

***LUIS
SENARENS***



***FRANK
READE JR.
AND HIS
ENGINE
OF THE CLOUDS***

Luis Senarens

Frank Reade Jr. and His Engine of the Clouds

Or, Chased Around the World in the Sky

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CHAPTER I. SHOT FOR MONEY.

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It was a bitterly cold night in March.

The bleak, gloomy streets of Chicago were almost deserted.

A poor little boy in rags was slinking along an aristocratic avenue, shivering with the cold and looking very wretched.

His pallid, emaciated face showed poverty and privation, an air of utter misery surrounded him, and he had a mournful look in his sunken eyes.

Nobody noticed poor Joe Crosby but the police.

He was then only one of the many waifs of the great city.

Tom Reynard, the detective, had seen him stealing along like a thief, and the zealous officer became so suspicious of the boy's actions that he began to follow him.

Perhaps he was justified in doing this, for the hoodlums of Chicago were a pretty bad set of rowdies, as a rule.

The detective was a middle aged, sharp, shrewd fellow, of medium size, clad in a black suit and derby hat, his bony face clean shaven, his keen blue eyes snapping with fire, and his reputation for ability the very finest.

He kept the skulking boy well in view and was a little bit startled to see him mount the stoop of a very handsome brown stone house, through the parlor windows of which, partly open at the top, there gleamed a dull light.

Instead of the poor little wretch making an attempt to break into the house as the detective expected, he boldly rang the bell.

A servant answered the summons, and, seeing the boy, she cried:

“What! Joe Crosby—you back home again?”

“Yes, Nora,” the boy replied, in firm tones, “and I am going to stay, too. My stepfather, Martin Murdock, is a wicked man. He lured me to a wretched tenement in West Randolph street, where an Italian villain has been keeping me a prisoner. But after a month of captivity I escaped from there to-night, and now I have come back to make Martin Murdock tell me why he did this?”

“Oh, the rascal!” indignantly cried the girl. “He told us that he sent you off to boarding-school. Come in, Joe, come in.”

“Is my stepfather in the house?”

“Yes; you will find him in the front parlor.”

The boy entered the mansion and disappeared from the detective’s view.

Reynard vented a whistle expressive of intense astonishment.

“Holy smoke!” he muttered. “Here’s a daisy game! Never thought I was going to drop onto a family affair of this kind. Wonder if I could hear what goes on in the parlor if I get up on the stoop?”

He saw that the parlor windows were partly open at the top, and mounting the stairs he crouched in the doorway.

Joe had gone into the parlor.

A well-built man, in stylish clothing, stood in the room.

It was Martin Murdock.

He was apparently about forty years of age and wore a black mustache, had dark hair and black eyes, an aquiline

nose, and upon his left cheek a V-shaped, livid scar.

A cry of astonishment escaped his lips when he saw the boy.

“Free!” he gasped. “How did you get away, you whelp?”

“That is my business,” the boy replied, angrily. “You must explain why you had me imprisoned in that vile den.”

“Oh, I must, eh?” sneered the man, with a nasty leer.

“I have thought it over,” said Joe, sharply. “You was a poor man when you married my mother. When she died I know that she left me a large fortune, for I heard the lawyer read her will. You was made my guardian until I come of age, in five years. Now there was one point in the will that would make you wish to see me dead. That was the clause which said you would inherit all my money if I were to die before I am twenty-one. Are you trying to put me out of the way so you can get that money, Martin Murdock?”

He looked the man squarely in the eyes as he asked this question.

Murdock quailed before his victim’s reproachful burning glance for Joe had correctly surmised the dark plot he had in view.

His nervousness only lasted a moment for he quickly recovered.

“Fool!” he hissed, getting enraged at the thought that his wicked scheme was suspected. “How dare you hint that I’d do such a thing?”

“Because I know you are a villain.”

“What!” roared Murdock, furiously. “You insult me. I’ll pound the life out of you, you infernal young scoundrel!”

And he sprang at the boy and dealt him a savage blow that knocked him over upon the floor, rushed up to him and began to kick him about the head.

Weak from past privations, and unable to defend himself, poor Joe groaned in a heart-rending manner, and cried, piteously, as the hot tears ran down his pale, thin cheeks:

“Oh, don’t—don’t, Mr. Murdock!”

“I’ll kill you!” yelled the brute.

“For pity’s sake! Oh, the pain! Stop—I can’t stand it!”

Just then the servant rushed in.

“Shame!” she cried, indignantly.

“Get out of here!” roared Murdock. “I’ll discharge you!”

“If you beat poor Joe any more I’ll have you arrested!”

This threat caused the broker to say, hastily:

“He provoked me to it. I don’t intend to hit him again.”

Satisfied with this assurance, the girl went out.

Poor Joe, cut, bleeding and black-and-blue, crept toward the door.

The man glared at him a moment and then hissed:

“Get up, there! Get up, I say! I’ll have a final settlement with you! Put on your hat. It is eight o’clock now. The lawyer who has charge of your money has gone home. He lives out of town. You come with me to his house. You’ll get your money. Then you can clear out of here and never trouble me again.”

“Gladly!” exclaimed Joe, in eager tones.

He knew that with plenty of money he could easily get along in the world and be under no obligations to this fiend.

Murdock scowled at him and prepared to go out.

Hearing them coming the detective left the stoop and got behind an adjacent tree where he was unseen.

He had scarcely concealed himself when he saw Martin Murdock come out with Joe, hail a passing cab, get in and ride away.

The detective had overheard all they said in the parlor, and with his suspicions of the broker aroused, he pursued the cab, resolved to see the termination of the affair.

Murdock did not utter a word to the boy, but kept watching him and deeply thinking over a dark scheme he had in view.

The boy feared this man, but he was so eager to have a final settlement with him that he did not hesitate to go with him.

Reaching the railroad depot they embarked on a train.

"I'll take him to an unfrequented place and put an end to him!" thought Murdock, grimly. "He stands in my way to nearly a million. The stakes are enormous. It is worth the risk. I'm bound to have the money."

Unluckily for him, the detective was on the same train.

They were whirled away.

Several hours passed by, when the end of the road was reached.

"Readestown! All out! Last stop!" called the conductor.

Murdock and the boy were the only ones in that car, and they arose, alighted and strode away.

Tom Reynard pursued them.

The place was a noted little city in which dwelt a celebrated young inventor named Frank Reade, Jr.

Skirting the suburbs of the city, Murdock led his victim toward a magnificent big mansion in which dwelt the inventor alluded to.

In the extensive grounds surrounding the house were a number of immense workshops, in which the inventor constructed his marvelous contrivances.

"There's where the lawyer lives," Murdock said to the boy, as he pointed at the mansion, although he had never been in Readestown before.

This information allayed any suspicions the poor boy might have had, and as the surroundings were isolated, the place seemed to favor the murderous design the man had in view.

They strode toward the mansion and paused at the gate.

"You wait here for me," said Murdock. "I'll go in and see if the lawyer is home. I'll call you in if I find him."

"All right," the boy replied, in low, sad tones.

He leaned against the gate post with an oppressive feeling at heart and the gloomiest forebodings in his mind.

It almost seemed as if he had a subtle premonition of his fate.

Murdock entered the grounds and stole away in the shrubbery.

He came to a pause and listened intently, then keenly peered around without hearing or seeing anybody.

The wretch was intensely excited and as pale as death, while upon his brow there stood great beads of perspiration.

He fully realized what he was going to do.

There was not an extenuating thing to excuse him.

From where he crouched he could plainly see the boy.

He drew a revolver from his hip-pocket, his hand shaking as if palsied, and deliberately aimed at the poor boy.

Bang!

“Oh, God, I’m shot!” shrieked Joe.

Murdock rushed to his victim.

Poor little Joe fell to the ground.

The assassin thrust the pistol in his stiffening fingers.

He designed to lend the crime an appearance of suicide.

But Tom Reynard had seen the whole deed, and came rushing up to the villain and his victim, too late to stop the crime or be of any service.

“You murderer!” cried the detective.

“I’m caught!” hoarsely muttered Murdock.

He struck the detective with the pistol, knocked him senseless, and hearing footsteps approaching he rushed away.

Down from the house rushed Frank Reade, Jr., alarmed by the pistol shot, and seeing the detective was stunned he knelt down beside the boy.

Poor Joe was dead, to all appearances.

CHAPTER II.

THE ENGINE OF THE CLOUDS.

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Frank Reade, Jr., was a dashing young man of distinguished appearance, attired in fashionable clothing.

He was noted for his wonderful skill at inventing electrical and mechanical wonders of various kinds.

In this work he was ably assisted by a diminutive negro, named Pomp, and a rollicking, red-headed Irishman, called Barney O'Shea, who invariably were his traveling companions on the trips he made with his inventions.

Judging that the boy was beyond all recovery, and deeming it wisest to pay first attention to the living, Frank lifted the detective up and carried him into the house.

He met the coon and the Celt running toward him.

"Gorramighty!" panted Pomp. "Wha' de trouble, Marsa Frank?"

"I found this senseless man and a dead boy at the gate just now!"

"Be heavens, it's a bloody murdher, then!" exclaimed Barney.

"So it seems. Help me in with this fellow till we revive him."

They carried Reynard into the sitting-room, laid him down, and seeing his badge, discovered that he was a detective.

Restoratives were applied and he began to revive, upon observing which Frank went out to get the dead boy.

When he reached the gate, to his amazement he found that the body of little Joe Crosby had mysteriously disappeared.

Frank hunted all over, but failed to find it.

Completely at a loss to account for the mysterious disappearance, he returned to the house and told his friends about it.

Reynard had recovered.

Sitting on the sofa, he heard that the body was gone.

Then he told Frank and his friends what had occurred.

As soon as they heard the story they realized that a brutal crime had been perpetrated by an avaricious, unscrupulous rascal, who ought to be punished for his sin.

"I'd better apprise the local authorities of the deed and the strange loss of the body," said Frank, briskly. "In the meantime, Mr. Reynard, you had better try to find Martin Murdock."

"Holy smoke! Here's a daisy game!" the detective replied. "Your head's level, Mr. Reade. I'm off. You'll hear from me again!"

And away he went.

Frank followed him out.

He went to inform the police.

It was then nearly eleven o'clock.

Barney and Pomp had been in the workshop putting the finishing touches on a new flying machine Frank invented.

Everything was completed, but in their hurried exit they had left the electric arc lights lit in the shop.

When the inventor was gone the Irishman said to Pomp:

"D'yer moind yer wor afther lavin' ther loights lit in ther shop."

"Me?" said the coon. "G'way! 'Twarn't me, honey. Yo' done it."

"Go an' turrin thim out, naygur!"

"Won't do nuffin' ob de kine."

"Neither will I, me jewel."

"When Marse Frank come back he gwine ter git mad."

"Shure, you're a dead man, then, fer I'll blame it on you."

"An' I'se gwine ter say dat yo' done did it, chile."

"Ther two av us will get it in ther neck, then."

"Dunno 'bout dat, I'ish," said Pomp. "If I'se got ter go, yo' go, too!"

And so saying, he suddenly grabbed Barney by the nape of his neck and the slack of his pants, and rushed him into the yard.

Away they scudded across the garden toward the shops, the Irishman unable to stop himself, and Pomp grinning and chuckling over the advantage he had gained.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, as his legs flew along. "Begorry, I'll have yer scalp fer this, ye puckered-up hyaena!"

"Cl'ar de track!" roared the delighted coon. "Heah come de cyclone! Golly, what a roast, Barney!"

Propelling the Celt before him, he reached the half-closed door of the shop, slammed Barney against it with a bang, causing it to fly open, and barked his nose on the panel.

"Murdher!" raved the Celt. "Faix, me bugle is bushted!"

"Put on de brakes!" howled the coon.