.

If only that notion, that brilliant bit of inspiration, or madness, or genius, had come to him, Mark Wridsdale ! He would have known how to use the wealth it would have brought him. He had his ambitions, social and

political, and had chafed under his inability to carry them out. He had worked hard all his life of five-and-forty years, and he was not afraid of work now ; but there were moments in his life in which he experienced a desire to gratify some of his longings and to be able to pay a little less attention to the daily task. He was a man of some note in his native town, and he enjoyed the respect, if not the affection, of his fellow - townspeople ; but he wanted something more than mere note, something that would enable him to snap his fingers at either affection or respect. He knew, and had known for some years, that as things were going he would never be in command of the wealth which would alone enable him to fulfil his ambitions. If this discovery, this invention of Morrison's, had only been his, why, then, there would have been no reason why he should not fulfil the desire of his heart. With the wealth which would spring from the invention of that machine a man might enter Parliament, be the foremost personage in his own neighbourhood, purchase a title, endow public institutions, and die leaving a great name behind him. A man might do all this,

but not any man. Was Morrison the sort of man who would?

Wridsdale thought all these matters over as he stood with his back to the fire, smoking his cigar slowly and meditatively. It was a long time before he threw what remained of it away, and went across to his desk again. There he sat down and unrolled Morrison's papers, and for the fourth time went carefully through them, making fresh notes and calculations, and covering sheet after sheet with figures and rough diagrams. It was past midnight when he rolled the papers up again, and secured them in the wrapper in which Morrison had laid them upon the desk.

'I can't see a flaw in it anywhere,' he murmured to himself. 'It's perfect; and, like all these big things, it's simplicity itself, when you've once got the notion of it, the clear vision. And it's been left to Morrison—my clerk—to get it!'

He carried the papers over to a safe, and locked them securely away. Then he looked at his watch, lighted another cigar, and slowly put on his coat and hat. He lingered a moment, staring meditatively at the last gleam of the fire.

'I ought to have a half of it,' he said to himself. 'I've taught him everything he knows—he owes everything to me. He's worked this notion out in my time. He'll use my material to make the machine. It's I who give him room and facility. Certainly I ought to have half—at least half.'

The clock struck one, and Wridsdale started out of his reverie. He left his room, and, passing through the counting-house, called gently to the night-watchman. Todd, carrying a great lantern, came through the shed, his misshapen form swaying in the gloom, and looming large against the faint gas-jets.

'Going?' said Todd.

'Yes,' answered his master. 'Good-night, Todd.'

'Morning, you mean,' retorted Todd. 'It's past one now.'

'Oh, well, good morning, then.'

'Morning,' grunted the night-watchman, holding the door open. 'Ugh, it's cold!' He closed the door upon Wridsdale's retreating form, and, having secured it, stumped slowly back to his sheltered corner in the engine-house.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAKING OF MORRISON'S MACHINE

MORRISON began the making of his machine with a quiet elation which was patent to everybody who came in contact with him. On the morning following his revelation of the secret to Wridsdale, he rose at an hour which was unusually early, even for him, and went off to the workshop at his quickest pace. Before breakfast time, he had made everything ready in the room which Wridsdale had set apart for him. It was a room that had been used but little, and much rubbish had accumulated in it. When all the useless odds and ends had been cleared away, and the place swept and laid bare, Morrison looked at its empty expanse as a general might look upon a wide plain on which he means to engage the enemy and win a great victory. That emptiness was to be the scene of his operations, the theatre of his ultimate triumph.

Where there was now nothing but so many feet of vacant floor space, surrounded by blank walls, there should stand, within a few weeks, the first actual presentation, wrought in visible and tangible form, of his great machine.

The inventor went about his work silently and methodically. There were preliminaries to arrange, details to settle; due provision to make for the observance of strict secrecy as to what it was that was being fashioned in the empty room. Absolute secrecy it was impossible to keep; before many days had elapsed, every workman about the place knew that Wridsdale and Morrison had some new-fangled notion in hand, and that they were giving a great deal of time and thought and labour to working it out. Into the closed room were taken certain materials, implements, appliances; from behind its locked door came hammerings and tappings, and sometimes long intervals of profound silence. Sometimes Morrison emerged, pale and anxious, to seek the services and help of one of the more experienced mechanics in fashioning something or other, the exact purpose or use of which the mechanic thus employed found it im-

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possible to explain to himself. It began to be noticed, as the first week passed away, that Morrison never employed the same workman twice—one day he would engage the services of this man; another day, the help of that—and though the men thus enlisted in the fashioning of the machine put their heads together and talked, they found it impossible to arrive at any definite conclusion as to what it was that was being made. There was little doubt in the minds of any of Wridsdale's work-people that the thing which was being put together so secretly and mysteriously was a new invention of some importance and consequence. After Morrison had got fairly settled down in his room, it was noticed that Wridsdale began visiting it frequently. He would go there as soon as he reached the works in the morning, even before he attended to his correspondence, and would remain closeted with Morrison for so long a time that his clerks, waiting his instructions as to letters and documents, would find themselves hurried and hustled for the rest of the day. As the time went on, these visits of Wridsdale's became more frequent and more prolonged. The same

mystery and secrecy invariably attached to them. The master would go to the locked door and satisfy the man within as to his identity ere the latter opened it. When Wridsdale left, the door was immediately locked behind him. When Morrison left for the night, it was secured in the most careful fashion by a special safety lock, of which he and Wridsdale held master keys. Daytime and night-time the door was as jealously guarded as a house which holds much treasure.

With the first day of the operations a curious change came over Morrison. Always quiet, retiring, and self-absorbed, he developed all these qualities to an almost abnormal degree. He stole away from home early in the morning and returned late at night, worn, pale and silent. He ate in purely mechanical and absent-minded fashion the food which his sister set before him, and would then sit by his fireside with his brows knit and corded in continuous thought and his eyes unnaturally bright with mental excitement. Sometimes he would seize paper and pencil and begin calculations or drawings which kept him up until long after midnight—twice during the first

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fortnight he rose in the night and hurried away to the workshop. As every day went by the strain and excitement began to tell upon him more palpably, and the workfolk through whom he pushed his way in the grey morning shook their heads as they looked at his drawn face and burning eyes. Morrison saw nothing; heard nothing; knew nothing of all this or of anything else—he had one thing fixed in his mind and one thing only. It is probable that during that month he never understood a single word of what was said to him—unless the words had direct reference to the making of his machine.

Lucy grew seriously alarmed. Day after day went by whereon Morrison never came home until midnight, and then arrived in a condition which was little short of collapse. She noted that his face was growing thinner and paler and his eyes larger and brighter, and there was a certain wildness about his look which frightened her. At last, when he came home one night staggering like a drunken man, she determined that something must be done; and when she had made him eat and drink and seen a little of the strangeness go out of his

face she spoke to him firmly on the foolishness of his conduct. But to her great consternation and alarm she found that Morrison, usually the most docile of men and indulgent of brothers where she was concerned, was absolutely impervious to whatever she said to him. It seemed to her that he had lost all capacity to understand her meaning; to whatever she said to him he offered no reply other than a meaningless, foolish smile or a wag of the head. It was abundantly clear to her that the strain was already telling upon him severely.

After that Lucy naturally took council with her lover as to what should be done. George, usually full of suggestions and schemes about anything and everything, felt himself at an utter loss when confronted with this difficulty.

'I don't see what we can do,' he said dolefully. 'You know what Richard is, Lucy; once he gets wrapped up in a thing he'll see it through, or burst or die or something of the sort. Do you remember when he made that improvement in your sewing-machine? how he began pottering about with it one Saturday afternoon and neither ate, drank, slept nor washed until he got it to his satisfaction on the

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Monday morning, just at daylight! It's no good; he'll go through with this thing. You can't stop him.'

'It will kill him,' said Lucy. 'It's impossible for him to go on as he is doing. He's up at five o'clock and off to the works with scarcely a mouthful of food, and I don't suppose he eats anything during the day. It's rarely midnight before he comes home. How can he go on like that without a break-down of some sort?'

'He does get something during the day, though,' said George. 'I didn't like telling you before, but I don't know why I shouldn't. Wridsdale's taken him in hand in that respect.'

'Mr Wridsdale?'

'Yes. Every day for the past week Wridsdale's sent out for lunch for two and had it brought to his private room. Jolly good lunch, too, Lucy; oysters, chops, champagne—I've seen 'em taking it through the counting-house. Now, Wridsdale himself is the sort of man who lunches off a chop or a cut from the joint, and he actually drinks toast-and-water—that's a standing joke at the works—and it made me wonder a bit when I saw this sudden departure

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into the habits of the luxuriant. But the first day it happened, Wridsdale went off to Richard's room and brought him back after the usual mysteries of lock and key, and I'm firmly convinced that he feeds him, and doses him with champagne. You know what Richard is; he'll eat and drink just what he's told to, like a child, and never know anything of it.'

Lucy looked somewhat relieved.

'Well, if Mr Wridsdale is looking after him in the daytime,' she said, 'things are not quite so bad as I feared. But you know, George, he ought to have more sleep, and he ought not to work so continuously. I wonder what this thing is he is making?'

'It's something very big, Lucy. I'll bet a year's screw on it. It's something so big that Wridsdale's pretty nearly as bad as Richard. He spends half his time in Richard's room now. It seems to us in the counting-house that he's thrown everything aside in favour of whatever it is that Richard is concocting. He's at the works early in the morning and at Richard's door. We can't get him to give his attention to letters or accounts. He puts us off or tells us to use our own discretion. Fancy

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Wridsdale doing that! Oh, it's something very big, Lucy. I bet it is.'

'Richard said we should all be millionaires,' she said, looking at her lover with a smile. 'But I don't know that I should much care for that. Things are very nice as they are, aren't they, dear? If only Richard wouldn't work himself silly. There's one thing you might do, George,' she added abruptly. 'I wish I'd thought of it before.'

'What's that?' asked George.

'Bring Richard home from the works every night. You know how absent-minded he is at all times, and he is so queer just now that I am in terror every night lest anything should happen to him. Will the policeman oblige the cook in this?' said Lucy, with an arch smile, which caused George to assume the *rôle* of active lover. 'It will be a duty worthy his past achievements.'

It was an ancient but evergreen jest amongst George's friends and acquaintances that he had enrolled himself as a special constable during the time of the Blackford Riots, and that the only duty he had been called upon to perform was to escort a cook home in safety, who had fallen

amongst a party of the rioters while out on a shopping expedition. It was also said that the cook had been so charmed with George's politeness and fascinated by his six-foot-two of manly proportions that she had invited him to supper and had absolutely refused to part with him until he had drunk her health. Hence it came about that Lucy frequently teased him by calling him the policeman—why George called Lucy the cook is an obvious matter, nor did he ever trouble to explain to her that she was much more charming than the lady to whom he had done special service.

'The policeman is ready and willing in that as in everything else,' said George, after an interval. 'But it's no light work, Lucy. I'll promise to see Richard home, but I won't promise to bring him home by any particular hour. Wild horses wouldn't drag him out of that room if he isn't ready to come.'

Lucy was as well aware of that fact as George was, and was satisfied to know that he would do what he could. So every night after that found George sharing a corner in the engine-house with Stumpy Todd, waiting in patience until the unlocking of Richard's door warned

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him that his friend was going home. He and Stumpy made a curious pair. Each sat on a low stool near the fire; each smoked his pipe; each was in turn loquacious or taciturn as the humour took them. Beside George's tall and stalwart figure, the figure of a lifeguardsman rather than of a mercantile clerk, Stumpy's misshapen body looked like a monstrosity; compared with George's good-humoured, handsome face, Stumpy's ill-favoured countenance was as that of a gnome. But not even George's eyes were as bright and keen as Stumpy's black orbs peering out from the shock of unkempt hair which covered his great head, nor were his ears as sharp as the misshapen creature's were.

'Know what's going on in there?' said Stumpy, as they sat one night listening to the tapping and hammering and the metallic ring of steel which came from Richard's room.

'No,' answered George. 'Don't know at all.'

'N'more do I,' said Stumpy. 'N'more does anybody in the place. That is, 'ceptin' Wridsdale. He knows.'

'Think so?'

'Sure he does. I know him—known him ever since he was that high. He knows.'

'I suppose everybody'll know some day,' said George.

'It's a machine of some sort,' said Stumpy. 'Heard the men talking about bits of it they've made. They can't make head or tail of it—think it's some new-fangled thing or other. Wish I could set eyes on it.'

'Why, do you know anything about machinery?' asked George.

Stumpy blew a great cloud of smoke towards the ceiling.

'Haven't been here boy and man without picking something up,' he grunted. 'How d'ye think I spend my time at night, eh?'

'Smoking over the fire and sipping at that bottle of yours, perhaps?' answered George, interrogatively.

'Y're a blooming liar!' retorted Stumpy. 'Cause I don't.'

'All right,' said George. 'Then you don't. I never said you did, you know, when you come to think about it. That's what I should do, though, if I were night-watchman at Wridsdale's.'

'No, you wouldn't,' said Stumpy. 'No, you

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wouldn't. Smoking's all very well, and a taste of something's all very well, but they don't fill up a whole night. You'd do as I do if you'd been here as long as I have.'

'What's that?' asked George.

'Take your lantern and walk round, a-looking at the machines and passing the time o' day with 'em,' answered the night-watchman. 'Lor' bless you, many's the talk I have with this here engine and with some o' them machines in the bottom floor there.'

George looked at Stumpy Todd critically. He had known him for some years as a curious and eccentric creature who made a point of being personally rough and rude to everybody in the place from Wridsdale downwards. He now found himself wondering if Stumpy's solitary vigils had made him a little mad.

'Must be a one-sided conversation,' he said musingly.

'Would be if you were mixed up in it,' answered Stumpy. 'It takes a man of brains to talk to a machine—a man like him,' he added, jerking his head in the direction of Morrison's room. 'Ah, he's a headpiece on him, he has! Better than Wridsdale's.'

'Think so?'

'Umph!' grunted Stumpy.

'Well, I wish he'd get that confounded thing finished and rest his brains for a while, then,' yawned George. 'He'll wear 'em out working like that, all day and half the night.'

'You leave him a-be,' said the night-watchman. ''Tis his meat and drink and wife and child is that there thing what he's a-pottering at. Leave him a-be till such times as 'tis finished.'

'No other choice,' said George, with another yawn of increased size. 'You might as well try to wake the dead as get him out of that room until he wants to come.'

But every night, now at this hour, now at that, sometimes earlier, sometimes later, the noise of the key turning in the lock of Richard's room could be heard, harsh and startling in the silence of the empty workshop, and the inventor would come out, pale and worn, and after locking and double-locking his treasure house would go quietly home with his friend, usually in a dead silence which frightened honest George more than an earthquake would have done.

CHAPTER V

IN THE GUARDED ROOM

THE misshapen night-watchman's opinion as regards the relations between Morrison and his machine was of the essence of absolute truth. It was meat and drink, wife and child to him—the only thing of which he had any real cognisance. As it grew under his hands, the feverish desire to see it finished, perfected and proved, increased in fervour and intensity. If he could have had all his own way, Morrison would not have left his workshop until all was completed; but in spite of his absorption something impelled him to tear himself away every night and go home to Lucy. He had a dim, vague notion that he was giving her cause for uneasiness and anxiety, but the power of his brain was so fixed on the work he had in hand that the notion never got beyond the chaotic stage. It was just strong enough to take him home and that was all.

If either Lucy or George could have seen Morrison at work, their fears on his behalf would have been somewhat allayed. He entered the strictly-guarded room with the alacrity of a lover who steps into his mistress's chamber. The worn look which was so noticeable when his task no longer claimed him disappeared from his face when he set to work again. He toiled on all day, unconscious of hunger or fatigue or distress—it was only when he literally tore himself away from his labour that outraged nature refused to be further goaded. He was one of those men whose spiritual natures are much in advance—so far as strength is concerned—of their physical powers, and he had always been able to throw himself into the work of the moment with such thoroughness as to forget everything else—even the needs of his own weak body. Thus it was that he frequently worked on and on, utterly unconscious of the fact that the tired faculties which he was exercising were strained to snapping point, with the result that when he suddenly stopped the relaxation which followed acted like a sharp shock to the system. But of all this, of its why and wherefore, Morrison was

in no condition to think soberly. He only knew, in a dull, half-dazed way, that he was very tired—very—and very sleepy, when he was not working, and that he was wider awake, quicker of thought and action, more fertile in resource and invention when actually at work than he had ever been in his life.

Wridsdale, watching him closely from the first, saw the strain beginning to tell upon him sooner perhaps than either Lucy or George did. It surprised him to find that Morrison began working at the first beginnings of his machine with an absolutely feverish impatience, as though he were an artist who feared that his conception might take wing ere he could transfer it to canvas or embody it in marble. There was no fear of Morrison's conception taking wing—it was all down in accurate drawings, diagrams and calculations, and Wridsdale wondered that the man should behave as if he had but a month of life left to him. But when the preliminaries were over, and Morrison began the actual construction of his machine, Wridsdale experienced another sort of surprise in seeing the feverish impatience give way to an almost too-conscientious carefulness. It

seemed to him that Morrison was sparing no pains to insure the absolute success of his machine from the moment it should be set in motion. No detail, however trifling or insignificant, escaped his notice ; whatever was to be done was done in the most thorough fashion.

While Morrison laboured, Wridsdale used to sit in the room for hours watching him in dead silence. Nothing escaped his quick eye, and there was no need for him to ask, nor for Morrison to offer, any explanations. With the plans and diagrams spread out before him it was easy to follow the making of the machine. And as it grew, Wridsdale knew that it was going to be a success, that he was watching a process which must result in a great triumph of mechanical effort and contrivance. Perhaps no such sight had ever been seen in the world before as might have been seen any day in that somewhat small and stuffy room where the only light was artificial. There were two men there who spoke little at first and not at all later on, and one of them sat with folded arms and impassive face watching and noting and

storing things up in his memory, while the other worked eagerly and silently at bench or lathe, or at the machine which slowly grew into shape on the little platform in the centre of the floor.

At first, when Wridsdale went to the door of the guarded room Morrison used to let him in with some eagerness, and when he was safely inside explain to him what he was doing and how he was getting on. But as the days passed the master frequently found himself kept waiting outside the door until the man forgot his preoccupation sufficiently to allow him to comprehend that Wridsdale was seeking admittance. Wridsdale understood and said nothing. There came a time when he had to wait even longer, and when Morrison would admit him with some show of impatience, slam and lock the door upon him and turn back to his work without a word. Wridsdale said nothing as to that either. He knew what was taking place, and was not the man to let little rudenesses or discourtesies stand in the way. It was the first time in his life that he had seen a really great theoretical idea transformed into

a tangible, solid thing of iron and steel, and he felt sometimes as if he were surreptitiously assisting at a new creation.

When Wridsdale saw the first signs of physical exhaustion showing themselves all too plainly on Morrison's face, he grew anxious and uneasy. He made inquiries as to how long Morrison was working, and was still more uneasy when he found out that he was usually at the workshop by six or seven o'clock in the morning and remained there until midnight.

'Leastways,' said Stumpy Todd, of whom he made his first inquiries as to Morrison's self-imposed working hours, 'he's here as soon as anybody in the morning, and he's never gone before twelve at midnight and sometimes he's here later than that.'

Wridsdale shook his head.

'This will never do,' he said, half to himself. 'He'll never stand it—he'll kill himself.'

'Not till the thing's finished,' said Stumpy.

Wridsdale turned on the night-watchman like a flash.

'Till what thing's finished?' he asked angrily.

'How do I know?' retorted Stumpy. 'It might be a gun, or a spinning-jenny, or a carding-machine. I only said thing. Lots o' things a man can make, isn't there?'

Wridsdale scowled at him and went away to his private room. He often wondered—in company with a good many other people—why he tolerated Stumpy's brusque manners. He had once dismissed him in a fit of sudden temper, only to discover later on that Stumpy had utterly disregarded everything that was said, and had point-blank denied to the foreman that any order of dismissal had reached his ears. After that Stumpy became a fixture and doubly rude to everybody; but Wridsdale knew him for a faithful and devoted servant and humoured him.

After hearing Stumpy's evidence Wridsdale became more uneasy than ever. He began to be afraid that Morrison might break down ere the machine was finished. That must not happen, he said to himself, and he went straight off to the guarded room and sought admission. Morrison let him in and went back silently to his work. Wridsdale looked at him and thought he was growing morose.

'I say, Morrison,' he said, 'I think you're working too hard at this thing. What hours are you working?'

Morrison looked at him as if he scarcely comprehended the question. Wridsdale repeated it with emphasis.

'I—I don't quite know, Mr Wridsdale,' Morrison answered. 'About the usual time, I should think.'

'Your usual time isn't till midnight,' said Wridsdale, drily. 'And you're not usually here at six o'clock in the morning. This won't do—you'll knock yourself up.'

Morrison shook his head.

'I'm all right,' he said. 'I—I want to get it finished.'

'You're not all right,' said Wridsdale, looking at him narrowly. Another thought passed into his mind. 'What about your meals, Morrison? Are you getting them regularly?'

Morrison turned a puzzled look upon his tormentor.

'I suppose so,' he said. 'I—don't remember making any difference;' and he resumed the work on which he had been engaged when Wridsdale entered the room. In another

moment he had become utterly oblivious of Wridsdale's presence.

Wridsdale went out to some of his clerks and made inquiry as to Morrison's meal times. The result was what he had expected; there was general agreement that for the past week or so Morrison had worked continuously throughout the day, that was if whatever he was doing in the locked room kept him at work. He had certainly not followed his usual practice of going out to dinner at noon. It appeared that it had been his custom to lunch or dine at a little restaurant near the workshop, also patronised by some of Wridsdale's clerks, and that for some days his particular corner there had been empty.

The next day Wridsdale—who in the meantime had taken some medical advice on the matter—made provision for Morrison after the fashion narrated by George to Lucy. It was easy enough to do that, but it was not easy to make Morrison eat or drink. Wridsdale by pretext got him into his own private room and, having fastened the door, told him very plainly that he was behaving in a foolish fashion in not taking care of his health, and

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intimated that as he seemed disinclined to do so, he, Wridsdale, would take care of it for him. Thereupon he commanded him to eat and drink. Morrison looked annoyed, excused himself, and finally protested. Wridsdale heard him out, and then told him in so many words that unless he did as he was told he should not go back to the guarded room. Morrison gave way on the instant, and after that Wridsdale was his master in the matter of food. But when it came to the question of Morrison's working too many hours per diem Wridsdale was obliged to give way. Morrison begged to be allowed to work as he pleased—he grew almost eloquent in his appeal to Wridsdale to remember his promise that every facility should be given him. He was all right, he said, quite all right, and all he wanted was to be left alone to complete his work. It filled his mind; he could think of nothing else until it was done. And Wridsdale believed him fully and left him to work as he pleased.

The month which Morrison had spoken of as necessary for the making of his machine drew towards a close. When more than three

weeks of it had passed Wridsdale made another discovery that filled him with admiration for Morrison's power of sticking to his labour. Chancing to need something out of his office one Sunday he strolled down to the works during the afternoon and rang Stumpy Todd's bell. Stumpy opened the door and stared at him.

'I shall not stay a minute, Todd,' said Wridsdale, hurrying in. 'Keep the door open.'

He passed up the steps towards the counting-house and suddenly paused, arrested by a sound of hammering. He turned sharply on Todd.

'What's that?' he demanded.

'What's what?' said Stumpy.

'Confound your impudence!' snapped Wridsdale. 'You know what I mean well enough. That noise—somebody's at work.'

'Oh—that?' said Stumpy. 'That? That's him, of course.'

'Him?'

'Morrison,' said Stumpy. 'Tinkering away as gay as a lark.'

Wridsdale took a step or two towards the guarded room: then paused and turned back.

'You don't mean to say he's working to-day?' he said.

'All days and every day—ever since he locked his self into that room,' answered Stumpy. 'Not to speak of nights.'

'What the devil did you let him in for?' demanded Wridsdale.

'Your orders,' said Stumpy. 'Leastways—he said so.'

Wridsdale got what he wanted from his office and went away. He had taken but a few steps along the street when a voice called, 'Hi!' and he turned to see Stumpy's stolid face regarding him from the door.

'Well—what is it?' he snapped.

'Him?' said Stumpy, jerking his head over his shoulder. 'Am I to let him in next Sunday? What?'

Wridsdale turned away and hurried down the street with a muttered oath. As he walked homeward his mind occupied itself in thinking of the future of the machine which was now so nearly completed. Ever since Morrison had first laid his papers before him he had thought of little else. He knew what the successful making of the machine meant. He knew that

ere long a certain trade would be revolutionised and labour cheapened, and that the work then being done by half a score of men would be done, and done better and more expeditiously, by the machine at which its inventor was even then toiling.

And the machine was Morrison's—not his.

As he entered his house Wridsdale felt that the vagaries of fate are too foolish. The machine should have been of his invention, not of Morrison's, for then the wealth which it would bring would have come to him—to him in whose hands it would have been used to such great advantage. He knew what to do with wealth—what could Morrison do with it? He would never be anything but a genius of mechanical invention all his life; if wealth came to him—as it was coming—he would fritter it away in experiments, as many another brilliant inventor had done before him.

As Wridsdale sat in his study that evening he thought of these matters over and over again. He had never married, and he had few friends, and he often spent lonely evenings which, as he sometimes bitterly reflected, might be spent in better fashion if he were a man of

better position, a man of power and influence. The wealth that would accrue from Morrison's machine would make him such a man—if only it were in his grasp. But—

'I ought to have at least a half share,' he said to himself for the thousandth time. 'He's learnt all he knows from me; he's worked the notion out in my time; he's made the machine in my time; he's used my materials—the whole affair's almost as much mine as his. It's only just that I should have at least a half share. Who else would have given him the facilities that I have? Who else would have given him time, and experience, and material—for nothing? Why should I give it for nothing?'

So he thought and argued far into the night, and from thinking and arguing fell to plotting, and scheming, and contriving, his soul fired on some chance of profiting as fully as possible in the wealth which the machine would bring. And while he was thus employed Morrison was bringing his labours towards their end, and George was sitting with Stumpy, waiting for the sound of the unlocked door, and Lucy was alone in the little house, anxiously listening for the coming of brother and lover.

CHAPTER VI

THE MACHINE IS MADE

ON the morning of the twenty-ninth day from the time Morrison had begun work in the guarded room, Wridsdale sat alone in his private office, his mind still harping on the subject which had filled it almost continuously for the past month. The covetousness which was inherent in him had grown with feeding, and from a feeling at first closely akin to simple envy had developed into something like a resolute determination to share in the wealth created by another man's brains. That determination once arrived at, the only thing which remained was to consider the ways and means of carrying it out. Of those ways and means Wridsdale was now thinking—thinking steadily and keenly with a firmly-concentrated mind. He was going to cheat Morrison of, at anyrate, a portion of the just fruits of his labour; on that point his mind was made up. He had

utterly dismissed all mental processes which concerned the rights and wrongs of the action—all he now cared about was the formulating of a successful plan of campaign which would result in victory to himself.

As he sat wrapped in thought a tap came at his door. As the door opened, he looked up and saw Morrison enter. Wridsdale knew from a first glance at the inventor's face that the end of his labours was reached. There was a curious look of achievement in Morrison's face, and something of the worn appearance which it had lately presented had gone from it. But Wridsdale noticed—and remembered it afterwards—that the strange light in the deep-set eyes had grown fiercer and more intensified in its brilliance.

Wridsdale sprang from his chair with a half-uttered question.

'Is it—?' he began, and looked the rest.

Morrison nodded his head carelessly, as though the thing he had completed were some ordinary implement.

'Yes,' he said, 'it's finished, Mr Wridsdale. I've just put the last touches to it.' He walked over to a calendar which hung above the mantel-

piece and followed its lines with his finger. 'I've been at it twenty-nine days,' he remarked, turning away with an air of indifference.

'I congratulate you,' said Wridsdale. He half held out his hand, then drew it back, remembering what he had in his mind. 'I congratulate you. You've worked hard — too hard, I'm afraid, Morrison. Well, I'd like to see the machine now.'

'No,' said Morrison, suddenly, 'not to-day. I want your permission to make the necessary power-communication. I'll do it myself; it's quite an easy thing—only requires a shafting made through to the engine-house—my room's above that, you know—and then to-morrow I'll start it, and you shall see it working. Then—then, Mr Wridsdale, you'll see it's really finished.'

'Very good,' said Wridsdale. He saw it was useless to insist or to argue with Morrison in his present excited state. 'Do all that you want,' he added. 'It will be easy, as you say, to get the necessary power. Here,' he said, stopping Morrison as he was leaving the room, 'come back, Morrison, and we'll drink the machine's success!'

But Morrison shook his head, and mutter-

ing, 'To-morrow! to-morrow!' left the room. The clerks stared at him as he passed through the counting-house, and George slipped off his stool and followed him into the workshop.

'Richard,' he said, 'is it finished?'

Morrison looked up moodily, and nodded his head.

'It's finished,' he repeated.

'Then go home and get to sleep,' urged George.

'I'll go home early to-night,' said Morrison. 'I've a little to do yet. Yes, I'll go home with you, George, at six, and sleep. I've—I've a bit of a pain just there,' he added, tapping his forehead. 'It'll be all right when I've had a good sleep.'

Then he turned away, and George went back to his clerical duties, somewhat disturbed. He did not like the abnormally quiet look on Morrison's face, nor the fact of the pain in his forehead. But there was one cause of thankfulness—the machine was made. When noon came he hurried across the town to the little suburban street and told the news to Lucy, promising to bring Morrison home early that evening for the first time for weeks.

During the rest of that day Morrison was

busily engaged in making the necessary arrangements for the supply of steam-power to his machine. As he worked he thought of the moment when he should connect the old giant with the new-born child of his brain, and hear the music which the latter would make as it uttered its first cry. Somehow the thought did not give him as much pleasure as it used to give. That curious pain in his forehead prevented him from feeling very much at all. It was a dull, numbing pain, and it seemed to spread and spread. But Morrison did not allow it to interfere with his work. He toiled on without break throughout the afternoon, and at last all that he had wished to do was done. He looked wistfully around the room which had seen his labours and would see his triumph on the morrow. The machine stood in the middle of the room, carefully wrapped in sheeting. Through the shafting which Morrison had made through the floor came the belt which would connect steam-power with the machine. It lay carelessly coiled and inert at the foot of the sheeted machine. To-morrow, in Wridsdale's presence, he would slip it on to the wheel above it,

touch a lever, and the first great offspring of his brain would begin its labours.

But his brain was growing tired. That dull pain in his forehead grew duller and duller, and it seemed to him that he was already asleep. He locked the door of the guarded room and made his way through the workshops to the counting-house door. It was not yet six o'clock, but when George caught sight of him he put his work away and made ready to depart. They went out into the street, arm-in-arm, and set out homeward in silence.

Wridsdale remained in his office that evening until the workmen had left the sheds and the clerks had gone away from the counting-house. There was then no one left in the place but himself and Stumpy Todd, who came on duty at six o'clock. Until seven o'clock Wridsdale sat at his desk, thinking and scheming. As the clock struck he stirred into activity. He wrote a few words on a sheet of paper, enclosed and secured the latter in an envelope, and rang the night watchman's bell. In a few minutes Todd came limping through the counting-house and looked in at the open door of the private office.

'Ring?' he inquired.

'Yes,' said Wridsdale. 'You know where my house is, Todd?'

'No. 12 Albert Park North,' replied Stumpy, eyeing the note which Wridsdale held in his hand with a look of disfavour and suspicion.

'Right. I want you to take this note there and wait for an answer. You can get a tram-car from the square.'

'There's no one in the place but me, you know,' said Todd. 'It's against orders—your orders—for it to be left.'

'All right, Todd. I shall be here until you return. There's the note, and off you go.'

Stumpy picked up the note as if it had been a red-hot coin, and made great show of bestowing it safely within the breast-pocket of his ancient coat. Then he pulled his cap firmly over his ears, and having looked at Wridsdale pretty much as a dog looks at its master when made to obey, he turned away towards the main entrance. Wridsdale followed him.

'Don't forget to ring the bell when you return, Todd,' he said.

'Couldn't get in without, could I?' growled

Stumpy. 'I'll ring. Mind the fires don't go down while I'm out.'

Wridsdale locked the door on Stumpy's retreating figure, and then walked slowly back towards the counting-house. Ere he reached it he turned off through the workshop to the guarded room. He had seen Morrison go away with George Broadclough, and he knew that there was now nothing to prevent him from inspecting the finished machine, or from doing something which he had meant, if chance offered, to do all day. He produced from his pocket the key which opened the safety lock, and in another moment stood within the room. He groped in the darkness for the button which turned on the electric light ; his finger touched it, and the room was suddenly filled with radiance.

Wridsdale shut and locked the door from pure habit, and then turned and gazed at the sheeted machine. It seemed almost like sacrilege to draw the sheeting aside and look on the thing in all its virgin proportions. But that was sentiment, and for sentimental ideas he had no time. He drew the wrappings away and revealed the machine, and stood gazing at it with eyes that criticised and

admired. He knew as he looked at it that it was the work of a greater man than he could ever hope to be ; he felt that with all his training and all his experience he could never have conceived a machine like that, nor have fashioned it so perfectly and with such delicacy of finish.

Wridsdale drew a long breath. He put out his hand and touched the gleaming metal here and there. He had studied the plans and diagrams so carefully, and had watched Morrison's operations so narrowly, that he knew the use and properties of every delicate bit of machinery. He had no doubt at all about the success of the first experiment, and he meant to make it himself—now. The machine should be wedded to its motive power at his hands.

Wridsdale unlocked the door and went downstairs to the engine-house. The great engine which supplied the power for his workshops lay like a giant asleep and snoring—a touch of his fingers and it woke into lazy stretchings that quickened speedily into fierce, resistless life. The mighty crank began its *one—two—three—four, one—two—three—four, one—two—three—four* in a cadence that increased in speed at every movement, and the

silent, gloomy sheds were suddenly alive with the sibilant hiss of steam. Wridsdale went back to the virgin machine. And this time he left the door open.

The belting lay curled like a hangman's noose on the floor at the foot of the machine. He gathered it up till it drew taut against the shafting which ran the length of the shed below, and at the same instant he slipped it on to the wheel of the machine and pulled a lever. For the hundredth part of a second he held his breath, then it came with a great sigh as the machine, with a sudden shivering throughout its frame, broke into sound and began the marvellous evolutions at which the world was soon to wonder. The sweat suddenly burst out in great beads upon Wridsdale's forehead; he knew that his were the first eyes to see the first motions of this wonderful invention, and he knew too that he was taking a mean advantage of the inventor.

But of the latter knowledge Wridsdale recked little. His agitation came from the pure joy and delight of the mechanic in watching the perfect motion of the machine before him. He walked round and round the

machine, listening to its pulsations, its whirrings, its clickings and beatings, and he said to himself that it was a thing of perfection. Finally he sat down on the one chair which the room contained, and, folding his arms, gave himself up to the pure joy of watching the thing run. And the great engine below throbbed and sang and the wheels whirred and the machine clanked and clattered, and the clanking and clattering were to Wridsdale as music. He said to himself, as he sat there, that he would have given the world to invent a thing like that, and in his heart he cursed Morrison because it had been his luck to do what he himself had never believed it possible to do. And, as he looked, the desire to claim some share in the machine grew fiercer and stronger, and he knew that for good or evil he must fight for his own hand and will in the matter.

While Wridsdale was thus occupied, Stumpy Todd was proceeding very unwillingly and at an exceeding slow pace in the direction of the square. Never in the best of humours, he was now put thoroughly out of temper by being sent on his present errand. He never remembered doing such a thing before. It

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was true that Wridsdale sometimes sent him across to the inn for a chop, or to the neighbouring post-office with a late letter, but to send him to the other side of the town was an unheard-of indignity. Why hadn't Wridsdale sent him off to the North Pole at once? It was beyond Stumpy's powers to remember when he had last travelled so far as he must needs do that night. His ordinary daily amount of travelling, year in and year out, consisted of a short journey of twenty yards from his lodgings to the works and back again, with various trotings and stumpings up and down the sheds thrown in. It was more than flesh and blood could bear to be packed off at a moment's notice to the other side of Blackford.

Ere he reached the top of the street leading from the works to the square, Stumpy Todd grew not merely ill-tempered but suspicious. What did Wridsdale send him out for? He could have got a messenger-boy in two minutes—he usually did employ messenger-boys. Why didn't he on this occasion—ah! why didn't he?

It suddenly flashed upon Stumpy that Wridsdale was anxious to secure his absence for

a while in order to carry out some project of his own. On the top of this sudden illumination come another ; Wridsdale was up to something in that room where young Morrison had worked almost day and night for the past month.

Stumpy Todd deliberately paused in his progress towards the square. He took off his cap and scratched his head for a full minute . . . and then with equal deliberation turned and went back by the way he had come. During the head-scratching process he had considered all the facts of the case, and had decided that it was his duty as night-watchman at Wridsdale's to keep himself fully acquainted with whatever happened there between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. No matter that Wridsdale himself had caused his absence. Wridsdale had once impressed upon him the absolute necessity of sticking to his post, and he would follow the behests of the Wridsdale of that day rather than the Wridsdale of this.

It is scarcely necessary to say that, with his long and intimate acquaintance with the place, Stumpy Todd know how to enter Wridsdale's Machine Works without going in

by the front door. Within a few minutes of his turning back he stood in the deepest shadows of the engine-house listening with all his ears. He saw the great engine at work, he heard the whirring of the great driving-wheel, and above it he caught a sound which he knew had never been heard in that place before. When he heard that, Stumpy Todd divested himself of his boots. Then, keeping close to walls, and in shadows, he went out into the workshop and by devious ways and staircases until he drew near to the guarded room. He saw that the door was open and the light streaming forth. And from a very dark corner opposite the open door Stumpy Todd saw the new machine working and watched Wridsdale's face as the latter sat gloating over it.

After a while Stumpy Todd retired by the way he had come, and presently set out on his mission for the second time. It was nearly ten o'clock when he came back to the works, but Wridsdale asked him no questions as to his dilatoriness. And for once in his life Stumpy felt no desire to engage in recriminatory conversation.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST STRAW

IN anticipation of Morrison's early home-coming that evening, Lucy had taken special pains to make all things pleasant for him. The little house was lighted as if for a festival; a special feast was cooking at the kitchen fire, and Lucy herself was gaily apparelled and in the best of spirits. It seemed to George Broadclough, as he followed Morrison out of the spring twilight into the cheery parlour where Lucy awaited them, that he had never seen her look so attractive or so womanly as she did that night. For once, however, Lucy seemed to have no eyes for her lover. All her attention was given to Richard, whom she fussed after in a motherly fashion that made George laugh. Richard accepted his sister's attentions meekly, doing all that he was bidden to do, and generally comporting himself after the fashion

of an obedient child. While he was changing his clothes Lucy took the opportunity of examining George.

'It's really finished, George?' she asked anxiously.

'So he says,' answered George. 'He hasn't said much, coming home. It's my opinion he ought to go to bed pretty early, Lucy, and get a jolly good night's sleep. He complains of a dull sort of pain in his forehead, just there, and he's rather quieter than I like to see him. Look here—after we've had supper I'll sit with him a bit and then I'll go home, and you get him off to bed; that's the place for him, I'm certain.'

Lucy kissed him in reward for the suggestion. It was one of George's greatest charms in her eyes that he was always ready to give sound advice to anybody—she was sure that in this case the advice was good and should be acted upon.

Morrison sat down to table with his sister and George with something like a gleam of his usual self. He insisted that the feast had been prepared because George was present, and asked him if the cook of famous memory had offered

him a repast of anything like the gorgeous character which Lucy was giving them. He ate with some appetite and now and then with a show of hunger, and Lucy congratulated herself on his altered looks. But George, more keenly observant, did not like the occasional silences into which Morrison fell, nor the look in his eyes during these silences. It seemed to him that these things and the way in which from time to time his brows gathered together in an expression of weariness were anything but favourable symptoms of the state of Morrison's nerves.

It was not until they had finished their meal, and Lucy was occupied in domestic duties in the kitchen, that any reference was made to the machine. Lucy had purposely omitted asking any question of her brother, and George had observed a similar reticence. It was Morrison himself who broached the subject at last.

'I told you my machine was finished, George?' he said as he and George faced each other across the hearth.

'Yes,' answered George. 'You did.'

'I was twenty-nine days at it,' said Morrison.

'I knew it could be done within a month. Well, it's done.'

'It's a success, too, I hope?' said George.

'It's perfect. I don't think an improvement could be made in it. Wridsdale doesn't think so either. We're going to try it to-morrow, and to-morrow night I'll tell you all about it, what it is and everything.'

'I suppose it's your machine entirely, Richard?' said George, after a while. 'I mean Wridsdale's no part in it?'

'Wridsdale? No! It's all mine—my own invention—every bit of it,' said Morrison, with some show of excitement. 'Why, Wridsdale couldn't invent a machine like that! He's confessed it to me over and over again as he's watched me at work, and he said so when he first saw the plans. Wridsdale! No, indeed!'

'I suppose he knows exactly what the machine is and how it's built, and all that?' asked George.

'Yes, he's seen everything. Why not?'

George hesitated as to what he wanted to say. He puffed vigorously at his pipe for a while.

'Well—I—it struck me—of course I'm a suspicious beggar, you know, Richard, but it struck me that as the two of you had been chained up together in that room so long, you know,' said George, blundering along as he best could, 'he might say, you know, that it was a joint production, or something like that, eh?'

Then he wished he had bitten his tongue out rather than have spoken. A new look came into Morrison's face—a look which George remembered with many bitter self-reproaches afterwards—'the sort of look, you know,' he said in trying to describe it, 'that you'd think a young mother would have if you told her somebody had stolen her baby.' And he half-started from his seat as if he meant to rush off to the works there and then and seize his machine. But he sank back and looked at his friend reproachfully.

'He couldn't do that!' he said. 'He knows it's all mine. He couldn't lay claim to a cog-wheel in it. Oh, I can trust Wridsdale—he wouldn't do that, George.'

'Well, I thought I'd just mention it, old chap,' said George. 'One hears of such a lot of

brain-picking nowadays. Of course, now that the thing is finished, you'll get all the necessary protection, and that sort of thing, I suppose?'

'Yes,' answered Morrison. He suddenly lay back on the sofa, and clasped his hands over his eyes and forehead—a favourite attitude of his, as George knew well, when he was going to think some new idea out. He kept silence and George felt no inclination to break it. So they remained for some time, Morrison racking his already wearied-out brain in new and perturbing thought, and George smoking steadily in full enjoyment of his tobacco. Then Lucy came back, free of her household apron and its attendant cares, and looked at them questioningly. Her face grew anxious as she saw her brother's attitude.

'Richard!' she said, laying her hand on his arm. 'Give up! I know what that means; you're thinking something out! You're not to think any more just yet. Come!'

Morrison unclasped his hands and sat up. His forehead was a mass of corded veins and knots; his eyes burnt; the lines about his mouth were tense and harsh. He looked from

Lucy to George with a somewhat vacant expression.

'All right, Lucy,' he said. 'I was just thinking—something I'd not thought of. I—I think I shall go to bed.'

'Best thing you can do, old chap!' said George. 'A jolly good night's sleep'll make you feel like a prize-fighter in the morning. Sleep's the thing.'

'Yes,' said Morrison, half-stupidly. 'I'll—I'll go to bed.'

He went out of the room forthwith, and they heard him climbing the stairs slowly and wearily. Lucy looked at George with troubled eyes.

'Is he going to be ill, George?' she said.

'Looks like it,' answered George. 'My word, little woman, I'm glad I'm not one of the brain-y sort like poor Dick! It must be dreadful to go through all that sort of thing. But I don't wonder he feels it. Fancy working night and day as he's done for the past month! Well, I'm glad I'm one of the stupid.'

'You've been a very good old stupid and a very great comfort,' said Lucy, nestling into his arms. 'There! But, oh, George, what

shall we do about Richard? He looks as if he were going to be very ill.'

'I daresay he'll be all right in a day or two,' said George. 'He's been in a terribly overwrought condition for this past month, you know. I'll tell you what, Lucy—take him away.'

Lucy shook her head.

'That's no good,' she said. 'If he ever goes with me anywhere he spends all his time in visiting mills and factories and workshops and in examining anything in the way of machinery that he comes across. Don't you remember that when we all three went to Beachstowe he spent all the week at that pumping-station, and never saw the sea at all?'

'It did him good, anyhow,' said George. 'It was something new. What he wants now is something new—his brain's got running too much on one thing.'

'Well, I hope he'll have a long night's sleep,' said Lucy. 'I'm glad he's gone to bed so early.'

But Morrison had not gone to bed. While Lucy and George talked of him downstairs the

inventor was lying on a sofa in his bedroom in the attitude from which his sister had aroused him when she entered the parlour. He lay there with his hands pressed over eyes and forehead, thinking . . . thinking . . . thinking. The chance words which George had dropped had set Morrison off in a new train of thought. He had made light of George's suggestion, but it had fixed itself in his mind for all that. His brain, weak and weary with its prolonged exertion, was only too ready to receive a new impression, and having received it, to brood upon it. And so Morrison lay there, motionless of body, but alive with strenuous thought.

Supposing that Wridsdale should play him false? There was nothing to prevent him doing so as things stood. He had shown Wridsdale the plans with every confidence, never thinking of all the legal jargon of provisional protection and all the rest of it. Wridsdale had learnt and known every secret of the machine. Supposing he claimed some credit in its invention? There was brain-picking, as George had said . . . Morrison had heard of it . . . knew of it . . .

He had thought all this within a minute after

George had spoken. It passed through his mind like a flash of white light. Within the next minute another thought had flashed through—up to then Wridsdale knew everything: between then and the morning something must be added to the machine of which Wridsdale should know nothing. Added? The machine was perfect! But something . . . something . . .

This was what Morrison was grappling with as he lay there alone in the darkness. He heard the clock downstairs strike nine, and ten, and then the front door closed very gently, and he knew that George had said good-night to his sweetheart and was going home; he heard Lucy come softly up the stairs and pause a moment outside his door and go as softly away, and still he lay there motionless, with burning eyes and throbbing brain, and hands that pressed tighter and tighter around his forehead as if they would compel the thought that laboured within.

It was near midnight when Morrison suddenly sprang to his feet. He felt for the candle, which he had extinguished on entering his room, and found and lighted it. Within

another moment he was outside his room and creeping softly down the stairs. His footfall made scarce a sound, but ere he had reached the stair-foot Lucy's door was open and she was following him.

'Richard!' she cried. 'What is it? Where are you going?'

Morrison's voice was as calm and unemotional as it had ever been in all his life as he turned to face her.

'It's nothing, Lucy,' he answered soothingly. 'Don't be alarmed, dear. I've forgotten something—something that I ought to have done—and I must go back to the works and do it. I'll come back as soon as it's done, and go to bed for the whole of to-morrow—there!'

She looked at him in some doubt; her face was still afraid and her eyes were troubled.

'Oh!' she said, 'I wish you wouldn't, Richard. Wouldn't it do in the morning?'

'No,' he said. 'I must go. I'll be back to breakfast. Don't be afraid, Lucy.'

He was half-way to the door by that time, putting on his hat and coat as he went. He turned and gave her a smiling nod, then the door opened and shut again, and he was

gone. Lucy went back to bed, anxious and doubtful. She was not the sort of girl who whimpers, but she felt very like crying as she heard the sound of Richard's hurrying footsteps grow fainter and fainter along the street. And for the rest of that night she lay awake, full of thought.

Stumpy Todd was full of thought, too, that night. He sat in his favourite corner of the engine-house, his well-blackened pipe in full blast, his bottle of refreshment at hand, and his lantern on the table, and thought hard and long. His thoughts were many. Wridsdale had sent him on a fool's errand. Wridsdale wanted him out of the way. He had been one too many for Wridsdale. He had seen the new machine. What on earth was that machine? Why did Wridsdale sit grinning at it as if he were a love-struck lad gazing at his lass's picture? Why—

The bell, ringing with startling abruptness in close proximity to Stumpy's ear, put a sudden end to his cogitations, and jerked him to his feet with an alacrity that was amazing to himself. He stared at it for a moment as if in doubt of its behaviour; then he picked up

his lantern and set out for the door. Ere he reached it, the bell rang again, peremptorily.

'Hello! hello! hello!' said Stumpy, coming up to the door. 'Who's that?'

'Morrison!' said a voice outside.

Stumpy sighed deeply. 'S'pose I'll have to,' he said, as he unfastened bars and bolts. 'Nice time o' night to—' he began, as the door flew open and Morrison rushed in. But the inventor paid no heed. His figure flitted through the workshop and up the stair, and Stumpy heard the door of the locked room open and shut again. He secured the entrance and went back to his corner in the engine-house.

'This,' said Stumpy, as he re-lit his pipe, 'this is what they call a corker. I've no idea o' what a corker is, but this is one. What that blessed machine is, and why Wridsdale and Morrison's both going mad over it, the Lord only knows!'

At three o'clock Stumpy, in accordance with his usual routine, took his lantern and went round the establishment. He paused at the door of Morrison's room and listened. He heard the inventor at work—hammering and

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chipping and filing—he heard the click of metal and the ring of steel, and he went away shaking his head.

At a quarter to six in the morning Morrison flashed into the engine-house like a devastating angel—his face ablaze with excitement, his black hair tumbling about his eyes and ears. He gave a rapid glance at the engine, seized the lever and set the great thing to work, and, ere Stumpy could say a word, was gone again. Stumpy fell back in his seat motionless. Above and around him rose and surged the whirring of wheels.

The sight of the clock handles pointing to the hour of six roused him out of his astonishment. He hurried across the shed and threw open the doors to the group of yawning men who waited outside, or were leisurely approaching. The engineman was one of the first to cross the threshold; his quick ear caught the sobbings and complainings of his pet. He seized Stumpy by the shoulder.

‘Who the blazes set my engine going?’ he shouted.

Stumpy jerked his head towards the stairs.

‘Him!’ he said. ‘Him! Morrison.’