The Errand Boy; or, How Phil Brent Won Success

Horatio Alger

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CHAPTER I. PHIL HAS A LITTLE DIFFICULTY.

PHIL BRENT was plodding through the snow in the direction of the house where he lived with his step−mother and her son, when a snow−ball, moist and hard, struck him just below his ear with stinging emphasis. The pain was considerable, and Phil's anger rose.

He turned suddenly, his eyes flashing fiercely, intent upon discovering who had committed this outrage, for he had no doubt that it was intentional.

He looked in all directions, but saw no one except a mild old gentleman in spectacles, who appeared to have some difficulty in making his way through the obstructed street.

Phil did not need to be told that it was not the old gentleman who had taken such an unwarrantable liberty with him. So he looked farther, but his ears gave him the first clew.

He heard a chuckling laugh, which seemed to proceed from behind the stone wall that ran along the roadside.

"I will see who it is," he decided, and plunging through the snow he surmounted the wall, in time to see a boy of about his own age running away across the fields as fast as the deep snow would allow.

"So it's you, Jonas!" he shouted wrathfully. "I thought it was some sneaking fellow like you."

Jonas Webb, his step−brother, his freckled face showing a degree of dismay, for he had not calculated on discovery, ran the faster, but while fear winged his steps, anger proved the more effectual spur, and Phil overtook him after a brief run, from the effects of which both boys panted.

"What made you throw that snow−ball?" demanded Phil angrily, as he seized Jonas by the collar and shook him.

"You let me alone!" said Jonas, struggling ineffectually in his grasp.

"Answer me! What made you throw that snow−ball?" demanded Phil, in a tone that showed he did not intend to be trifled with.

"Because I chose to," answered Jonas, his spite getting the better of his prudence. "Did it hurt you?" he continued, his eyes gleaming with malice.

"I should think it might. It was about as hard as a cannon−ball," returned Phil grimly. "Is that all you've got to say about it?"

"I did it in fun," said Jonas, beginning to see that he had need to be prudent.

"Very well! I don't like your idea of fun. Perhaps you won't like mine," said Phil, as he forcibly drew Jonas back till he lay upon the snow, and then kneeling by his side, rubbed his face briskly with snow.

"What are you doin'? Goin' to murder me?" shrieked Jonas, in anger and dismay.

"I am going to wash your face," said Phil, continuing the operation vigorously.

"I say, you quit that! I'll tell my mother," ejaculated Jonas, struggling furiously.

"If you do, tell her why I did it," said Phil.

Jonas shrieked and struggled, but in vain. Phil gave his face an effectual scrubbing, and did not desist until he thought he had avenged the bad treatment he had suffered.

"There, get up!" said he at length.

Jonas scrambled to his feet, his mean features working convulsively with anger.

"You'll suffer for this!" he shouted.

"You won't make me!" said Phil contemptuously.

"You're the meanest boy in the village."

"I am willing to leave that to the opinion of all who know me."

"I'll tell my mother!"

"Go home and tell her!"

Jonas started for home, and Phil did not attempt to stop him. As he saw Jonas reach the street and plod angrily homeward, he said to himself:

"I suppose I shall be in hot water for this; but I can't help it. Mrs. Brent always stands up for her precious son, who is as like her as can be. Well, it won't make matters much worse than they have been."

Phil concluded not to go home at once, but to allow a little time for the storm to spend its force after Jonas had told his story. So he delayed half an hour and then walked slowly up to the side door. He opened the door, brushed off the snow from his boots with the broom that stood behind the door, and opening the inner door, stepped into the kitchen.

No one was there, as Phil's first glance satisfied him, and he was disposed to hope that Mrs. Brent — he never called her mother — was out, but a thin, acid, measured voice from the sitting−room adjoining soon satisfied him that there was to be no reprieve.

"Philip Brent, come here!"

Phil entered the sitting−room.

In a rocking−chair by the fire sat a thin woman, with a sharp visage, cold eyes and firmly compressed lips, to whom no child would voluntarily draw near.

On a sofa lay outstretched the hulking form of Jonas, with w

"I am here, Mrs. Brent," said Philip manfully.

"Philip Brent," said Mrs. Brent acidly, "are you not ashamed to look me in the face?"

"I don't know why I should be," said Philip, bracing himself up for the attack.

"You see on the sofa the victim of your brutality," continued Mrs. Brent, pointing to the recumbent figure of her son Jonas.

Jonas, as if to emphasize these words, uttered a half groan.

Philip could not help smiling, for to him it seemed ridiculous.

"You laugh," said his step−mother sharply. "I am not surprised at it. You delight in your brutality."

"I suppose you mean that I have treated Jonas brutally."

"I see you confess it."

"No, Mrs. Brent, I do not confess it. The brutality you speak of was all on the side of Jonas."

"No doubt," retorted Mrs. Brent, with sarcasm.

"It's the case of the wolf and the lamb over again."

"I don't think Jonas has represented the matter to you as it happened," said Phil. "Did he tell you that he flung a snow−ball at my head as hard as a lump of ice?"

"He said he threw a little snow at you playfully and you sprang upon him like a tiger."

"There's a little mistake in that," said Phil. "The snow−ball was hard enough to stun me if it had hit me a little higher. I wouldn't be hit like that again for ten dollars."

"That ain't so! Don't believe him, mother!" said Jonas from the sofa.

"And what did you do?" demanded Mrs. Brent with a frown.

"I laid him down on the snow and washed his face with soft snow."

"You might have given him his death of cold," said Mrs. Brent, with evident hostility. "I am not sure but the poor boy will have pneumonia now, in consequence of your brutal treatment."

"And you have nothing to say as to his attack upon me?" said Phil indignantly.

"I have no doubt you have very much exaggerated it."

"Yes, he has," chimed in Jonas from the sofa.

Phil regarded his step−brother with scorn.

"Can't you tell the truth now and then, Jonas?" he asked contemptuously.

"You shall not insult my boy in my presence!" said Mrs. Brent, with a little spot of color mantling her high cheek−bones. "Philip Brent, I have too long endured your insolence. You think because I am a woman you can be insolent with impunity, but you will find yourself mistaken. It is time that you understood something that may lead you to lower your tone. Learn, then, that you have not a cent of your own. You are wholly dependent upon my bounty."

"What! Did my father leave you all his money?" asked Philip.

"He was not your father!" answered Mrs. Brent coldly.

CHAPTER II. A STRANGE REVELATION.

PHILIP started in irrepressible astonishment as these words fell from the lips of his step−mother. It seemed to him as if the earth were crumbling beneath his feet, for he had felt no more certain of the existence of the universe than of his being the son of Gerald Brent.

He was not the only person amazed at this declaration. Jonas, forgetting for the moment the part he was playing, sat bolt upright on the sofa, with his large mouth wide open, staring by turns at Philip and his mother.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed in a tone indicating utter surprise and bewilderment.

"Will you repeat that, Mrs. Brent?" asked Philip, after a brief pause, not certain that he had heard aright.

"I spoke plain English, I believe," said Mrs. Brent coldly, enjoying the effect of her communication.

"I said that Mr. Brent, my late husband, was not your father."

"I don't believe you!" burst forth Philip impetuously.

"You don't wish to believe me, you mean," answered his step−mother, unmoved.

"No, I don't wish to believe you," said the boy, looking her in the eye.

"You are very polite to doubt a lady's word," said Mrs. Brent with sarcasm.

"In such a matter as that I believe no one's word," said Phil. "I ask for proof."

"Well, I am prepared to satisfy you. Sit down and I will tell you the story."

Philip sat down on the nearest chair and regarded his step−mother fixedly.

"Whose son am I," he demanded, "if not Mr. Brent's?"

"You are getting on too fast. Jonas," continued his mother, suddenly turning to her hulking son, on whose not very intelligent countenance there was an expression of greedy curiosity, "do you understand that what I am going to say is to be a secret, not to be spoken of to any one?"

"Yes'm," answered Jonas readily.

"Very well. Now to proceed. Philip, you have heard probably that when you were very small your father — I mean Mr. Brent — lived in a small town in Ohio, called Fultonville?"

"Yes, I have heard him say so."

"Do you remember in what business he was then engaged?"

"He kept a hotel."

"Yes; a small hotel, but as large as the place required. He was not troubled by many guests. The few who stopped at his house were business men from towns near by, or drummers from the great cities, who had occasion to stay over a night. One evening, however, a gentleman arrived with an unusual companion — in other words, a boy of about three years of age. The boy had a bad cold, and seemed to need womanly care. Mr. Brent's wife — — "

"My mother?"

"The woman you were taught to call mother," corrected the second Mrs. Brent, "felt compassion for the child, and volunteered to take care of it for the night. The offer was gladly accepted, and you — for, of course, you were the child — were taken into Mrs. Brent's own room, treated with simple remedies, and in the morning seemed much better. Your father — your real father — seemed quite gratified, and preferred a request. It was that your new friend would take care of you for a week while he traveled to Cincinnati on business. After dispatching this, he promised to return and resume the care of you, paying well for the favor done him. Mrs. Brent, my predecessor, being naturally fond of children, readily agreed to this proposal, and the child was left behind, while the father started for Cincinnati."

Here Mrs. Brent paused, and Philip regarded her with doubt and suspense

"Well?" he said.

"Oh, you want to know the rest?" said Mrs. Brent with an ironical smile. "You are interested in the story?"

"Yes, madam, whether it is true or not."

"There isn't much more to tell," said Mrs. Brent.

"A week passed. You recovered from your cold, and became as lively as ever. In fact, you seemed to feel quite at home among your new surroundings, which was rather unfortunate, for your father never came back!"

"Never came back!" repeated Philip.

"No; nor was anything heard from him. Mr. and Mrs. Brent came to the conclusion that the whole thing was prearranged to get rid of you. Luckily for you, they had become attached to you, and, having no children of their own, decided to retain you. Of course, some story had to be told to satisfy the villagers. You were represented to be the son of a friend, and this was readily believed. When, however, my late husband left Ohio, and traveled some hundreds of miles eastward to this place, he dropped this explanation and represented you as his own son. Romantic, wasn't it?"

Philip looked searchingly at the face of his step−mother, or the woman whom he had regarded as such, but he could read nothing to contradict the story in her calm, impassive countenance. A great fear fell upon him that she might be telling the truth. His features showed his contending emotions. But he had a profound distrust as well as dislike of his step−mother, and he could not bring himself to put confidence in what she told him.

"What proof is there of this?" he asked, after a while.

"Your father's word. I mean, of course, Mr. Brent's word. He told me this story before I married him, feeling that I had a right to know."

"Why didn't he tell me?" asked Philip incredulously.

"He thought it would make you unhappy."

"You didn't mind that," said Philip, his lips curling.

"No," answered Mrs. Brent, with a curious smile. "Why should I? I never pretended to like you, and now I have less cause than ever, after your brutal treatment of my boy."

Jonas endeavored to look injured, but could not at once change the expression of his countenance.

"Your explanation is quite satisfactory, Mrs. Brent," returned Philip. "I don't think I stood much higher in your estimation yesterday than today, so that I haven't lost much. But you haven't given me any proof yet."

"Wait a minute."

Mrs. Brent left the room, went up−stairs, and speedily returned, bringing with her a small daguerreotype, representing a boy of three years. "Did you ever see this before?" she asked.

"No," answered Philip, taking it from her hand and eying it curiously.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Brent decided that you were to be left on their hands," she proceeded, "they had this picture of you taken in the same dress in which you came to them, with a view to establish your identity if at any time afterward inquiry should be made for you."

The daguerreotype represented a bright, handsome child, dressed tastefully, and more as would be expected of a city child than of one born in the country. There was enough resemblance to Philip as he looked now to convince him that it was really his picture.

"I have something more to show you," said Mrs. Brent.

She produced a piece of white paper in which the daguerreotype had been folded. Upon it was some writing, and Philip readily recognized the hand of the man whom he had regarded as his father.

He read these lines:

"This is the picture of the boy who was mysteriously left in the charge of Mr. Brent, April, 1863, and never reclaimed. l have reared him as my own son, but think it best to enter this record of the way in which he came into my hands, and to preserve by the help of art his appearance at the time he first came to us. GERALD BRENT."

"Do you recognize this handwriting?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"Yes," answered Philip in a dazed tone.

"Perhaps," she said triumphantly, "you will doubt my word now."

"May I have this picture?" asked Philip, without answering her.

"Yes; you have as good a claim to it as any one."

"And the paper?"

"The paper I prefer to keep myself," said Mrs. Brent, nodding her head suspiciously. "I don't care to have my only proof destroyed."

Philip did not seem to take her meaning, but with the daguerreotype in his hand, he left the room.

"I say, mother," chuckled Jonas, his freckled face showing his enjoyment, "it's a good joke on Phil, isn't it?" I guess he won't be quite so uppish after this."

CHAPTER III. PHIL'S SUDDEN RESOLUTION.

WHEN Phil left the presence of Mrs. Brent, he felt as if he had been suddenly transported to a new world. He was no longer Philip Brent, and the worst of it was that he did not know who he was. In his tumultuous state of feeling, however, one thing seemed clear — his prospects were wholly changed, and his plans for the future also. Mrs. Brent had told him that he was wholly dependent upon her. Well, he did not intend to remain so. His home had not been pleasant at the best. As a dependent upon the bounty of such a woman it would be worse. He resolved to leave home and strike out for himself, not from any such foolish idea of independence as sometimes leads boys to desert a good home for an uncertain skirmish with the world, but simply be cause he felt now that he had no real home.

To begin with he would need money, and on opening his pocket−book he ascertained that his available funds consisted of only a dollar and thirty−seven cents. That wasn't quite enough to begin the world with. But he had other resources. He owned a gun, which a friend of his would be ready to take off his hands. He had a boat, also, which he could probably sell.

On the village street he met Reuben Gordon, a young journeyman carpenter, who was earning good wages, and had money to spare.

"How are you, Phil," said Reuben in a friendly way.

"You are just the one I want to meet," said Phil earnestly. "Didn't you tell me once you would like to buy my gun?"

"Yes. Want to sell it?"

"No, I don't; but I want the money it will bring. So I'll sell it if you'll buy."

"What d'ye want for it?" asked Reuben cautiously.

"Six dollars."

"Too much. I'll give five."

"You can have it," said Phil after a pause. "How soon can you let me have the money?"

"Bring the gun round to−night, and I'll pay you for it."

"All right. Do you know of any one who wants to buy a boat?"

"What? Going to sell that, too?"

"Yes."

"Seems to me you're closin' up business?" said Reuben shrewdly.

"So I am. I'm going to leave Planktown."

"You don't say? Well, I declare! Where are you goin'?"

"To New York, I guess."

"Got any prospect there?"

"Yes."

This was not, perhaps, strictly true — that is, Phil had no definite prospect, but he felt that there must be a chance in a large city like New York for any one who was willing to work, and so felt measurably justified in saying what he did.

"I hadn't thought of buyin' a boat," said Reuben thoughtfully.

Phil pricked up his ears at the hint of a possible customer.

"You'd better buy mine," he said quickly; "I'll sell it cheap."

"How cheap?"

"Ten dollars."

"That's too much."

"It cost me fifteen."

"But it's second−hand now, you know," said Reuben.

"It's just as good as new. I'm taking off five dollars, though, you see."

"I don't think I want it enough to pay ten dollars."

"What will you give?"

Reuben finally agreed to pay seven dollars and seventy−five cents, after more or less bargaining, and to pay the money that evening upon delivery of the goods. "I don't think I've got anything more to sell," said Phil thoughtfully. "There's my skates, but they are not very good. I'll give them to Tommy Kavanagh. He can't afford to buy a pair."

Tommy was the son of a poor widow, and was very much pleased with the gift, which Phil conveyed to him just before supper.

Just after supper he took his gun and the key of his boat over to Reuben Gordon, who thereupon gave him the money agreed upon.

"Shall I tell Mrs. Brent I am going away?" Phil said to himself, "or shall I leave a note for her?"

He decided to announce his resolve in person. To do otherwise would seem too much like running away, and that he had too much self−respect to do.

So in the evening, after his return from Reuben Gordon's, he said to Mrs. Brent:

"I think I ought to tell you that I'm going away to−morrow."

Mrs. Brent looked up from her work, and her cold gray eyes surveyed Phil with curious scrutiny.

"You are going away!" she replied. "Where are you going?"

"I think I shall go to New York."

"What for?"

"Seek my fortune, as so many have done before me."

"They didn't always find it!" said Mrs. Brent with a cold sneer. "Is there any other reason?"

"Yes; it's chiefly on account of what you told me yesterday. You said that I was dependent upon you."

"So you are."

"And that I wasn't even entitled to the name of Brent."

"Yes, I said it, and it's true."

"Well," said Phil, "I don't want to be dependent upon you. I prefer to earn my own living."

"I am not prepared to say but that you are right. But do you know what the neighbors will say?"

"What will they say?"

"That I drove you from home."

"It won't be true. I don't pretend to enjoy my home, but I suppose I can stay on here if I like?"

"Yes, you can stay."

"You don't object to my going?"

"No, if it is understood that you go of your own accord."

"I am willing enough to take the blame of it, if there is any blame."

"Very well; get a sheet of note−paper, and write at my direction."

Phil took a sheet of note−paper from his father's desk, and sat down to comply with Mrs. Brent's request.

She dictated as follows:

"I leave home at my own wish, but with the consent of Mrs. Brent, to seek my fortune. It is wholly my own idea, and I hold no one else responsible. "PHILIP BRENT."

"You may as well keep the name of Brent," said his step−mother, as you have no other that you know of."

Phil winced at those cold words. It was not pleasant to reflect that this was so, and that he was wholly ignorant of his parentage.

"One thing more," said Mrs. Brent. "It is only eight o'clock. I should like to have you go out and call upon some of those with whom you are most intimate, and tell them that you are leaving home voluntarily."

"I will," answered Phil.

"Perhaps you would prefer to do so to−morrow."

"No; I am going away to−morrow morning."

"Very well."

"Going away to−morrow morning?" repeated Jonas, who entered the room at that moment.

Phil's plan was briefly disclosed.

"Then give me your skates," said Jonas.

"I can't. I've given them to Tommy Kavanagh."

"That's mean. You might have thought of me first," grumbled Jonas.

"I don't know why. Tommy Kavanagh is my friend and you are not."

"Anyway, you can let me have your boat and gun."

"I have sold them."

"That's too bad."

"I don't know why you should expect them. I needed the money they brought me to pay my expenses till I get work."

"I will pay your expenses to New York if you wish," said Mrs. Brent.

"Thank you; but I shall have money enough," answered Phil, who shrank from receiving any favor at the hands of Mrs. Brent.

"As you please, but you will do me the justice to remember that I offered it."

"Thank you. I shall not forget it."

"That evening, just before going to bed, Mrs. Brent opened a trunk and drew from it a folded paper.

She read as follows — for it was her husband's will:

"To the boy generally known as Philip Brent, and supposed, though incorrectly, to be my son, I bequeath the sum of five thousand dollars, and direct the same to be paid over to any one whom he may select as guardian, to hold in trust for him till he attains the age of twenty−one."

"He need never know of this," said Mrs. Brent to herself in a low tone. "I will save it for Jonas."

She held the paper a moment, as if undecided whether to destroy it, but finally put it carefully back in the secret hiding−place from which she had taken it.

"He is leaving home of his own accord," she whispered. "Henceforth he will probably keep away. That suits me well. but no one can say I drove him to it."

CHAPTER IV. MR. LIONEL LAKE.

SIX MONTHS before it might have cost Philip a pang to leave home. Then his father was living, and from him the boy had never received aught but kindness. Even his step−mother, though she secretly disliked him, did not venture to show it, and secure in the affections of his supposed father, he did not trouble himself as to whether Mrs. Brent liked him or not. As for Jonas, he was cautioned by his mother not to get himself into trouble by treating Phil badly, and the boy, who knew on which side his interests lay, faithfully obeyed. It was only after the death of Mr. Brent that both Jonas and his mother changed their course, and thought it safe to snub Philip.

Planktown was seventy−five miles distant from New York, and the fare was two dollars and a quarter.

This was rather a large sum to pay, considering Phil's scanty fund, but he wished to get to the great city as soon as possible, and he decided that it would be actually cheaper to ride than to walk, considering that he would have to buy his meals on the way. He took his seat in the cars, placing a valise full of underclothes on the seat next him. The train was not very full, and the seat beside him did not appear to be required.

Mile after mile they sped on the way, and Phil looked from the window with interest at the towns through which they passed. There are very few boys of his age — sixteen — who do not like to travel in the cars. Limited as were his means, and uncertain as were his prospects, Phil felt not only cheerful, but actually buoyant, as every minute took him farther away from Planktown, and so nearer the city where he hoped to make a living at the outset, and perhaps his fortune in the end.

Presently — perhaps half way on — a young man, rather stylishly dressed, came into the car. It was not at a station, and therefore it seemed clear that he came from another car.

He halted when he reached the seat which Phil occupied.

Our hero, observing that his glance rested on his valise, politely removed it, saying:

"Would you like to sit down here, sir?"

"Yes, thank you," answered the young man, and sank into the seat beside Phil.

"Sorry to inconvenience you," he said, with a glance at the bag.

"Oh, not at all," returned Phil. "I only put the valise on the seat till it was wanted by some passenger."

"You are more considerate than some passengers," observed the young man. "In the next car is a woman, an elderly party, who is taking up three extra seats to accommodate her bags and boxes."

"That seems rather selfish," remarked Phil.

"Selfish! I should say so. I paused a minute at her seat as I passed along, and she was terribly afraid I wanted to sit down. She didn't offer to move anything, though, as you have. I stopped long enough to make her feel uncomfortable, and then passed on. I don't think I have fared any the worse for doing so. I would rather sit beside you than her."

"Am I to consider that a compliment?" asked Phil, smiling.

"Well, yes, if you choose. Not that it is saying much to call you more agreeable company than the old party alluded to. Are you going to New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"Live there?"

"I expect to live there."

"Brought up in the country, perhaps?"

"Yes, in Planktown."

"Oh, Planktown! I've heard it's a nice place, but never visited it. Got any folks?"

Phil hesitated. In the light of the revelation that had been made to him by Mrs. Brent, he did not know how to answer. However, there was no call to answer definitely. "Not many," he said.

"Goin' to school in New York?"

"No."

"To college, perhaps. I've got a cousin in Columbia College."

"I wish I knew enough to go to college," said Phil; "but I only know a little Latin, and no Greek at all."

"Well, I never cared much about Latin or Greek, myself. I presume you are thinking about a business position?"

"Yes, I shall try to get a place."

"You may find a little time necessary to find one. However, you are, no doubt, able to pay your board for awhile."

"For a short time," said Phil.

"Well, I may be able to help you to a place. I know a good many prominent business men."

"I should be grateful to you for any help of that kind," said Phil, deciding that he was in luck to meet with such a friend.

"Don't mention it. I have had to struggle myself — in earlier days — though at present I am well fixed. What is your name?"

"Philip Brent."

"Good! My name is Lionel Lake. Sorry I haven't got any cards. Perhaps I may have one in my pocket−book. Let me see!"

Mr. Lake opened his porte−monnaie and uttered a exclamation of surprise. "By Jove!" he said, "I am in a fix."

Phil looked at him inquiringly.

"I took out a roll of bills at the house of my aunt, where I stayed last night," explained Mr. Lake, "and must have neglected to replace them."

"I hope you have not lost them," said Phil politely.

"Oh, no; my aunt will find them and take care of them for me, so that I shall get them back. The trouble is that I am left temporarily without funds."

"But you can get money in the city," suggested Phil.

"No doubt; only it is necessary for me to stay over a train ten miles short of the city."

Mr. Lionel Lake seemed very much perplexed.

"If I knew some one in the cars," he said reflectively.

It did occur to Phil to offer to loan him something, but the scantiness of his own resources warned him that it would not be prudent, so he remained silent.

Finally Mr. Lake appeared to have an idea.

"Have you got five dollars, Philip?" he said familiarly.

"Yes, sir," answered Philip slowly.

"Then I'll make a proposal. Lend it to me and I will give you this ring as security. It is worth twenty−five dollars easily.

He drew from his vest−pocket a neat gold ring, with some sort of a stone in the setting. "There!" said Mr. Lake, "I'll give you this ring and my address, and you can bring it to my office to−morrow morning. I'll give you back the five dollars and one dollar for the accommodation. That's good interest, isn't it?"

"But I might keep the ring and sell it," suggested Phil.

"Oh, I am not afraid. You look honest. I will trust you," said the young man, in a careless, off−hand manner. "Say, is it a bargain?"

"Yes," answered Phil.

It occurred to him that he could not earn a dollar more easily. Besides, he would be doing a favor to this very polite young man.

"All right, then!"

"Five dollars of Phil's scanty hoard was handed to Mr. Lake, who, in return, gave Phil the ring, which he put on his finger.

He also handed Phil a scrap of paper, on which he penciled:

"LIONEL LAKE, No. 237 Broadway."

"I'm ever so much obliged," he said. "Good−by. I get out at the next station."

Phil was congratulating himself on his good stroke of business, when the conductor entered the car, followed by a young lady. When they came to where Phil was seated, the young lady said:

"That is my ring on that boy's finger?"

"Aha! we've found the thief, then!" said the conductor. "Boy, give up the ring you stole from this young lady!"

As he spoke he placed his hand on Phil's shoulder.

"Stole!" repeated Phil, gasping. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do!" said the conductor roughly.

CHAPTER V. AN OVERBEARING CONDUCTOR

NO MATTER how honest a boy may be, a sudden charge of theft is likely to make him look confused and guilty.

Such was the case with Phil.

"I assure you," he said earnestly, "that I did not steal this ring."

"Where did you get it, then?" demanded the conductor roughly.

He was one of those men who, in any position, will make themselves disagreeable. Moreover, he was a man who always thought ill of others, when there was any chance of doing so. In fact, he preferred to credit his fellows with bad qualities rather than with good.

"It was handed me by a young man who just left the car," said Phil.

"That's a likely story," sneered the conductor.

"Young men are not in the habit of giving valuable rings to strangers."

"He did not give it to me, I advanced him five dollars on it."

"What was the young man's name?" asked the conductor incredulously.

"There's his name and address," answered Phil, drawing from his pocket the paper handed him by Mr. Lake.

"Lionel Lake, 237 Broadway," repeated the conductor. "If there is any such person, which I very much doubt, you are probably a confederate of his."

"You have no right to say this," returned Phil indignantly.

"I haven't, haven't I?" snapped the conductor.

"Do you know what I am going to do with you?"

"If you wish me to return the ring to this young lady, I will do so, if she is positive it is hers."

"Yes, you must do that, but it won't get you out of trouble. I shall hand you over to a policeman as soon as we reach New York."

Phil was certainly dismayed, for he felt that it might be difficult for him to prove that he came honestly in possession of the ring.

"The fact is," added the conductor, "your story is too thin."

"Conductor," said a new voice, "you are doing the boy an injustice."

The speaker was an old man with gray hair, but of form still robust, though he was at least sixty five. He sat in the seat just behind Phil.

"Thank you, sir," said Phil gratefully.

"I understand my business," said the conductor impertinently, "and don't need any instructions from you."

"Young man," said the old gentleman, in a very dignified tone, "I have usually found officials of your class polite and gentlemanly, but you are an exception."

"Who are you?" asked the conductor rudely. "What right have you to put in your oar?"

"As to who I am, I will answer you by and by. In reference to the boy, I have to say that his story is correct. I heard the whole conversation between him and the young man from whom he received the ring, and I can testify that he has told the truth."

"At any rate he has received stolen property."

"Not knowing it to be stolen. The young man was an entire stranger to him, and though I suspected that he was an unscrupulous adventurer, the boy has not had experience enough to judge men."

"Very well. If he's innocent he can prove it when he's brought to trial," said the conductor.

"As for you, sir, it's none of your business."

"Young man, you asked me a short time since who I am. Do you want to know?"

"I am not very particular."

"Then, sir, I have to inform you that I am Richard Grant, the president of this road."

The conductor's face was a curious and interesting study when he heard this announcement. He knew that the old man whom he had insulted had a right to discharge him from his position, and bully as he had shown himself, he was now inclined to humble himself to save his place.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said in a composed tone. "If I had known who you were I wouldn't have spoken as I did."

"I had a claim to be treated like a gentleman, even if I had no connection with the road," he said.

"If you say the boy's all right, I won't interfere with him," continued the conductor.

"My testimony would clear him from any charge that might be brought against him," said the president. "I saw him enter the car, and know he has had no opportunity to take the ring."

"If he'll give me back the ring, that's all I want," said the young lady.

"That I am willing to do, though I lose five dollars by it," said Philip.

"Do so, my boy," said the president. "I take it for granted that the young lady's claim is a just one."

Upon this Philip drew the ring from his finger and handed it to the young lady, who went back to the car where her friends were sitting.

"I hope, sir," said the conductor anxiously, "that you won't be prejudiced against me on account of this affair."

"I am sorry to say that I can't help feeling prejudiced against you," returned the president dryly; "but I won't allow this feeling to injure you if, upon inquiring, I find that you are otherwise an efficient officer."

"Thank you, sir."

"I am glad that my presence has saved this boy from being the victim of an injustice. Let this be a lesson to you in future."

The conductor walked away, looking quite chop−fallen, and Philip turned to his new friend.

"I am very much indebted to you, sir," he said.

"But for you I should have found myself in serious trouble."

"I am glad to have prevented an injustice, my lad. I am sorry I could not save you from loss also. That enterprising rogue has gone off with five dollars belonging to you. I hope the loss will not be a serious one to you."

"It was more than a third part of my capital, sir," said Phil, rather ruefully.

"I am sorry for that. I suppose, however, you are not dependent upon your own resources?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Have you no parents, then?" asked Mr. Grant, with interest.

"No, sir; that is, I have a step−mother."

"And what are your plans, if you are willing to tell me?"

"I am going to New York to try to make a living."

"I cannot commend your plan, my young friend, unless there is a good reason for it."

"I think there is a good reason for it, sir."

"I hope you have not run away from home?"

"No, sir; I left home with my step−mother's knowledge and consent."

"That is well. I don't want wholly to discourage you, and so I will tell you that I, too, came to New York at your age with the same object in view, with less money in my pocket than you possess."

"And now you are the president of a railroad!" said Phil hopefully.

"Yes; but I had a hard struggle before I reached that position."

"I am not afraid of hard work, sir."

"That is in your favor. Perhaps you may be as lucky as I have been. You may call at my office in the city, if you feel inclined."

As Mr. Grant spoke he put in Phil's hand a card bearing his name and address, in Wall Street.

"Thank you, sir," said Phil gratefully. "I shall be glad to call. I may need advice."

"If you seek advice and follow it you will be an exception to the general rule," said the president, smiling. "One thing more — you have met with a loss which, to you, is a serious one. Allow me to bear it, and accept this bill."

"But, sir, it is not right that you should bear it," commenced Phil. Then, looking at the bill, he said: "Haven't you made a mistake? This is a ten−dollar bill."

"I know it. Accept the other five as an evidence of my interest in you. By the way, I go to Philadelphia and Washington before my return to New York, and shall not return for three or four days. After that time you will find me at my office.

"I am in luck after all," thought Phil cheerfully, "in spite of the mean trick of Mr. Lionel Lake."

CHAPTER VI. SIGNOR ORLANDO.

SO PHIL reached New York in very fair spirits. He found himself, thanks to the liberality of Mr. Grant, in a better financial position than when he left home.

As he left the depot and found himself in the streets of New York, he felt like a stranger upon the threshold of a

new life. He knew almost nothing about the great city he had entered, and was at a loss where to seek for lodgings.

"It's a cold day," said a sociable voice at his elbow.

Looking around, Phil saw that the speaker was a sallow−complexioned young man, with black hair and mustache, a loose black felt hat, crushed at the crown, giving him rather a rakish look.

"Yes, sir," answered Phil politely.

"Stranger in the city, I expect?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind the sir. I ain't used to ceremony. I am Signor Orlando."

"Signor Orlando!" repeated Phil, rather puzzled.

"Are you an Italian?"

"Well, yes," returned Signor Orlando, with a wink, "that's what I am, or what people think me; but I was born in Vermont, and am half Irish and half Yankee."

"How did you come by your name, then?"

"I took it," answered his companion. "You see, dear boy, I'm a professional."

"A what?"

"A professional — singer and clog−dancer. I believe I am pretty well known to the public," continued Signor Orlando complacently. "Last summer I traveled with Jenks Brown's circus. Of course you've heard of them. Through the winter I am employed at Bowerman's Varieties, in the Bowery. I appear every night, and at two matinees weekly."

It must be confessed that Phil was considerably impressed by the professional character of Signor Orlando. He had never met an actor, or public performer of any description, and was disposed to have a high respect for a man who filled such a conspicuous position. There was not, to be sure, anything very impressive about Signor Orlando's appearance. His face did not indicate talent, and his dress was shabby. But for all that he was a man familiar with the public — a man of gifts.

"I should like to see you on the stage," said Phil respectfully.

"So you shall, my dear boy — so you shall. I'll get you a pass from Mr. Bowerman. Which way are you going?"

"I don't know," answered Phil, puzzled. "I should like to find a cheap boarding−house, but I don't know the city."

"I do," answered Signor Orlando promptly. "Why not come to my house?"

"Have you a house?"

"I mean my boarding−house. It's some distance away. Suppose we take a horse−car?"

"All right!" answered Phil, relieved to find a guide in the labyrinth of the great city.

"I live on Fifth Street, near the Bowery — a very convenient location," said Orlando, if we may take the liberty to call him thus.

"Fifth Avenue?" asked Phil, who did not know the difference.

"Oh, no; that's a peg above my style. I am not a Vanderbilt, nor yet an Astor."

"Is the price moderate?" asked Phil anxiously. "I must make my money last as long as I can, for I don't know when I shall get a place."

"To be sure. You might room with me, only I've got a hall bedroom. Perhaps we might manage it, though."

"I think I should prefer a room by myself," said Phil, who reflected that Signor Orlando was a stranger as yet.

"Oh, well, I'll speak to the old lady, and I guess she can accommodate you with a hall bedroom like mine on the third floor."

"What should I have to pay?"

"A dollar and a quarter a week, and you can get your meals where you please."

"I think that will suit me," said Phil thoughtfully.

After leaving the car, a minute's walk brought them to a shabby three−story house of brick. There was a stable opposite, and a group of dirty children were playing in front of it.

"This is where I hang out," said Signor Orlando cheerfully. "As the poet says, there is no place like home."

If this had been true it was not much to be regretted, since the home in question was far from attractive.

Signor Orlando rang the bell, and a stout woman of German aspect answered the call.

"So you haf come back, Herr Orlando," said this lady. "I hope you haf brought them two weeks' rent you owe me."

"All in good time, Mrs. Schlessinger," said Orlando. "But you see I have brought some one with me."

"Is he your bruder now?" asked the lady.

"No, he is not, unfortunately for me. His name is — — "

Orlando coughed. "Philip Brent," suggested our hero.

"Just so — Philip Brent."

"I am glad to see Mr. Prent," said the landlady.

"And is he an actor like you, Signor Orlando?"

"Not yet. We don't know what may happen. But he comes on business, Mrs. Schlessinger. He wants a room."

The landlady brightened up. She had two rooms vacant, and a new lodger was a godsend.

"I vill show Mr. Prent what rooms I haf," she said. "Come up−stairs, Mr. Prent."

The good woman toiled up the staircase panting, for she was asthmatic, and Phil followed. The interior of the house was as dingy as the exterior, and it was quite dark on the second landing.

She threw open the door of a back room, which, being lower than the hall, was reached by a step.

"There!" said she, pointing to the faded carpet, rumpled bed, and cheap pine bureau, with the little six−by−ten looking−glass surmounting it. "This is a peautiful room for a single gentleman, or even for a man and his wife."

"My friend, Mr. Brent, is not married," said Signor Orlando waggishly.

Phil laughed.

"You will have your shoke, Signor Orlando," said Mrs. Schlessinger.

"What is the price of this room?" asked Phil.

"Three dollars a week, Mr. Prent, I ought to have four, but since you are a steady young gentleman — — "

"How does she know that?" Phil wondered.

"Since you are a steady young gentleman, and a friend of Signor Orlando, I will not ask you full price."

"That is more than I can afford to pay," said Phil, shaking his head.

"I think you had better show Mr. Brent the hall bedroom over mine," suggested the signor.

Mrs. Schlessinger toiled up another staircase, the two new acquaintances following her. She threw open the door of one of those depressing cells known in New York as a hall bedroom. It was about five feet wide and eight feet long, and was nearly filled up by a cheap bedstead, covered by a bed about two inches thick, and surmounted at the head by a consumptive−looking pillow. The paper was torn from the walls in places. There was one rickety chair, and a wash−stand which bore marks of extreme antiquity.

"This is a very neat room for a single gentleman," remarked Mrs. Schlessinger.

Phil's spirits fell as he surveyed what was to be his future home. It was a sad contrast to his neat, comfortable room at home.

"Is this room like yours, Signor Orlando?" he asked faintly.

"As like as two peas," answered Orlando. "Would you recommend me to take it?"

"You couldn't do better."

How could the signor answer otherwise in presence of a landlady to whom he owed two weeks' rent?"

"Then," said Phil, with a secret shudder, "I'll take it if the rent is satisfactory."

"A dollar and a quarter a week," said Mrs. Schlessinger promptly.

"I'll take it for a week."

"You won't mind paying in advance?" suggested the landlady. "I pay my own rent in advance."

Phil's answer was to draw a dollar and a quarter from his purse and pass it to his landlady.

"I'll take possession now," said our hero. "Can I have some water to wash my face?"

Mrs. Schlessinger was evidently surprised that any one should want to wash in the middle of the day, but made no objections.

When Phil had washed his face and hands, he went out with Signor Orlando to dine at a restaurant on the Bowery.

CHAPTER VII. BOWERMAN'S VARIETIES.

THE RESTAURANT to which he was taken by Signor Orlando was thronged with patrons, for it was one o'clock. On the whole, they did not appear to belong to the highest social rank, though they were doubtless respectable. The table−cloths were generally soiled, and the waiters had a greasy look. Phil said nothing, but he did not feel quite so hungry as before he entered.

The signor found two places at one of the tables, and they sat down. Phil examined a greasy bill of fare and found that he could obtain a plate of meat for ten cents. This included bread and butter, and a dish of mashed potato. A cup of tea would be five cents additional.

"I can afford fifteen cents for a meal," he thought, and called for a plate of roast beef.

"Corn beef and cabbage for me," said the signor.

"It's very filling," he remarked aside to Phil.

"They won't give you but a mouthful of beef."

So it proved, but the quality was such that Phil did not care for more. He ordered a piece of apple pie afterward feeling still hungry. "I see you're bound to have a square meal," said the signor.

After Phil had had it, he was bound to confess that he did not feel uncomfortably full. Yet he had spent twice as much as the signor, who dispensed with the tea and pie as superfluous luxuries.

In the evening Signor Orlando bent his steps toward Bowerman's Varieties.

"I hope in a day or two to get a complimentary ticket for you, Mr. Brent," he said.

"How much is the ticket?" asked Phil.

"Fifteen cents. Best reserved seats twenty−five cents.'

"I believe I will be extravagant for once," said Phil, "and go at my own expense."

"Good!" said the signor huskily. "You'll feel repaid I'll be bound. Bowerman always gives the public their money's worth. The performance begins at eight o'clock and won't be out until half−past eleven."

"Less than five cents an hour," commented Phil.

"What a splendid head you've got!" said Signor Orlando admiringly. "I couldn't have worked that up. Figures ain't my province."

It seemed to Phil rather a slender cause for compliment, but he said nothing, since it seemed clear that the computation was beyond his companion's ability.

As to the performance, it was not refilled, nor was the talent employed first−class. Still Phil enjoyed himself after a fashion. He had never had it in his power to attend many amusements, and this was new to him. He naturally looked with interest for the appearance of his new friend and fellow−lodger.

Signor Orlando appeared, dressed in gorgeous array, sang a song which did credit to the loudness of his voice rather than its quality, and ended by a noisy clog−dance which elicited much applause from the boys in the gallery, who shared the evening's entertainment for the moderate sum of ten cents.

The signor was called back to the stage. He bowed his thanks and gave another dance. Then he was permitted to retire. As this finished his part of the entertainment he afterward came around in citizen's dress, and took a seat in the auditorium beside Phil.

"How did you like me, Mr. Brent?" he asked complacently.

"I thought you did well, Signor Orlando. You were much applauded."

"Yes, the audience is very loyal," said the proud performer.

Two half−grown boys heard Phil pronounce the name of his companion, and they gazed awe−stricken at the famous man.

"That's Signor Orlando!" whispered one of the others.

"I know it," was the reply. "Such is fame," said the Signor, in a pleased tone to Phil. "People point me out on the streets."

"Very gratifying, no doubt," said our hero, but it occurred to him that he would not care to be pointed out as a performer at Bowerman's. Signor Orlando, however, well−pleased with himself, didn't doubt that Phil was impressed by his popularity, and perhaps even envied it.

They didn't stay till the entertainment was over. It was, of course, familiar to the signor, and Phil felt tired and sleepy, for he had passed a part of the afternoon in exploring the city, and had walked in all several miles.

He went back to his lodging−house, opened the door with a pass−key which Mrs. Schlessinger had given him, and climbing to his room in the third story, undressed and deposited himself in bed.

The bed was far from luxurious. A thin pallet rested on slats, so thin that he could feel the slats through it, and the covering was insufficient. The latter deficiency he made up by throwing his overcoat over the quilt, and despite

the hardness of his bed, he was soon sleeping soundly.

"To−morrow I must look for a place," he said to Signor Orlando. "Can you give me any advise?"

"Yes, my dear boy. Buy a daily paper, the Sun or Herald, and look at the advertisements. There may be some prominent business man who is looking out for a boy of your size." Phil knew of no better way, and he followed Signor Orlando's advice.

After a frugal breakfast at the Bowery restaurant, he invested a few pennies in the two papers mentioned, and began to go the rounds.

The first place was in Pearl Street.

He entered, and was directed to a desk in the front part of the store.

"You advertised for a boy," he said.

"We've got one," was the brusque reply.

Of course no more was to be said, and Phil walked out, a little dashed at his first rebuff.

At the next place he found some half a dozen boys waiting, and joined the line, but the vacancy was filled before his turn came.

At the next place his appearance seemed to make a good impression, and he was asked several questions.

"What is your name?"

"Philip Brent."

"How old are you?"

"Just sixteen."

"How is your education?"

"I have been to school since I was six."

"Then you ought to know something. Have you ever been in a place?"

"No, sir."

"Do you live with your parents?"

"No, sir; I have just come to the city, and am lodging in Fifth Street."

"Then you won't do. We wish our boys to live with their parents."

Poor Phil! He had allowed himself to hope that at length he was likely to get a place. The abrupt termination of the conversation dispirited him.

He made three more applications. In one of them he again came near succeeding, but once more the fact that he did not live with his parents defeated his application.

"It seems to be very hard getting a place," thought Phil, and it must be confessed he felt a little homesick.

"I won't make any more applications to−day," he decided, and being on Broadway, walked up that busy thoroughfare, wondering what the morrow would bring forth.

It was winter, and there was ice on the sidewalk. Directly in front of Phil walked an elderly gentleman, whose suit of fine broadcloth and gold spectacles, seemed to indicate a person of some prominence and social importance.

Suddenly he set foot on a treacherous piece of ice. Vainly he strove to keep his equilibrium, his arms waving wildly, and his gold−headed cane falling to the sidewalk. He would have fallen backward, had not Phil, observing his danger in time, rushed to his assistance.

CHAPTER VIII. THE HOUSE IN TWELFTH STREET.

WITH some difficulty the gentleman righted himself, and then Phil picked up his cane.

"I hope you are not hurt, sir?" he said.

"I should have been but for you, my good boy," said the gentleman. "I am a little shaken by the suddenness of my slipping."

"Would you wish me to go with you, sir?"

"Yes, if you please. I do not perhaps require you, but I shall be glad of your company."

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you live in the city?"

"Yes, sir; that is, I propose to do so. I have come here in search of employment."

Phil said this, thinking it possible that the old gentleman might exert his influence in his favor.

"Are you dependent on what you may earn?" asked the gentleman, regarding him attentively.

"I have a little money, sir, but when that is gone I shall need to earn something."

"That is no misfortune. It is a good thing for a boy to be employed. Otherwise he is liable to get into mischief."

"At any rate, I shall be glad to find work, sir."

"Have you applied anywhere yet?"

Phil gave a little account of his unsuccessful applications, and the objections that had been made to him.

"Yes, yes," said the old gentleman thoughtfully, "more confidence is placed in a boy who lives with his parents."

The two walked on together until they reached Twelfth Street. It was a considerable walk, and Phil was surprised that his companion should walk, when he could easily have taken a Broadway stage, but the old gentleman explained this himself.

"I find it does me good," he said, "to spend some time in the open air, and even if walking tires me it does me good."

At Twelfth Street they turned off.

"I am living with a married niece," he said, "just on the other side of Fifth Avenue."

At the door of a handsome four−story house, with a brown−stone front, the old gentleman paused, and told Phil that this was his residence.

"Then, sir, I will bid you good−morning," said Phil.

"No, no; come in and lunch with me," said Mr. Carter hospitably.

He had, by the way, mentioned that his name was Oliver Carter, and that he was no longer actively engaged in business, but was a silent partner in the firm of which his nephew by marriage was the nominal head.

"Thank you, sir," answered Phil.

He was sure that the invitation was intended to be accepted, and he saw no reason why he should not accept it.

"Hannah," said the old gentleman to the servant who opened the door, "tell your mistress that I have brought a boy home to dinner with me."

"Yes, sir," answered Hannah, surveying Phil in some surprise.

"Come up to my room, my young friend," said Mr. Carter. "You may want to prepare for lunch."

Mr. Carter had two connecting rooms on the second floor, one of which he used as a bed−chamber. The furniture was handsome and costly, and Phil, who was not used to city houses, thought it luxurious.

Phil washed his face and hands, and brushed his hair. Then a bell rang, and following his new friend, he went down to lunch.

Lunch was set out in the front basement. When Phil and Mr. Carter entered the room a lady was standing by the fire, and beside her was a boy of about Phil's age. The lady was tall and slender, with light−brown hair and cold gray eyes.

"Lavinia," said Mr. Carter, "I have brought a young friend with me to lunch."

"So I see," answered the lady. "Has he been here before?"

"No; he is a new acquaintance."

"I would speak to him if I knew his name."

"His name is — — "

Here the old gentleman hesitated, for in truth he had forgotten.

"Philip Brent."

"You may sit down here, Mr. Brent," said Mrs. Pitkin, for this was the lady's name.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"And so you made my uncle's acquaintance this morning?" she continued, herself taking a seat at the head of the table.

"Yes; he was of service to me," answered Mr. Carter for him. "I had lost my balance, and should have had a heavy fall if Philip had not come to my assistance."

"He was very kind, I am sure," said Mrs. Pitkin, but her tone was very cold.

"Philip," said Mr. Carter, "this is my grand−nephew, Alonzo Pitkin."

He indicated the boy already referred to.

"How do you do?" said Alonzo, staring at Philip not very cordially.

"Very well, thank you," answered Philip politely.

"Where do you live?" asked Alonzo, after a moment's hesitation. "In Fifth Street."

"That's near the Bowery, isn't it?"

"Yes."

The boy shrugged his shoulders and exchanged a significant look with his mother.

Fifth Street was not a fashionable street — indeed quite the reverse, and Phil's answer showed that he was a nobody. Phil himself had begun to suspect that he was unfashionably located, but he felt that until his circumstances improved he might as well remain where he was.

But, though he lived in an unfashionable street, it could not be said that Phil, in his table manners, showed any lack of good breeding. He seemed quite at home at Mrs. Pitkin's table, and in fact acted with greater propriety than Alonzo, who was addicted to fast eating and greediness.

"Couldn't you walk home alone, Uncle Oliver?" asked Mrs. Pitkin presently.

"Yes."

"Then it was a pity to trouble Mr. Brent to come with you."

"It was no trouble," responded Philip promptly, though he suspected that it was not consideration for him that prompted the remark.

"Yes, I admit that I was a little selfish in taking up my young friend's time," said the old gentleman cheerfully; "but I infer, from what he tells me, that it is not particularly valuable just now."

"Are you in a business position, Mr. Brent?" asked Mrs. Pitkin.

"No, madam. I was looking for a place this morning."

"Have you lived for some time in the city?"

"No; I came here only yesterday from the country."

"I think country boys are very foolish to leave good homes in the country to seek places in the city," said Mrs. Pitkin sharply.

"There may be circumstances, Lavinia, that make it advisable," suggested Mr. Carter, who, however, did not know Phil's reason for coming.

"No doubt; I understand that," answered Mrs. Pitkin, in a tone so significant that Phil wondered whether she thought he had got into any trouble at home.

"And besides, we can't judge for every one. So I hope Master Philip may find some good and satisfactory opening, now that he has reached the city."

After a short time, lunch, which in New York is generally a plain meal, was over, and Mr. Carter invited Philip to come up−stairs again.

"I want to talk over your prospects, Philip," he said.

There was silence till after the two had left the room. Then Mrs. Pitkin said:

"Alonzo, I don't like this."

"What don't you like, ma?"

"Uncle bringing this boy home. It is very extraordinary, this sudden interest in a perfect stranger."

"Do you think he'll leave him any money?" asked Alonzo, betraying interest.

"I don't know what it may lead to, Lonny, but it don't look right. Such things have been known."

"I'd like to punch the boy's head," remarked Alonzo, with sudden hostility. "All uncle's money ought to come to us."

"So it ought, by rights," observed his mother.

"We must see that this boy doesn't get any ascendency over him."

Phil would have been very much amazed if he had overheard this conversation.

CHAPTER IX. THE OLD GENTLEMAN PROVES A FRIEND.

THE OLD gentleman sat down in an arm−chair and waved his hand toward a small rocking−chair, in which Phil seated himself.

"I conclude that you had a good reason for leaving home, Philip," said Mr. Carter, eying our hero with a keen, but friendly look.

"Yes, sir; since my father's death it has not been a home to me."

"Is there a step−mother in the case?" asked the old gentleman shrewdly.

"Yes, sir."

"Any one else?"

"She has a son."

"And you two don't agree?"

"You seem to know all about it, sir," said Phil, surprised.

"I know something of the world — that is all."

Phil began to think that Mr. Carter's knowledge of the world was very remarkable. He began to wonder whether he could know anything more — could suspect the secret which Mrs. Brent had communicated to him. Should he speak of it? He decided at any rate to wait, for Mr. Carter, though kind, was a comparative stranger.

"Well," continued the old gentleman, "I won't inquire too minutely into the circumstances. You don't look like a boy that would take such an important step as leaving home without a satisfactory reason. The next thing is to help you."

Phil's courage rose as he heard these words. Mr. Carter was evidently a rich man, and he could help him if he was willing. So he kept silence, and let his new friend do the talking.

"You want a place," continued Mr. Carter. "Now, what are you fit for?"

"That is a hard question for me to answer, sir. I don't know."

"Have you a good education?"

"Yes, sir; and I know something of Latin and French besides."

"You can write a good hand?"

"Shall I show you, sir?"

"Yes; write a few lines at my private desk."

Phil did so, and handed the paper to Mr. Carter.

"Very good," said the old gentleman approvingly.

"That is in your favor. Are you good at accounts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Better still."

"Sit down there again," he continued. "I will give you a sum in interest."

Phil resumed his seat. "What is the interest of eight hundred and forty−five dollars and sixty cents for four years, three months and twelve days, at eight and one−half per cent?"

Phil's pen moved fast in perfect silence for five minutes. Then he announced the result.

"Let me look at the paper. I will soon tell you whether it is correct."

After a brief examination, for the old gentleman was himself an adept at figures, he said, with a beaming smile:

"It is entirely correct. You are a smart boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Phil, gratified.

"And you deserve a good place — better than you will probably get."

Phil listened attentively. The last clause was not quite so satisfactory.

"Yes," said Mr. Carter, evidently talking to himself, "I must get Pitkin to take him."

Phil knew that the lady whom he had already met was named Pitkin, and he rightly concluded that it was her husband who was meant.

"I hope he is more agreeable than his wife," thought Philip.

"Yes, Philip," said Mr. Carter, who had evidently made up his mind, "I will try to find you a place this afternoon.

"I shall be very much obliged, sir," said Philip gladly. "I have already told you that my nephew and I are in business together, he being the active and I the silent partner. We do a general shipping business. Our store is on Franklin Street. I will give you a letter to my nephew and he will give you a place."

"Thank you, sir."

"Wait a minute and I will write the note."

Five minutes later Phil was on his way down town with his credentials in his pocket.

CHAPTER X. PHIL CALLS ON MR. PITKIN.

PHIL paused before an imposing business structure, and looked up to see if he could see the sign that would show him he had reached his destination.

He had not far to look. On the front of the building he saw in large letters the sign: ENOCH PITKIN CO.

In the door−way there was another sign, from which he learned that the firm occupied the second floor.

He went up−stairs, and opening a door, entered a spacious apartment which looked like a hive of industry. There

were numerous clerks, counters piled with goods, and every indication that a prosperous business was being carried on.

The nearest person was a young man of eighteen, or perhaps more, with an incipient, straw−colored mustache, and a shock of hair of tow−color. This young man wore a variegated neck−tie, a stiff standing−collar, and a suit of clothes in the extreme of fashion. Phil looked at him hesitatingly.

The young man observed the look, and asked condescendingly:

"What can I do for you, my son?"

Such an address from a person less than three years older than himself came near upsetting the gravity of Phil.

"Is Mr. Pitkin in?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Can I see him."

"I have no objection," remarked the young man facetiously.

"Where shall I find him?"

The youth indicated a small room partitioned off as a private office in the extreme end of the store.

"Thank you," said Phil, and proceeded to find his way to the office in question.

Arrived at the door, which was partly open, he looked in.

In an arm−chair sat a small man, with an erect figure and an air of consequence. He was not over forty−five, but looked older, for his cheeks were already seamed and his look was querulous. Cheerful natures do not so soon show signs of age as their opposites.

"Mr. Pitkin?" said Phil interrogatively.

"Well?" said the small man, frowning instinctively.

"I have a note for you, sir." Phil stepped forward and handed the missive to Mr. Pitkin.

The latter opened it quickly and read as follows:

The boy who will present this to you did me a service this morning. He is in want of employment. He seems well educated, but if you can't offer him anything better than the post of errand boy, do so. I will guarantee that he will give satisfaction. You call send him to the post−office, and to other offices on such errands as you may have. Pay him five dollars a week and charge that sum to me. Yours truly, OLIVER CARTER.

Mr. Pitkin's frown deepened as he read this note.

"Pish!" he ejaculated, in a tone which, though low, was audible to Phil. "Uncle Oliver must be crazy. What is your name?" he demanded fiercely, turning suddenly to Phil.

"Philip Brent."

"When did you meet — the gentleman who gave you this letter?"

Phil told him.

"Do you know what is in this letter?"

"I suppose, sir, it is a request that you give me a place."

"Did you read it?"

"No," answered Phil indignantly.

"Humph! He wants me to give you the place of errand boy."

"I will try to suit you, sir,"

"When do you want to begin?"

"As soon as possible, sir."

"Come to−morrow morning, and report to me first."

"Another freak of Uncle Oliver's!" he muttered, as he turned his back upon Phil, and so signified that the interview was at an end.

CHAPTER XI. PHIL ENTERS UPON HIS DUTIES.

PHIL presented himself in good season the next morning at the store in Franklin Street. As he came up in one direction the youth whom he had seen in the store the previous day came up in the opposite direction. The latter was evidently surprised.

"Halloo, Johnny!" said he. "What's brought you here again?"

"Business," answered Phil.

"Going to buy out the firm?" inquired the youth jocosely.

"Not to−day."

"Some other day, then," said the young man, laughing as if he had said a very witty thing.

As Phil didn't know that this form of expression, slightly varied, had become a popular phrase of the day, he did not laugh.

"Do you belong to the church?" asked the youth, stopping short in his own mirth.

"What makes you ask?"

"Because you don't laugh."

"I would if I saw anything to laugh at."

"Come, that's hard on me. Honor bright, have you come to do any business with us?"

It is rather amusing to see how soon the cheapest clerk talks of "us," quietly identifying himself with the firm that employs him. Not that I object to it. Often it implies a personal interest in the success and prosperity of the firm, which makes a clerk more valuable. This was not, however, the case with G. Washington Wilbur, the young man who was now conversing with Phil, as will presently appear.

"I am going to work here," answered Phil simply.

"Going to work here!" repeated Mr. Wilbur in surprise. "Has old Pitkin engaged you?"

"Mr. Pitkin engaged me yesterday," Phil replied.

"I didn't know he wanted a boy. What are you to do?"

"Go to the post−office, bank, and so on."

"You're to be errand boy, then?"

"Yes."

"That's the way I started," said Mr. Wilbur patronizingly.

"What are you now?"

"A salesman. I wouldn't like to be back in my old position. What wages are you going to get?"

"Five dollars."

"Five dollars a week!" ejaculated Mr. G. Washington Wilbur, in amazement. "Come, you're chaffing."

"Why should I do that? Is that anything remarkable?"

"I should say it was," answered Mr. Wilbur slowly.

"Didn't you get as much when you were errand boy?"

"I only got two dollars and a half. Did Pitkin tell you he would pay you five dollars a week."

"No; Mr Carter told me so."

"The old gentleman — Mr. Pitkin's uncle?"

"Yes. It was at his request that Mr. Pitkin took me on."

Mr. Wilbur looked grave.

"It's a shame!" he commenced.

"What is a shame; that I should get five dollars a week?"

"No, but that I should only get a dollar a week more than an errand boy. I'm worth every cent of ten dollars a week, but the old man only gives me six. It hardly keeps me in gloves and cigars."

"Won't he give you any more?"

"No; only last month I asked him for a raise, and he told me if I wasn't satisfied I might go elsewhere."

"You didn't?"

"No, but I mean to soon. I will show old Pitkin that he can't keep a man of my experience for such a paltry salary. I dare say that Denning or Claflin would be glad to have me, and pay me what I am worth."

Phil did not want to laugh, but when Mr. Wilbur, who looked scarcely older than himself, and was in appearance but a callow youth, referred to himself as a man of experience he found it hard to resist.

"Hadn't we better be going up stairs?" asked Phil.

"All right. Follow me," said Mr. Wilbur, "and I'll take you to the superintendent of the room."

"I am to report to Mr. Pitkin himself, I believe."

"He won't be here yet awhile," said Wilbur.

But just then up came Mr. Wilbur himself, fully half an hour earlier than usual.

Phil touched his hat politely, and said:

"Good−morning."

"Good−morning!" returned his employer, regarding him sharply. "Are you the boy I hired yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come up−stairs, then."

Phil followed Mr. Pitkin up−stairs, and they walked together through the sales−room.

"I hope you understand," said Mr. Pitkin brusquely, "that I have engaged you at the request of Mr. Carter and to oblige him."

"I feel grateful to Mr. Carter," said Phil, not quite knowing what was coming next.

"I shouldn't myself have engaged a boy of whom I knew nothing, and who could give me no city references."

"I hope you won't be disappointed in me," said Phil. "I hope not," answered Mr. Pitkin, in a tone which seemed to imply that he rather expected to be.

Phil began to feel uncomfortable. It seemed evident that whatever he did would be closely scrutinized, and that in an unfavorable spirit.

Mr. Pitkin paused before a desk at which was standing a stout man with grayish hair.

"Mr. Sanderson," he said, "this is the new errand boy. His name is — what is it, boy?"

"Philip Brent."

"You will give him something to do. Has the mail come in?"

"No; we haven't sent to the post−office yet."

"You may send this boy at once."

Mr. Sanderson took from the desk a key and handed it to Philip.

"That is the key to our box," he said. "Notice the number — 534. Open it and bring the mail. Don't loiter on the way."

"Yes, sir."

Philip took the key and left the warehouse. When he reached the street he said to himself:

"I wonder where the post−office is?"

He did not like to confess to Mr. Sanderson that he did not know, for it would probably have been considered a disqualification for the post which he was filling.

"I had better walk to Broadway," he said to him self. "I suppose the post−office must be on the principal street."

In this Phil was mistaken. At that time the post−office was on Nassau Street, in an old church which had been utilized for a purpose very different from the one to which it had originally been devoted.

Reaching Broadway, Phil was saluted by a bootblack, with a grimy but honest−looking face.

"Shine your boots, mister?" said the boy, with a grin.

"Not this morning."

"Some other morning, then?"

"Yes," answered Phil.

"Sorry you won't give me a job," said the bootblack. "My taxes comes due to−day, and I ain't got enough to pay 'em."

Phil was amused, for his new acquaintance scarcely looked like a heavy taxpayer.

"Do you pay a big tax?" he asked.

"A thousand dollars or less," answered the knight of the brush.

"I guess it's less," said Phil.

"That's where your head's level, young chap."

"Is the post−office far from here?"

"Over half a mile, I reckon."

"Is it on this street?"

"No, it's on Nassau Street."

"If you will show me the way there I'll give you ten cents."

"All right! The walk'll do me good. Come on!"

"What's your name?" asked Phil, who had become interested in his new acquaintance.

"The boys call me Ragged Dick."

It was indeed the lively young bootblack whose history was afterward given in a volume which is probably familiar to many of my readers. At this time he was only a bootblack, and had not yet begun to feel the spur of that ambition which led to his subsequent prosperity.

"That's a queer name," said Phil.

"I try to live up to it," said Dick, with a comical glance at his ragged coat, which had originally been worn by a man six feet in height.

He swung his box over his shoulder, and led the way to the old post−office.

CHAPTER XII. MR. LIONEL LAKE AGAIN.

PHIL continued his conversation with Ragged Dick, and was much amused by his quaint way of expressing himself.

When they reached Murray Street, Dick said:

"Follow me. We'll cut across the City Hall Park. It is the shortest way."

Soon they reached the shabby old building with which New Yorkers were then obliged to be content with as a post−office.

Phil secured the mail matter for Pitkin Co., and was just about leaving the office, when he noticed just ahead of him a figure which looked very familiar.

It flashed upon him of a sudden that it was his old train acquaintance, Lionel Lake. He immediately hurried forward and touched his arm.

Mr. Lake, who had several letters in his hand, started nervously, and turned at the touch. He recognized Phil, but appeared not to do so.

"What do you wish, boy?" he asked, loftily."

"I want to speak a word with you, Mr. Lake."

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "You are mistaken in the person," he said. "My name is not Lake."

"Very likely not," said Phil significantly, "but that's what you called yourself when we met on the train."

"I repeat, boy, that you are strangely mistaken. My name is" — he paused slightly — "John Montgomery."

"Just as you please. Whatever your name is, I have a little business with you."

"I can't stop. My business is urgent," said Lake.

"Then I will be brief. I lent you five dollars on a ring which I afterward discovered to be stolen. I want you to return that money."

Mr. Lake looked about him apprehensively, for he did not wish any one to hear what Phil was saying.

"You must be crazy!" he said. "I never saw you before in the whole course of my life."

He shook off Phil's detaining hand, and was about to hurry away, but Phil said resolutely:

"You can't deceive me, Mr. Lake. Give me that money, or I will call a policeman."

Now, it happened that a policeman was passing just outside, and Lake could see him.

"This is an infamous outrage!" he said, "but I have an important appointment, and can't be detained. Take the money. I give it to you in charity." Phil gladly received and pocketed the bank−note, and relinquishing his hold of Mr. Lake, rejoined Dick, who had been an interested eye−witness of the interview.

"I see you've got pluck," said Dick. "What's it all about?"

Phil told him.

"I ain't a bit s'prised," said Dick. "I could tell by his looks that the man was a skin."

"Well, I'm even with him, at any rate," said Phil.

"Now I'll be getting back to the office. Thank you for your guidance. Here's a quarter."

"You only promised me ten cents."

"It's worth a quarter. I hope to meet you again."

"We'll meet at Astor's next party," said Dick, with a grin. "My invite came yesterday."

"Mine hasn't come yet," said Phil, smiling.

"Maybe it'll come to−morrow."

"He's a queer chap," thought Phil. "He's fit for something better than blacking boots. I hope he'll have the luck to get it."

Phil had been detained by his interview with Mr. Lake, but he made up for it by extra speed, and reached the warehouse in fair time. After delivering the letters he was sent out on another errand, and during the entire day he was kept busy.

Leaving him for the moment we go back to the Pitkin mansion, and listen to conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin. "Uncle Oliver is getting more and more eccentric every day," said the lady. "He brought home a boy to lunch to−day — some one whom he had picked up in the street."

"Was the boy's name Philip Brent?" asked her husband.

"Yes, I believe so. What do you know about him?" asked the lady in surprise.

"I have engaged him as errand boy."

"You have! What for?" exclaimed Mrs. Pitkin.

"I couldn't help it. He brought a letter from your uncle, requesting me to do so, and offering to pay his wages out of his own pocket."

"This is really getting very serious," said Mrs. Pitkin, annoyed. "Suppose he should take a fancy to this boy?"

"He appears to have done so already," said her husband dryly.

"I mean, suppose he should adopt him?"

"You are getting on pretty fast, Lavinia, are you not?"

"Such things happen sometimes," said the lady, nodding. "If it should happen it would be bad for poor Lonny."

"Even in that case Lonny won't have to go to the poor−house."

"Mr. Pitkin, you don't realize the danger. Here's Uncle Oliver worth a quarter of a million dollars, and it ought to be left to us."

"Probably it will be."

"He may leave it all to this boy. This must be prevented."

"How?"

"You must say the boy doesn't suit you, and discharge him."

"Well, well, give me time. I have no objection; but I suspect it will be hard to find any fault with him. He looks like a reliable boy."

"To me he looks like an artful young adventurer," said Mrs. Pitkin vehemenntly. "Depend upon it, Mr. Pitkin, he will spare no pains to ingratiate himself into Uncle Oliver's favor."

It will be seen that Mrs. Pitkin was gifted — if it can be called a gift — with a very suspicious temperament. She was mean and grasping, and could not bear the idea of even a small part of her uncle's money going to any one except her own family. There was, indeed, another whose relationship to Uncle Oliver was as close — a cousin, who had estranged her relatives by marrying a poor bookkeeper, with whom she had gone to Milwaukee. Her name was never mentioned in the Pitkin household, and Mrs. Pitkin, trusting to the distance between them, did not apprehend any danger from this source. Had she known Rebecca Forbush was even now in New York, a widow with one child, struggling to make a living by sewing and taking lodgers, she would have felt less tranquil. But she knew nothing of all this, nor did she dream that the boy whom she dreaded was the very next day to make the acquaintance of this despised relation.

This was the way that it happened:

Phil soon tired of the room he had taken in Fifth Street. It was not neatly kept, and was far from comfortable. Then again, he found that the restaurants, cheap as they were, were likely to absorb about all his salary, though the bill−of−fare was far from attractive.

Chance took him through a side−street, between Second and Third Avenues, in the neighborhood of Thirteenth Street,

Among the three and four−story buildings that lined the block was one frame−house, two−story−and−basement, on which he saw a sign, "Board for Gentlemen." He had seen other similar signs, but his attention was specially drawn to this by seeing a pleasant−looking woman enter the house with the air of proprietor. This woman recalled to Philip his own mother, to whom she bore a striking resemblance.

"I would like to board with one whose face recalled that of my dear dead mother," thought Phil, and on the impulse of the moment, just after the woman had entered, he rang the door−bell.

The door was opened almost immediately by the woman he had just seen enter.

It seemed to Phil almost as if he were looking into his mother's face, and he inquired in an unsteady voice:

"Do you take boarders?"

"Yes," was the answer. "Won't you step in?"

CHAPTER XIII. PHIL'S NEW HOME.

THE HOUSE was poorly furnished with cheap furniture, but there was an unexpected air of neatness about it. There is a great difference between respectable and squalid poverty. It was the first of these that was apparent in the small house in which our hero found himself.

"I am looking for a boarding−place," said Philip. "I cannot afford to pay a high price."

"And I should not think of asking a high price for such plain accommodations as I can offer," said Mrs. Forbush. "What sort of a room do you desire?"

"A small room will answer."

"I have a hall−bedroom at the head of the stairs. Will you go up and look at it?"

"I should like to do so."

Mrs. Forbush led the way up a narrow staircase, and Philip followed her.

Opening the door of the small room referred to, she showed a neat bed, a chair, a wash−stand, and a few hooks from which clothing might be hung. It was plain enough, but there was an air of neatness which did not characterize his present room.

"I like the room," he said, brightening up. "How much do you charge for this room and board?"

"Four dollars. That includes breakfast and supper," answered Mrs. Forbush. "Lunch you provide for yourself."

"That will be satisfactory," said Phil. "I am in a place down town, and I could not come to lunch, at any rate."

"When would you like to come, Mr. — — ?" said the widow interrogatively."

"My name is Philip Brent."

"Mr. Brent."

"I will come some time to−morrow."

"Generally I ask a small payment in advance, as a guarantee that an applicant will really come, but I am sure I can trust you."

"Thank you, but I am quite willing to conform to your usual rule," said Phil, as he drew a two−dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to the widow.

So they parted, mutually pleased. Phil's week at his present lodging would not be up for several days, but he was tired of it, and felt that he would be much more comfortable with Mrs. Forbush. So he was ready to make the small pecuniary sacrifice needful.

The conversation which has been recorded took but five minutes, and did not materially delay Phil, who, as I have already said, was absent from the store on an errand.

The next day Phil became installed at his new boarding−place, and presented himself at supper.

There were three other boarders, two being a young salesman at a Third Avenue store and his wife. They occupied a square room on the same floor with Phil. The other was a female teacher, employed in one of the city public schools. The only remaining room was occupied by a drummer, who was often called away for several days together. This comprised the list of boarders, but Phil's attention was called to a young girl of fourteen, of sweet and attractive appearance, whom he ascertained to be a daughter of Mrs. Forbush. The young lady herself, Julia Forbush, cast frequent glances at Phil, who, being an unusually good−looking boy, would naturally excite the notice of a young girl.

On the whole, it seemed a pleasant and social circle, and Phil felt that he had found a home.

The next day, as he was occupied in the store, next to G. Washington Wilbur, he heard that young man say:

"Why, there's Mr. Carter coming into the store!"

Mr. Oliver Carter, instead of making his way directly to the office where Mr. Pitkin was sitting, came up to where Phil was at work.

"How are you getting along, my young friend?" he asked familiarly. "Very well, thank you, sir."

"Do you find your duties very fatiguing?"

"Oh, no, sir. I have a comfortable time."

"That's right. Work cheerfully and you will win the good opinion of your employer. Don't forget to come up and see me soon."

"Thank you, sir."

"You seem to be pretty solid with the old man," remarked Mr. Wilbur.

"We are on very good terms," answered Phil, smiling.

"I wish you had introduced him to me," said Wilbur.

"Don't you know him?" asked Phil, in surprise.

"He doesn't often come to the store, and when he does he generally goes at once to the office, and the clerks don't have a chance to get acquainted."

"I should hardly like to take the liberty, then," said Phil.

"Oh, keep him to yourself, then, if you want to," said Mr. Wilbur, evidently annoyed.

"I don't care to do that. I shall be entirely willing to introduce you when there is a good chance."

This seemed to appease Mr. Wilbur, who became once more gracious.

"Philip," he said, as the hour of closing approached, "why can't you come around and call upon me this evening?"

"So I will," answered Phil readily. Indeed, he found it rather hard to fill up his evenings, and was glad to have a way suggested.

"Do. I want to tell you a secret."

"Where do you live?" asked Phil.

"No. — — East Twenty−second Street."

"All right. I will come round about half−past seven."

Though Wilbur lived in a larger house than he, Phil did not like his room as well. There being only one chair in the room, Mr. Wilbur put his visitor in it, and himself sat on the bed.

There was something of a mystery in the young man's manner as, after clearing his throat, he said to Phil:

"I am going to tell you a secret."

Phil's curiosity was somewhat stirred, and he signified that he would like to hear it.

"I have for some time wanted a confidant," said Mr. Wilbur. "I did not wish to trust a mere acquaintance, for — ahem! — the matter is quite a delicate one.

Phil regarded him with increased interest.

"I am flattered by your selecting me," said he. "I will keep your secret."

"Phil," said Mr. Wilbur, in a tragic tone, "you may be surprised to hear that I am in LOVE!"

Phil started and wanted to laugh, but Mr. Wilbur's serious, earnest look restrained him.

"Ain't you rather young?" he ventured to say. "No; I am nineteen," answered Mr. Wilbur.

"The heart makes no account of years."

Whether this was original or borrowed, Phil could not tell.

"Have you been in love long?" asked Phil.

"Three weeks."

"Does the lady know it?"

"Not yet," returned Mr. Wilbur. "I have worshiped her from afar. I have never even spoken to her."

"Then the matter hasn't gone very far?"

"No, not yet."

"Where did you meet her first?"

"In a Broadway stage."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know much about her, then?"

"Yes; I know where she lives."

"Where?"

"On Lexington Avenue."

"Whereabouts?"

"Between Twenty−ninth and Thirtieth Streets. Would you like to see her house?"

"Yes," answered Phil, who saw that Mr. Wilbur wished him so to answer.

"Then come out. We might see her."

The two boys — for Mr. Wilbur, though he considered himself a young man of large experience, was really scarcely more than a boy — bent their steps to Lexington Avenue, and walked in a northerly direction.

They had reached Twenty−eighth Street, when the door of house farther up on the avenue was opened and a lady came out.

"That's she!" ejaculated Mr. Wilbur, clutching Phil by the arm.

Phil looked, and saw a tall young lady, three or four inches taller than his friend and as many years older. He looked at his companion with surprise.

"Is that the young lady you are in love with?" he asked.

"Yes; isn't she a daisy?" asked the lover fervently.

"I am not much of a judge of daisies,' answered Phil, a little embarrassed, for the young lady had large features, and was, in his eyes, very far from pretty.

CHAPTER XIV. CONSULTING THE ORACLE.

PHIL did not like to hurt the feelings of his companion, and refrained from laughing, though with difficulty.

"She doesn't appear to know you," he said.

"No," said Wilbur; "I haven't had a chance to make myself known to her."

"Do you think you can make a favorable impression upon — the daisy?" asked Phil, outwardly sober, but inwardly amused.

"I always had a taking way with girls," replied Mr. Wilbur complacently.

Phil coughed. It was all that saved him from laughing.

While he was struggling with the inclination, the lady inadvertently dropped a small parcel which she had been carrying in her hand. The two boys were close behind. Like an arrow from the bow Mr. Wilbur sprang forward, picked up the parcel, and while his heart beat wildly, said, as he tendered it to the owner, with a graceful bow and captivating smile:

"Miss, I believe you dropped this."

"Thank you, my good boy," answered the daisy pleasantly.

Mr. Wilbur staggered back as if he had been struck. He fell back in discomfiture, and his face showed the mortification and anguish he felt.

"Did you hear what she said?" he asked, in a hollow voice.

"She called you a boy, didn't she?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Wilbur sadly.

"Perhaps she may be near−sighted," said Phil consolingly.

"Do you think so?" asked Mr. Wilbur hopefully.

"It is quite possible. Then you are short, you know."

"Yes, it must be so," said G. Washington Wilbur, his face more serene. "If she hadn't been she would have noticed my mustache."

"True."

"She spoke kindly. If — if she had seen how old I was, it would have been different, don't you think so?"

"Yes, no doubt."

"There is only one thing to do," said Mr. Wilbur, in a tone of calm resolve.

"What is that?" inquired Phil, in some curiosity.

"I must wear a stove−pipe hat! As you say, I am small, and a near−sighted person might easily suppose me to be younger than I am. Now, with a stove−pipe hat I shall look much older."

"Yes, I presume so."

"Then I can make her acquaintance again, and she will not mistake me. Phil, why don't you wear a stove−pipe?"

"Because I don't want to look any older than I am. Besides, an errand−boy wouldn't look well in a tall hat."

"No, perhaps not."

"And Mr. Pitkin would hardly like it."

"Of course. When you are a salesman like me it will be different."

Mr. Wilbur was beginning to recover his complacency, which had been so rudely disturbed.

"I suppose you wouldn't think of marrying on your present salary?" said Phil. "Six dollars a week wouldn't support a married pair very well."

"The firm would raise my salary. They always do when a man marries. Besides, I have other resources."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I am worth two thousand dollars. It was left me by an aunt, and is kept in trust for me until I am twenty−one. I receive the interest now."

"I congratulate you," said Phil, who was really pleased to hear of his companion's good fortune.

"That money will come in handy."

"Besides, I expect she's got money," continued Mr. Wilbur. "Of course, I love her for herself alone — I am not mercenary — still, it will be a help when we are married."

"So it will," said Phil, amused at the confident manner in which Mr. Wilbur spoke of marriage with a lady of whom he knew absolutely nothing.

"Philip," said Mr. Wilbur, "when I marry, I want you to stand up with me — to be my groomsman."

"If I am in the city, and can afford to buy a dress−suit, I might consent."

"Thank you. You are a true friend!" said Mr. Wilbur, squeezing his hand fervently.

The two returned to Mr. Wilbur's room and had a chat. At an early hour Phil returned to his own boarding−place.

As time passed on, Phil and Wilbur spent considerable time together out of the store. Mr. G. Washington Wilbur, apart from his amusing traits, was a youth of good principles and good disposition, and Phil was glad of his company. Sometimes they went to cheap amusements, but not often, for neither had money to spare for such purposes.

Some weeks after Phil's entrance upon his duties Mr. Wilbur made a proposal to Phil of a startling nature.

"Suppose we have our fortunes told, Phil?" he said.

"If it would help my fortune, or hurry it up, I shouldn't object," said Phil, smiling.

"I want to know what fate has in store for me," said Wilbur.

"Do you think the fortune−tellers know any better than you do?" asked Phil incredulously. "They tell some strange things," said Wilbur.

"What, for instance?"

"An aunt of mine went to a fortune−teller and asked if she would ever be married, and when? She was told that she would be married before she was twenty−two, to a tall, light−complexioned man."

"Did it come true?"

"Yes, every word," said Mr. Wilbur solemnly. "She was married three months before her twenty−second birthday, and her husband was just the kind of man that was predicted. Wasn't that strange?"

"The fortune−teller might easily have guessed all that. Most girls are married as young as that."

"But not to tall, light−complexioned men!" said Wilbur triumphantly.

"Is there anything you wish particularly to know?" asked Phil.

"I should like to know if I am going to marry — you know who."

"The daisy?"

"Yes."

Phil was not much in favor of the scheme, but finally agreed to it.

There was a certain "Veiled Lady," who advertised her qualifications in the Herald, as the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, and therefore gifted with the power to read the future. Mr. Wilbur made choice of her, and together they went to call upon her one evening. They were shown into an anteroom, and in due time Mr. Wilbur was called into the dread presence. He was somewhat nervous and agitated, but "braced up," as he afterward expressed it, and went in. He wanted Phil to go in with him, but the attendant said that madam would not allow it, and he went forward alone.

Fifteen minutes afterward he re−entered the room with a radiant face.

"Have you heard good news?" asked Phil.

Mr. Wilbur nodded emphatically and whispered, for there were two others in waiting:

"It's all right. I am to marry her."

"Did the fortune−teller say so?"

"Yes."

"Did she give her name?"

"No, but she described her so that I knew her at once."

"Will it be soon?" asked Phil slyly.

"Not till I am twenty−four," answered Mr. Wilbur soberly. "But perhaps she may be mistaken about that. Perhaps she thought I was older than I am."

"Do you doubt her knowledge, then?"

"No; at any rate, I can wait, since she is to be mine at last. Besides, I am to be rich. When I am thirty years old I am to be worth twenty thousand dollars."

"I congratulate you, Wilbur," said Phil, smiling. "You are all right, at least,"

"The next gentleman!" said the attendant.

Phil entered the inner room, and looked about him in curiosity.

A tall woman sat upon a sort of throne, with one hand resting on a table beside her. A tall wax−taper supplied the place of the light of day, which was studiously excluded from the room by thick, dark curtains. Over the woman's

face was a black veil, which gave her an air of mystery.

"Come hither, boy!" she said, in a clear, commanding voice.

Phil advanced, not wholly unimpressed, though he felt skeptical.

The woman bent forward, starting slightly and scanned his face eagerly.

CHAPTER XV. PHIL AND THE FORTUNE−TELLER.

DO YOU wish to hear of the past or the future?" asked the fortune−teller.

"Tell me something of the past," said Phil, with a view of testing the knowledge of the seeress.

"You have left an uncongenial home to seek your fortune in New York. You left without regret, and those whom you have left behind do not miss you."

Phil started in amazement. This was certainly true.

"Shall I find the fortune I seek?" asked our hero earnestly.

"Yes, but not in the way you expect. You think yourself alone in the world!"

The fortune−teller paused, and looked searchingly at the boy.

"So I am," returned Phil.

"No boy who has a father living can consider himself alone."

"My father is dead!" returned Phil, growing skeptical.

"You are mistaken."

"I am not likely to be mistaken in such a matter. My father died a few months since."

"Your father still lives!" said the fortune−teller sharply. "Do not contradict me!"

"I don't see how you can say that. I attended his funeral."

"You attended the funeral of the man whose name you bear. He was not your father."

Phil was much excited by this confirmation of his step−mother's story. He had entertained serious doubts of its being true, thinking it might have been trumped up by Mrs. Brent to drive him from home, and interfere with his succession to any part of Mr. Brent's property.

"Is my step−mother's story true, then?" he asked breathlessly. "She told me I was not the son of Mr. Brent."

"Her story was true," said the veiled lady.

"Who is my real father, then?"

The lady did not immediately reply. She seemed to be peering into distant space, as she said slowly:

"I see a man of middle size, dark−complexioned, leading a small child by the hand. He pauses before a house — it looks like an inn. A lady comes out from the inn. She is kindly of aspect. She takes the child by the hand and leads him into the inn. Now I see the man go away — alone. The little child remains behind. I see him growing up. He has become a large boy, but the scene has changed. The inn has disappeared. I see a pleasant village and a comfortable house. The boy stands at the door. He is well−grown now. A lady stands on the threshold as his steps turn away. She is thin and sharp−faced. She is not like the lady who welcomed the little child. Can you tell me who this boy is?" asked the fortune−teller, fixing her eyes upon Phil.

"It is myself!" he answers, his flushed face showing the excitement he felt.

"You have said!"

"I don't know how you have learned all this," said Phil, "but it is wonderfully exact. Will you answer a question?"

"Ask!"

"You say my father — my real father — is living?"

The veiled lady bowed her head.

"Where is he?"

"That I cannot say, but he is looking for you."

"He is in search of me?"

"Yes."

"Why has he delayed it so long?"

"There are circumstances which I cannot explain which have prevented his seeking and claiming you."

"Will he do so?"

"I have told you that he is now seeking for you. I think he will find you at last."

"What can I do to bring this about?"

"Do nothing! Stay where you are. Circumstances are working favorably, but you must wait.

There are some drawbacks."

"What are they?"

"You have two enemies, or rather one, for the other does not count."

"Is that enemy a man?"

"No, it is a woman."

"My step−mother!" ejaculated Phil, with immediate conviction.

"You have guessed aright."

"And who is the other?"

"A boy."

"Jonas?"

"It is the son of the woman whom you call your step−mother."

"What harm can they do me? I am not afraid of them," said Phil, raising his head proudly.

"Do not be too confident! The meanest are capable of harm. Mrs. Brent does not like you because she is a mother."

"She fears that I will interfere with her son."

"You are all right."

"Is there anything more you can tell me?" asked Phil. "Have I any other enemies?"

"Yes; there are two more — also a woman and her son."

"That puzzles me. I can think of no one."

"They live in the city."

"I know. It is Mrs. Pitkin, my employer's wife. Why should she dislike me?"

"There is an old man who likes you. That is the cause."

"I see. She doesn't want him to be kind to any one out of the family."

"That is all I have to tell you," said the fortune−teller abruptly. "You can go."

"You have told me strange things," said Phil.

"Will you tell me how it is you know so much about a stranger?"

"I have nothing more to tell you. You can go!" said the veiled lady impatiently.

"At least tell me how much I am to pay you."

"Nothing."

"But I thought you received fees."

"Not from you."

"Did you not take something from my friend who was in here before me?"

"Yes."

"You told him a good fortune."

"He is a fool!" said the fortune−teller contemptuously. "I saw what he wanted and predicted it."

She waved her hand, and Phil felt that he had no excuse for remaining longer.

He left the room slowly, and found Mr. Wilbnr anxiously awaiting him.

"What did she tell you, Phil?" he asked eagerly. "Did she tell you what sort of a wife you would have?"

"No. I didn't ask her," answered Phil, smiling.

"I should think you'd want to know. What did she tell you, then?"

"She told me quite a number of things about my past life and the events of my childhood."

"I shouldn't have cared about that," said Wilbur, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, I know all about that myself. What I want to know about is, whether I am to marry the girl I adore."

"But you see, Wilbur, I don't adore anybody. I am not in love as you are."

"Of course that makes a difference," said Wilbur. "I'm glad I came, Phil. Ain't you?"

"Yes," answered Phil slowly.

"You see, it's such a satisfaction to know that all is coming right at last. I am to marry her, you know, and although it isn't till I am twenty−four — — "

"She will be nearly thirty by that time," said Phil slyly.

"She won't look it!" said Mr. Wilbur, wincing a little. "When I am thirty I shall be worth twenty thousand dollars."

"You can't save it very soon out of six dollars a week."

"That is true. I feel sure I shall be raised soon. Did the fortune−teller say anythimg about your getting rich?"

"No. I can't remember that she did. Oh, yes! she said I would make my fortune, but not in the way I expected."

"That is queer!" said Mr. Wilbur, interested. "What could she mean?"

"I suppose she meant that I would not save a competence out of five dollars a week."

"Maybe so."

"I have been thinking, Wilbur, you have an advantage over the young lady you are to marry. You know that you are to marry her, but she doesn't know who is to be her husband."

"That is true," said Wilbur seriously. "If I can find out her name, I will write her an anonymous letter, asking her to call on the veiled Lady."

CHAPTER XVI. MRS. BRENT'S STRANGE TEMPTATION.

NOW THAT Phil is fairly established in the city, circumstances require us to go back to the country town which he had once called home.

Mrs. Brent is sitting, engaged with her needle, in the same room where she had made the important revelation to Phil.

Jonas entered the house, stamping the snow from his boots.

"Is supper most ready, mother?" he asked.

"No, Jonas; it is only four o'clock," replied Mrs. Brent.

"I'm as hungry as a bear. I guess it's the skating."

"I wish you would go to the post−office before supper, Jonas. There might be a letter."

"Do you expect to hear from Phil?"

"He said nothing about writing," said Mrs. Brent indifferently. "He will do as he pleases about it."

"I did't know but he would be writing for money," chuckled Jonas.

"If he did, I would send him some," said Mrs. Brent. "You would!" repeated Jonas, looking at his mother in surprise.

"Yes, I would send him a dollar or two, so that people needn't talk. It is always best to avoid gossip."

"Are you expecting a letter from anybody, mother?" asked Jonas, after a pause.

"I dreamed last night I should receive an important letter," said Mrs. Brent.

"With money in it?" asked Jonas eagerly.

"I don't know."

"If any such letter comes, will you give me some of the money?"

"If you bring me a letter containing money," said Mrs. Brent, "I will give you a dollar."

"Enough said!" exclaimed Jonas, who was fond of money; "I'm off to the post−office at once."

Mrs. Brent let the work fall into her lap and looked intently before her. A flush appeared on her pale face, and she showed signs of restlessness.

"It is strange," she said to herself, "how I have allowed myself to be affected by that dream. I am not superstitious,

but I cannot get over the idea that a letter will reach me to−night, and that it will have an important bearing upon my life. I have a feeling, too, that it will relate to the boy Philip."

She rose from her seat and began to move about the room. It was a, relief to her in the restless state of her mind. She went to the window to look for Jonas, and her excitement rose as she saw him approaching. When he saw his mother looking from the window, he held aloft a letter.

"The letter has come," she said, her heart beating faster than its wont. "It is an important letter. How slow Jonas is."

And she was inclined to be vexed at the deliberation with which her son was advancing toward the house.

But he came at last.

"Well, mother, I've got a letter — a letter from Philadelphia," he said. "It isn't from Phil, for I know his writing."

"Give it to me, Jonas," said his mother, outwardly calm, but inwardly excited.

"Do you know any one in Philadelphia, mother?"

"No."

She cut open the envelope and withdrew the inclosed sheet.

"Is there any money in it?" asked Jonas eagerly.

"No."

"Just my luck!" said Jonas sullenly.

"Wait a minute," said his mother. "If the letter is really important, I'll give you twenty−five cents."

She read the letter, and her manner soon showed that she was deeply interested.

We will look over her shoulders and read it with her: "CONTINENTAL HOTEL, PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 5.
"DEAR MADAM: — I write to you on a matter of the greatest importance to my happiness, and shall most anxiously await your reply. I would come to you in person, but am laid up with an attack of rheumatism, and my physician forbids me to travel.

"You are, as I have been informed, the widow of Gerald Brent, who thirteen years since kept a small hotel in the small village of Fultonville, in Ohio. At that date I one day registered myself as his guest. I was not alone. My only son, then a boy of three, accompanied me. My wife was dead, and my affections centered upon this child. Yet the next morning I left him under the charge of yourself and your husband, and pursued my journey. From that day to this I have not seen the boy, nor have I written to you or Mr. Brent. This seems strange, does it not? It requires an explanation, and that explanation I am ready to give.

"To be brief, then, I was fleeing from undeserved suspicion. Circumstances which a need not detail had connected my name with the mysterious disappearance of a near friend, and the fact that a trifling dispute between us had taken place in the presence of witnesses had strengthened their suspicions. Knowing myself to be innocent, but unable to prove it, I fled, taking my child with me. When I reached Fultonville, I became alive to the ease with which I might be traced, through the child's companionship. There was no resource but to leave him. Your

husband and yourself impressed me as kind and warm−hearted. I was specially impressed by the gentleness with which you treated my little Philip, and I felt that to you I could safely trust him. I did not, however, dare to confide my secret to any one. I simply said I would leave the boy with you till he should recover from his temporary indisposition, and then, with outward calmness but inward anguish, I left my darling, knowing not if I should ever see him again.

"Well, time passed. I went to Nevada, changed my name, invested the slender sum I had with me in mining, and, after varying fortune, made a large fortune at last. But better fortune still awaited me. In a poor mining hut, two months since, I came across a man who confessed that he was guilty of the murder of which I had been suspected. His confession was reduced in writing, sworn to before a magistrate, and now at last I feel myself a free man. No one now could charge me with a crime from which my soul revolted.

"When this matter was concluded, my first thought was of the boy whom I had not seen for thirteen long years. I could claim him now before all the world; I could endow him with the gifts of fortune; I could bring him up in luxury, and I could satisfy a father's affectionate longing. I could not immediately ascertain where you were. I wrote to Fultonville, to the postmaster, and learned that you and Mr. Brent had moved away and settled down in Gresham, in the State of New York. I learned also that my Philip was still living, but other details I did not learn. But I cared not, so long as my boy still lived.

"And now you may guess my wish and my intention. I shall pay you handsomely for your kind care of Philip, but I must have my boy back again. We have been separated too long. I can well understand that you are attached to him, and I will find a home for you and Mr. Brent near my own, where you can see as often as you like the boy whom you have so tenderly reared. Will you do me the favor to come at once, and bring the boy with you? The expenses of your journey shall, of course, be reimbursed, and I will take care that the pecuniary part of my obligations to you shall be amply repaid. I have already explained why I cannot come in person to claim my dear child.

"Telegraph to me when you will reach Philadelphia, and I will engage a room for you. Philip will stay with me. Yours gratefully, "OSCAR GRANVILLE."

"Mother, here is a slip of paper that has dropped from the letter," said Jonas.

He picked up and handed to his mother a check on a Philadelphia bank for the sum of one hundred dollars.

"Why, that's the same as money, isn't it?" asked Jonas.

"Yes, Jonas."

"Then you'll keep your promise, won't you?"

Mrs. Brent silently drew from her pocket−book a two−dollar bill and handed it to Jonas.

"Jonas," she said, "if you won't breathe a word of it, I will tell you a secret."

"All right, mother."

"We start for Philadelphia to−morrow."

"By gosh! that's jolly," exclaimed Jonas, overjoyed. "I'll keep mum. What was in the letter, mother?"

"I will not tell you just now. You shall know very soon."

Mrs. Brent did not sleep much that night. Her mind was intent upon a daring scheme of imposture. Mr. Granville was immensely wealthy, no doubt. Why should she not pass off Jonas upon him as his son Philip, and thus secure a fortune for her own child?

CHAPTER XVII. JONAS JOINS THE CONSPIRACY.

LATER in the evening Mrs. Brent took Jonas into her confidence. She was a silent, secretive woman by nature, and could her plan have been carried out without imparting it to any one, she would gladly have had it so. But Jonas must be her active accomplice, and it was as well to let him know at once what he must do.

In the evening, when Jonas, tired with his day's skating, was lying on the lounge, Mrs. Brent rose deliberately from her seat, peeped into the adjoining room, then went to each window to make sure there was no eavesdropper, then resumed her seat and said:

"Jonas, get up. I want to speak to you."

"I am awfully tired, mother. I can hear you while I lie here."

"Jonas, do you hear me? I am about to speak to you of something no other person must hear. Get a chair and draw it close to mine."

Jonas rose, his curiosity stimulated by his mother's words and manner.

"Is it about the letter, mother?" he asked. "Yes, it relates to the letter and our journey to−morrow."

Jonas had wondered what the letter was about and who had sent his mother the hundred−dollar check, and he made no further objection. He drew a chair in front of his mother and said:

"Go ahead, mother, I'm listening."

"Would you like to be rich, Jonas?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"Wouldn't I?"

"Would you like to be adopted by a very rich man, have a pony to ride, plenty of pocket−money, fine clothes and in the end a large fortune?"

"That would just suit me, mother," answered the boy eagerly. "Is there any chance of it?"

"Yes, if you follow my directions implicitly."

"I will, mother," said Jonas, his eyes shining with desire. "Only tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"Do you remember what I told Philip the evening before he went away?"

"About his being left at Mr. Brent's hotel? Yes, I remember it."

"And about his true father having disappeared?"

"Yes, yes."

"Jonas, the letter I received this afternoon was from Philip's real father."

"By gosh!" ejaculated Jonas, altering his usual expression of surprise.

"He is in Philadelphia. He is a very rich man."

"Then Phil will be rich," said Jonas, disappointed.

"I thought you said it would be me."

"Philip's father has never seen him since he was three years old," continued Mrs. Brent, taking no notice of her son's tone.

"What difference does that make, mother?"

"Jonas," said Mrs. Brent, bending toward her son, "if I choose to tell him that you are Philip, he won't know the difference. Do you understand?"

Jonas did understand.

"That's a bully idea, mother! Can we pull the wool over the old man's eyes, do you think?"

"I wish you would not use such expressions, Jonas. They are not gentlemanly, and you are to be a young gentleman."

"All right, mother."

"We can manage it if you are very careful. It is worth the trouble, Jonas. I think Mr. Granville — that is his name — must be worth a quarter of a million dollars, and if he takes you for Philip the whole will probably go to you."

"What a head you've got, mother!" exclaimed Jonas admiringly. "It is a tip−top chance."

"Yes, it is one chance in ten thousand. But you must do just as I tell you."

"Oh, I'll do that, mother. What must I do?"

"To begin with, you must take Philip's name. You must remember that you are no longer Jonas Webb, but Philip Brent."

"That'll be a bully joke!" said Jonas, very much amused. "What would Phil say if he knew I had taken his name?"

"He must not know. Henceforth we must endeavor to keep out of his way. Again, you must consider me your step−mother, not your own mother."

"Yes, I understand. What are you going to do first, mother?"

"We start for Philadelphia to−morrow. Your father is lying sick at the Continental Hotel."

Jonas roared with delight at the manner in which his mother spoke of the sick stranger.

"Oh, it'll be fun, mother! Shall we live in Philadelphia?"

"I don't know. That will be as Mr. Granville thinks best."

"Where are you going, mother? Are you going to live here?"

"Of course I shall be with you. I will make that a condition. I cannot be parted from my only boy."

"But I shall be Mr. Granville's boy."

"To the public you will be. But when we are together in private, we shall be once more mother and son."

"I am afraid you will spoil all," said Jonas. "Old Granville will suspect something if you seem to care too much for me."

The selfish nature of Jonas was cropping out, and his mother felt, with a pang, that he would be reconciled to part with her forever for the sake of the brilliant prospects and the large fortune which Mr. Granville could offer him.

She was outwardly cold, but such affection as she was capable of she expended on this graceless and ungrateful boy.

"You seem to forget that I may have some feeling in the matter," said Mrs. Brent coldly, but with inward pain. "If the result of this plan were to be that we should be permanently separated, I would never consent to it."

"Just as you like, mother," said Jonas, with an ill grace. "I don't look much like Phil."

"No, there will be a difficulty. Still Mr. Granville has never seen Philip since he was three years old, and that is in our favor. He thinks I am Mr. Brent's first wife."

"Shall you tell him?"

"I don't know. I will be guided by circumstances. Perhaps it may be best. I wouldn't like to have it discovered that I had deceived him in that."

"How are you going to manage about this place, mother?"

"I am going to write to your Uncle Jonas to take charge of it. I will let him have it at a nominal rent. Then, if our plan miscarries we shall have a place to come back to."

"Were you ever in Philadelphia, mother?"

"No; but there will be no trouble in journeying there. I shall pack your clothes and my own to−night. Of course, Jonas, when you meet Mr. Granville you must seem to be fond of him. Then you must tell him how kind I have been to you. In fact, you must act precisely as Philip might be expected to do."

"Yes, mother; and you must be careful not to call me Jonas. That will spoil all, you know."

"Rest assured that I shall be on my guard. If you are as careful as I am, Philip — — "

Jonas burst into a guffaw at the new name.

"It's just like play−acting, mother," he said.

"But it will pay better," said Mrs. Brent quietly. "I think it will be best for me to begin calling you Philip at once — that is, as soon as we have left town — so that we may both get accustomed to it."

"All right, mother. You've got a good headpiece."

"I will manage things properly. If you consent to be guided by me, all will be right."

"Oh, I'll do it mother. I wish we were on our way."

"You can go to bed if you like. I must stay up late to−night. I have to pack our trunks."

The next day the pair of adventurers left Gresham. From the earliest available point Mrs. Brent telegraphed to Mr. Granville that she was on her way, with the son from whom he had so long been separated.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE CONSPIRACY SUCCEEDS.

IN A HANDSOME private parlor at the Continental Hotel a man of about forty−five years of age sat in an easy−chair. He was of middle height, rather dark complexion, and a pleasant expression. His right foot was bandaged, and rested on a chair. The morning Daily Ledger was in his hand, but he was not reading. His mind, judging from his absorbed look, was occupied with other thoughts.

"I can hardly realize," he said half−aloud, "that my boy will so soon be restored to my arms. We have been separated by a cruel fate, but we shall soon be together again. I remember how the dear child looked when I left him at Fultonville in the care of the kind inn−keeper. I am sorry he is dead, but his widow shall be suitably repaid for her kind devotion."

He had reached this point when a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Granville.

A servant of the hotel appeared. "A lady and a boy are in the parlor below, sir. They wish to see you."

Though Mr. Granville had considerable control over his feelings, his heart beat fast when he heard these words.

"Will you show them up at once?" he said, in a tone which showed some trace of agitation.

The servant bore the message to Mrs. Brent and Jonas, who were sitting in the hotel parlor.

If Mr. Granville was agitated, the two conspirators were not wholly at their ease. There was a red spot on each of Mrs. Brent's cheeks — her way of expressing emotion — and Jonas was fidgeting about uneasily in his chair, staring about him curiously.

"Mind what I told you," said his mother, in a low voice. "Remember to act like a boy who has suddenly been restored to his long−lost father. Everything depends on first impressions."

"I wish it was all over; I wish I was out of it," said Jonas, wiping the perspiration from his face. "Suppose he suspects?"

"He won't if you do as I tell you. Don't look gawky, but act naturally."

Just then the servant reappeared.

"You are to come up−stairs," he said. "The gentleman will see you."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Brent, rising. "Come, Jonas rose, and with the manner of a cur that expected a whipping, followed his mother and the servant.

"It's only one flight," said the servant, "but we can take the elevator."

"It is of no consequence," Mrs. Brent began, but Jonas said eagerly:

"Let's ride on the elevator, ma!"

"Very well, Philip," said Mrs. Brent.

A minute later the two stood at the door of Mr. Granville's room. Next they stood in his presence.

Mr. Granville, looking eagerly toward the door, passed over Mrs. Brent, and his glance rested on the boy who followed her. He started, and there was a quick feeling of disappointment. He had been picturing to himself how his lost boy would look, but none of his visions resembled the awkward−looking boy who stood sheepishly by the side of Mrs. Brent.

"Mr. Granville, I presume," said the lady.

"Yes, madam. You are — — "

"Mrs. Brent, and this," pointing to Jonas, "is the boy you left at Fultonville thirteen years ago. Philip, go to your father."

Jonas advanced awkwardly to Mr. Granville's chair, and said in parrot−like tones:

"I'm so glad to see you, pa!"

"And you are really Philip?" said Mr. Granville slowly.

"Yes, I'm Philip Brent; but I suppose my name is Granville now."

"Come here, my boy!"

Mr. Granville drew the boy to him, and looked earnestly in his face, then kissed him affectionately.

"He has changed since he was a little child, Mrs. Brent," he said, with a half−sigh.

"That's to be expected, sir. He was only three years old when you left him with us."

"But it seems to me that his hair and complexion are lighter."

"You can judge of that better than I," said Mrs. Brent plausibly. "To me, who have seen him daily, the change was not perceptible."

"I am greatly indebted to you for your devoted care — to you and your husband. I am grieved to hear that Mr. Brent is dead."

"Yes, sir; he left me six months since. It was a grievous loss. Ah, sir, when I give up Philip also, I shall feel quite alone in the world," and she pressed a handkerchief to her eyes. "You see, I have come to look upon him as my own boy!"

"My dear madam, don't think that I shall be so cruel as to take him from you. Though I wish him now to live with me, you must accompany him. My home shall be yours if you are willing to accept a room in my house and a seat at my table."

"Oh, Mr. Granville, how can I thank you for your great kindness? Ever since I received your letter I have been depressed with the thought that I should lose dear Philip. If I had a child of my own it would be different; but, having none, my affections are centered upon him."

"And very naturally," said Mr. Granville. "We become attached to those whom we benefit. Doubtless he feels a like affection for you. You love this good lady, Philip, who has supplied to you the place of your own mother, who died in your infancy, do you not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jonas stolidly. "But I want to live with my pa!"

"To be sure you shall. My boy, we have been separated too long already. Henceforth we will live together, and Mrs. Brent shall live with us."

"Where do you live, pa?" asked Jonas.

"I have a country−seat a few miles from Chicago," answered Mr. Granville. "We will go there as soon as I am well enough. I ought to apologize, Mrs. Brent, for inviting you up to my room, but my rheumatism makes me a prisoner."

"I hope your rheumatism will soon leave you, sir."

"I think it will. I have an excellent physician, and already I am much better. I may, however, have to remain here a few days yet."

"And where do you wish Philip and I to remain in the meantime?"

"Here, of course. Philip, will you ring the bell?"

"I don't see any bell," answered Jonas, bewildered. "Touch that knob!"

Jonas did so.

"Will that ring the bell?" he asked curiously.

"Yes, it is an electric bell."

"By gosh!" ejaculated Jonas.

"Don't use such language, Philip!" said Mrs. Brent hastily. "Your father will be shocked. You see, Mr. Granville, Philip has associated with country boys, and in spite of my care, he has adopted some of their language."

Mr. Granville himself was rather disturbed by this countrified utterance, and it occurred to him that his new−found son needed considerable polishing.

"Ah, I quite understand that, Mrs. Brent," he said courteously. "He is young yet, and there will be plenty of time for him to get rid of any objectionable habits and phrases."

Here the servant appeared.

"Tell the clerk to assign this lady and the boy rooms on this floor if any are vacant. Mrs. Brent, Philip may have a room next to you for the present. When I am better I will have him with me. John, is dinner on the table?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, after taking possession of your rooms, you and Philip had better go to dinner. I will send for him later."

"Thank you, sir." As Mrs. Brent was ushered into her handsome apartment her face was radiant with joy and exultation.

"All has gone well!" she said. "The most difficult part is over."

CHAPTER XIX. A NARROW ESCAPE FROM DETECTION.

THE CONSPIRACY into which Mrs. Brent had entered was a daring one, and required great coolness and audacity. But the inducements were great, and for her son's sake she decided to carry it through. Of course it was necessary that she should not be identified with any one who could disclose to Mr. Granville the deceit that was being practiced upon him. Circumstances lessened the risk of detection, since Mr. Granville was confined to his room in the hotel, and for a week she and Jonas went about the city alone.

One day she had a scare.

She was occupying a seat in a Chestnut Street car, while Jonas stood in front with the driver, when a gentleman whom she had not observed, sitting at the other end of the car, espied her.

"Why, Mrs. Brent, how came you here?" he asked, in surprise, crossing over and taking a seat beside her.

Her color went and came as, in a subdued tone, she answered. "I am in Philadelphia on a little visit, Mr. Pearson."

"Are you not rather out of your latitude?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, perhaps so."

"How is Mr. Brent?"

"Did you not hear that he was dead?"

"No, indeed! I sympathize with you in your sad loss."

"Yes," sighed the widow. "It is a great loss to us."

"I suppose Jonas is a large boy now," said the other. "I haven't seen him for two or three years."

"Yes, he has grown," said the widow briefly. She hoped that Mr. Pearson would not discover that Jonas was with her, as she feared that the boy might betray them unconsciously.

"Is he with you?"

"Yes."

"Do you stay long in Philadelphia?"

"No, I think not," answered Mrs. Brent.

"I go back to New York this afternoon, or I would ask permission to call on you."

Mrs. Brent breathed more freely. A call at the hotel was by all means to be avoided.

"Of course I should have been glad to see you, she answered, feeling quite safe in saying so. "Are you going far?"

"I get out at Thirteenth Street."

"Thank Heaven!" said Mrs. Brent to herself. "Then he won't discover where we are."

The Continental Hotel is situated at the corner of Chestnut and Ninth Streets, and Mrs. Brent feared that Jonas would stop the car at that point. As it was, the boy did not observe that his mother had met an acquaintance, so intent was he on watching the street sights.

When they reached Ninth Street mother and son got out and entered the hotel.

"I guess I'll stay down stairs awhile," said Jonas.

"No, Philip, I have something to say to you. Come up with me."

"I want to go into the billiard−room," said Jonas, grumbling.

"It is very important," said Mrs. Brent emphatically.

Now the curiosity of Jonas was excited, and he followed his mother into the elevator, for their rooms were on the third floor.

"Well, mother, what is it?" asked Jonas, when the door of his mother's room was closed behind them.

"I met a gentleman who knew me in the horse−car," said Mrs. Brent abruptly.

"Did you? Who was it?"

"Mr. Pearson."

"He used to give me candy. Why didn't you call me?"

"It is important that we should not be recognized," said his mother. "While we stay here we must be exceedingly prudent. Suppose he had called upon us at the hotel and fallen in with Mr. Granville. He might have told him that you are my son, and that your name is Jonas, not Philip."

"Then the fat would be in the fire!" said Jonas.

"Exactly so; I am glad you see the danger. Now I want you to stay here, or in your own room, for the next two or three hours."

"It'll be awfully tiresome," grumbled Jonas.

"It is necessary," said his mother firmly. "Mr. Pearson leaves for New York by an afternoon train. It is now only two o'clock. He left the car at Thirteenth Street, and might easily call at this hotel. It is a general rendezvous for visitors to the city. If he should meet you down stairs, he would probably know you, and his curiosity would be aroused. He asked me where I was staying, but I didn't appear to hear the question."

"That's pretty hard on me, ma."

"I am out of all patience with you," said Mrs. Brent. "Am I not working for your interest, and you are doing all you can to thwart my plans. If you don't care anything about inheriting a large fortune, let it go! We can go back to Gresham and give it all up."

"I'll do as you say, ma," said Jonas, subdued. The very next day Mr. Granville sent for Mrs. Brent. She lost no time in waiting upon him.

"Mrs. Brent," he said, "I have decided to leave Philadelphia to−morrow."

"Are you quite able, sir?" she asked, with a good assumption of sympathy.

"My doctor tells me I may venture. We shall travel in Pullman cars, you know. I shall secure a whole compartment, and avail myself of every comfort and luxury which money can command."

"Ah, sir! money is a good friend in such a case."

"True, Mrs. Brent. I have seen the time when I was poorly supplied with it. Now I am happily at ease. Can you and Philip be ready?"

"Yes, Mr. Granville," answered Mrs. Brent promptly. "We are ready to−day, for that matter. We shall both be glad to get started."

"I am glad to hear it. I think Philip will like his Western home. I bought a fine country estate of a Chicago merchant, whose failure compelled him to part with it. Philip shall have his own horse and his own servants."

"He will be delighted," said Mrs. Brent warmly.

"He has been used to none of these things, for Mr. Brent and I, much as we loved him, had not the means to provide him with such luxuries."

"Yes, Mrs. Brent, I understand that fully. You were far from rich. Yet you cared for my boy as if he were your own."

"I loved him as much as if he had been my own son, Mr. Granville."

"I am sure you did. I thank Providence that I am able to repay to some extent the great debt I have incurred. I cannot repay it wholly, but I will take care that you, too, shall enjoy ease and luxury. You shall have one of the

best rooms in my house, and a special servant to wait upon you."

"Thank you, Mr. Granville," said Mrs. Brent, her heart filled with proud anticipations of the state in which she should hereafter live. "I do not care where you put me, so long as you do not separate me from Philip."

"She certainly loves my son!" said Mr. Granville to himself. "Yet her ordinary manner is cold and constrained, and she does not seem like a woman whose affections would easily be taken captive. Yet Philip seems to have found the way to her heart. It must be because she has had so much care of him. We are apt to love those whom we benefit."

But though Mr. Granville credited Mrs. Brent with an affection for Philip, he was uneasily conscious that the boy's return had not brought him the satisfaction and happiness he had fondly anticipated.

To begin with, Philip did not look at all as he had supposed his son would look. He did not look like the Granvilles at all. Indeed, he had an unusually countrified aspect, and his conversation was mingled with rustic phrases which shocked his father's taste.

"I suppose it comes of the way in which he has been brought up and the country boys he has associated with," thought Mr. Granville. "Fortunately he is young, and there is time to polish him. As soon as I reach Chicago I will engage a private tutor for him, who shall not only remedy his defects of education, but do what he can to improve my son's manners. I want him to grow up a gentleman."

The next day the three started for Chicago, while Mr. Granville's real son and heir continued to live at a cheap lodging−house in New York.

The star of Jonas was in the ascendant, while poor Philip seemed destined to years of poverty and hard work. Even now, he was threatened by serious misfortune.

CHAPTER XX. LEFT OUT IN THE COLD.

OF COURSE Phil was utterly ignorant of the audacious attempt to deprive him of his rights and keep him apart from the father who longed once more to meet him. There was nothing before him so far as he knew except to continue the up−hill struggle for a living.

He gave very little thought to the prediction of the fortune−teller whom he had consulted, and didn't dream of any short−cut to fortune.

Do all he could, he found he could not live on his wages.

His board cost him four dollars a week, and washing and lunch two dollars more, thus compelling him to exceed his salary by a dollar each week.

He had, as we know, a reserve fund, on which he could draw, but it was small, and grew constantly smaller. Then, again, his clothes were wearing out, and he saw no way of obtaining money to buy new.

Phil became uneasy, and the question came up to his mind, "Should he write to his step−mother and ask her for a trifling loan?" If the money had been hers, he would not have done so on any condition; but she had had nothing of her own, and all the property in her hands came through Mr. Brent, who, as he knew, was attached to him, even though no tie of blood united them. He certainly meant that Phil should be cared for out of the estate, and at length Phil brought himself to write the following letter: "NEW YORK, March 10, 18 — .

"DEAR MRS. BRENT: I suppose I ought to have written you before, and have no good excuse to offer. I hope you and Jonas are well, and will continue so. Let me tell you how I have succeeded thus far.

"I have been fortunate enough to obtain a place in a large mercantile establishment, and for my services I am paid five dollars a week. This is more than boys generally get in the first place, and I am indebted to the partiality of an old gentleman, the senior member of the firm, whom I had the chance to oblige, for faring so well. Still I find it hard to get along on this sum, though I am as economical as possible. My board and washing cost me six dollars a week, and I have, besides, to buy clothing from time to time. I have nearly spent the extra money I had with me, and do not know how to keep myself looking respectable in the way of clothing. Under the circumstances, I shall have to apply to you for a loan, say of twenty−five dollars. In a year or two I hope to earn enough to be entirely independent. At present I cannot expect it. As my father — Mr. Brent — undoubtedly intended to provide for me, I don't think I need to apologize for making this request. Still I do it reluctantly, for I would prefer to depend entirely upon myself.

"With regards to you and Jonas, I am yours truly, PHILIP BRENT." Phil put this letter in the post−office, and patiently waited for an answer.

"Mrs. Brent surely cannot refuse me," he said to himself, "since I have almost wholly relieved her of the expense of taking care of me."

Phil felt so sure that money would be sent to him that he began to look round a little among ready−made clothing stores to see at what price he could obtain a suit that would do for every−day use. He found a store in the Bowery where he could secure a suit, which looked as if it would answer, for thirteen dollars. If Mrs. Brent sent him twenty−five, that would leave him twelve for underclothing, and for a reserve fund to meet the weekly deficit which he could not avoid.

Three — four days passed, and no letter came in answer to his.

"It can't be that Mrs. Brent won't at least answer my letter," he thought uneasily. "Even if she didn't send me twenty−five dollars, she couldn't help sending me something."

Still he felt uneasy, in view of the position in which he would find himself in case no letter or remittance should come at all.

It was during this period of anxiety that his heart leaped for joy when on Broadway he saw the familiar form of Reuben Gordon, a young man already mentioned, to whom Phil had sold his gun before leaving Gresham. "Why, Reuben, how are you?" exclaimed Phil joyfully. "When did you come to town?"

"Phil Brent!" exclaimed Reuben, shaking hands heartily. "I'm thunderin' glad to see you. I was thinkin' of you only five minutes ago, and wonderin' where you hung out."

"But you haven't told me when you came to New York."

"Only this morning! I'm goin' to stay with a cousin of my father's, that lives in Brooklyn, over night."

"I wanted to ask you about Mrs. Brent and Jonas. I was afraid they might be sick, for I wrote four days ago and haven't got any answer yet."

"Where did you write to?"

"To Gresham, of course," answered Phil, in surprise.

"You don't mean to say you hain't heard of their leavin' Gresham?" said Reuben, in evident astonishment.

"Who has left Gresham?"

"Your mother — leastwise, Mrs. Brent — and Jonas. They cleared out three weeks ago, and nobody's heard a word of them since — that is, nobody in the village."

"Don't you know where they've gone?" asked Phil, in amazement.

"No. I was goin' to ask you. I s'posed, of course, they'd write and let you know."

"I didn't even know they had left Gresham."

"Well, that's what I call cur'us. It ain't treatin' you right accordin' to my ideas."

"Is the house shut up?"

"It was till two days ago. Then a brother of Mrs. Brent came and opened it. He has brought his wife and one child with him, and it seems they're goin' to live there. Somebody asked him where his sister and Jonas were, but they didn't get no satisfaction. He said he didn't rightly know himself. He believed they was travelin'; thought they might be in Canada."

Phil looked and felt decidedly sober at this information. He understood, of course, now, why his letter had not been answered. It looked as if he were an outcast from the home that had been his so long. When he came to New York to earn a living he felt that he was doing so voluntarily, and was not obliged to do so. Now he was absolutely thrown upon his own resources, and must either work or starve.

"They've treated you real mean," said Reuben.

"I never did like Mrs. Brent, or Jonas either, for that matter.

"Where are you working?"

Phil answered this question and several others which his honest country friend asked, but his mind was preoccupied, and he answered some of the questions at random. Finally he excused himself on the ground that he must be getting back to the store.

That evening Phil thought seriously of his position. Something must be done, that was very evident. His expenses exceeded his income, and he needed some clothing. There was no chance of getting his wages raised under a year, for he already received more pay than it was customary to give to a boy. What should he do?

Phil decided to lay his position frankly before the only friend he had in the city likely to help him — Mr. Oliver Carter. The old gentleman had been so friendly and kind that he felt that he would not at any rate repulse him. After he had come to this decision he felt better. He determined to lose no time in calling upon Mr. Carter.

After supper he brushed his hair carefully, and made himself look as well as circumstances would admit. Then he bent his steps toward Twelfth Street, where, as the reader will remember, Mr. Carter lived with his niece.

He ascended the steps and rang the bell. It was opened by Hannah, who recognized him, having admitted him on the former occasion of his calling.

"Good−evening," said Phil pleasantly. "Is Mr. Carter at home?"

"No, sir," answered Hannah. "Didn't you know he had gone to Florida?"

"Gone to Florida!" repeated Phil, his heart sinking. "When did he start?"

"He started this afternoon."

"Who's asking after Uncle Oliver?" asked a boy's voice.

Looking behind Hannah, Phil recognized the speaker as Alonzo Pitkin.

CHAPTER XXI. "THEY MET BY CHANCE."

WHO WAS asking after Uncle Oliver?" demanded Alonzo superciliously.

"I was," answered Philip.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" said Alonzo, rather disdainfully.

"Yes," answered Phil calmly, though he felt provoked at Alonzo's tone, which was meant to be offensive. "You remember me, don't you?"

"You are the boy that got round Uncle Oliver, and got him to give you a place in pa's store."

"I deny that I got round him," returned Phil warmly. "I had the good luck to do him a favor."

"I suppose you have come after money?" said Alonzo coarsely.

"I sha'n't ask you for any, at any rate," said Phil angrily.

"No; it wouldn't do any good," said Alonzo; "and it's no use asking ma, either. She says you are an adventurer, and have designs on Uncle Oliver because he is rich."

"I shall not ask your mother for any favor," said Phil, provoked. "I am sorry not to meet your uncle."

"I dare say!" sneered Alonzo.

Just then a woman, poorly but neatly dressed, came down stairs. Her face was troubled. Just behind her came Mrs. Pitkin, whose face wore a chilly and proud look.

"Mr. Carter has left the city, and I really don't know when he will return," Phil heard her say. "If he had been at home, it would not have benefited you. He is violently prejudiced against you, and would not have listened to a word you had to say."

"I did not think he would have harbored resentment so long," murmured the poor woman. "He never seemed to me to be a hard man."

Phil gazed at the poorly dressed woman with a surprise which he did not attempt to conceal, for in her he recognized the familiar figure of his landlady. What could she have to do in this house? he asked himself.

"Mrs. Forbush!" he exclaimed.

Philip!" exclaimed Mrs. Forbush, in a surprise as great as his own, for she had never asked where her young lodger worked, and was not aware that he was in the employ of her cousin's husband and well acquainted with the rich uncle whom she had not seen for years.

"Do you know each other?" demanded Mrs. Pitkin, whose turn it was to be surprised. "This young gentleman lodges in my house," answered Mrs. Forbush.

"Young gentleman!" repeated Alonzo, with a mocking laugh.

Philip looked at him sternly. He had his share of human nature, and it would have given him satisfaction to thrash the insolent young patrician, as Alonzo chose to consider himself.

"And what do you want here, young man?" asked Mrs. Pitkin in a frosty tone, addressing Phil of course.

"I wished to see Mr. Carter," answered Phil.

"Really, Mr. Carter seems to be very much in request!" sneered Mrs. Pitkin. "No doubt he will be very much disappointed when he hears what he has lost. You will have to go to Florida to see him, I think, however." She added, after a pause: "It will not be well for either of you to call again. Mr. Carter will understand the motive of your calls."

"How cruel you are, Lavinia!" said Mrs. Forbush sadly.

"My name is Mrs. Pitkin!" said that lady frigidly.

"You have not forgotten that we are cousins, surely?"

"I do not care to remember it, Mrs. Forbush. Good−day."

There was no alternative but for Mrs. Forbush to say "good−day" also, and to descend the steps.

Philip joined her in the street. "Are you really the cousin of Mrs. Pitkin?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Forbush. "I bear the same relationship to Mr. Carter that she does. We were much together as girls, and were both educated at the same expensive schools. I offended my relatives by marrying Mr. Forbush, whose fault was that he was poor, and chiefly, I think, through the efforts of Lavinia Pitkin I was cast out by the family. But where did you meet Uncle Oliver?"

Philip explained the circumstances already known to the reader.

"Mr. Carter seems to me to be a kind−hearted man," he said. "I don't believe he would have cast you off if he had not been influenced by other parties."

"So I think," said Mrs. Forbush. "I will tell you," she continued, after a pause, "what drew me here this afternoon. I am struggling hard to keep my head above water, Mr. Brent, but I find it hard to meet my expenses. I cannot meet my rent due to−morrow within fifteen dollars, and I dared to hope that if I could meet Uncle Oliver face to face and explain matters to him, he would let me have the money."

"I am sure he would," said Phil warmly.

"But he is in Florida, and will probably remain there for a month or two at least," said Mrs. Forbush, sighing. But even if he were in the city I suppose Lavinia would do all in her power co keep us apart."

"I have no doubt she would, Mrs. Forbush. Though she is your cousin, I dislike her very much."

"I suppose the boy with whom you were talking was her son Alonzo?"

"Yes; he is about the most disagreeable boy I ever met. Both he and his mother seem very much opposed to my having an interview with your uncle."

"Lavinia was always of a jealous and suspicious disposition," said Mrs. Forbush. "I have not seen Alonzo since he was a baby. He is two years older than my Julia. He was born before I estranged my relatives by marrying a poor man."

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Forbush, about the rent?" asked Phil, in a tone of sympathy.

"I don't know. I shall try to get the landlord to wait, but I don't know how he will feel about it."

"I wish I had plenty of money. I would gladly lend you all you need."

"I am sure you would, Philip," said Mrs. Forbush. "The offer does me good, though it is not accompanied by the ability to do what your good heart dictates. I feel that I am not without friends."

"I am a very poor one," said Phil. "The fact is, I am in trouble myself. My income is only five dollars a week, and my expenses are beyond that. I don't know how I am going to keep up."

"You may stay with me for three dollars a week, if you cannot pay four," said Mrs. Forbush, forgetting her own troubles in her sympathy with our hero."

"No, Mrs. Forbush, you can't afford it. You need money as much as I do, and perhaps more; for you have more than yourself to support."

"Yes, poor Julia!" sighed the mother. "She is born to a heritage of poverty. Heaven only knows how we are going to get along."

"God will provide for us, Mrs. Forbush," said Philip. "I don't know how it is, but in spite of my troubles I feel cheerful. I have a confidence that things will come out well, though I cannot possibly imagine how."

"You are young, and youth is more inclined to be hopeful than maturer years. However, I do not wish to dampen your cheerfulness. Keep it, and let it comfort you."

If Phil could have heard the conversation that took place between Mrs. Pitkin and Alonzo after their departure, he might have felt less hopeful.

"It is dreadfully annoying that that woman should turn up after all these years!" said Mrs. Pitkin, in a tone of disgust.

"Is she really your cousin, ma?" asked Alonzo.

"Yes, but she disgraced herself by a low marriage, and was cast off."

"That disposes of her, then?"

"I don't know. If she could meet Uncle Oliver, I am afraid she would worm herself into his confidence and get him to do something for her. Then it is unfortunate that she and that boy have fallen in with each other. She may get him to speak to Uncle Oliver in her behalf."

"Isn't he working for pa?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you get pa to discharge him while Uncle Oliver is away?"

"Well thought of, Alonzo! I will speak to your father this very evening."

CHAPTER XXII. PHIL IS "BOUNCED."

SATURDAY, as is usual in such establishments, was pay−day at the store of Phil's employers. The week's wages were put up in small envelopes and handed to the various clerks.

When Phil went up to the cashier to get his money he put it quietly into his vest−pocket.

Daniel Dickson, the cashier, observing this, said:

"Brent, you had better open your envelope."

Rather surprised, Phil nevertheless did as requested.

In the envelope, besides the five−dollar bill representing his week's salary, he found a small slip of paper, on which was written these ominous words:

"Your services will not be required after this week." Appended to this notice was the name of the firm.

Phil turned pale, for to him, embarrassed as he was, the loss of his place was a very serious matter.

"What does this mean, Mr. Dickson?" he asked quickly.

"I can't inform you," answered the cashier, smiling unpleasantly, for he was a selfish man who sympathized with no one, and cared for no one as long as he himself remained prosperous.

"Who handed you this paper?" asked Phil.

"The boss."

"Mr. Pitkin?"

"Of course."

Mr. Pitkin was still in his little office, and Phil made his way directly to him.

"May I speak to you, sir?" asked our hero.

"Be quick about it then, for I am in a hurry," answered Pitkin, in a very forbidding tone.

"Why am I discharged, sir?"

"I can't go into details. We don't need you any longer."

"Are you not satisfied with me?"

"No!" said Pitkin brusquely.

"In what respect have I failed to satisfy you, sir?"

"Don't put on any airs, boy!" returned Pitkin.

"We don't want you, that's all."

"You might have given me a little notice," said Phil indignantly.

"We made no stipulation of that kind, I believe."

"It would only be fair, sir."

"No impertinence, young man! I won't stand it! I don't need any instructions as to the manner of conducting my business."

Phil by this time perceived that his discharge was decided upon without any reference to the way in which he had performed his duties, and that any discussion or remonstrance would be unavailing.

"I see, sir, that you have no regard for justice, and will leave you," he said.

"You'd better, and without delay!" said Pitkin irascibly.

Phil emerged upon the street with a sinking heart. His available funds consisted only of the money he had just received and seventy−five cents in change, and what he was to do he did not know. He walked home with slow steps, looking sad in spite of his usually hopeful temperament.

When he entered the house he met Mrs. Forbush in the hall. She at once noticed his gravity.

"Have you had any bad luck, Philip?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Phil. "I have lost my situation."

"Indeed!" returned the landlady, with quick sympathy. "Have you had any difficulty with your employer?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Did he assign any reason for your discharge?"

"No; I asked him for an explanation, but he merely said I was not wanted any longer."

"Isn't there any chance of his taking you back?"

"I am sure there is not."

"Don't be discouraged, Philip. A smart boy like you won't be long out of a place. Meanwhile you are welcome to stay here as long as I have a roof to cover me."

"Thank you, Mrs. Forbush," said Phil warmly. "you are a true friend. You are in trouble yourself, yet you stand by me!"

"I have had a stroke of good luck to−day," said Mrs. Forbush cheerfully. "A former boarder, whom I allowed to remain here for five or six weeks when he was out of employment, has sent me thirty dollars in payment of his bill, from Boston, where he found a position. So I shall be able to pay my rent and have something over. I have been lucky, and so may you."

Phil was cheered by the ready sympathy of his landlady, and began to take a more cheerful view of matters.

"I will go out bright and early on Monday and see if I can't find another place," he said. "Perhaps it may be all for the best."

Yet on the day succeeding he had some sober hours. How differently he had been situated only three months before. Then he had a home and relatives. Now he was practically alone in the world, with no home in which he could claim a share, and he did not even know where his step−mother and Jonas were. Sunday forenoon he attended church, and while he sat within its sacred precincts his mind was tranquilized, and his faith and cheerfulness increased.

On Monday he bought the Herald, and made a tour of inquiry wherever he saw that a boy was wanted. But in each place he was asked if he could produce a recommendation from his last employer. He decided to go back to his old place and ask for one, though he was very reluctant to ask a favor of any kind from a man who had treated him so shabbily as Mr. Pitkin. It seemed necessary, however, and he crushed down his pride and made his way to Mr. Pitkin's private office.

"Mr. Pitkin!" he said.

"You here!" exclaimed Pitkin, scowling. "You needn't ask to be taken back. It's no use."

"I don't ask it," answered Phil.

"Then what are you here for?"

"I would like a letter of recommendation, that I may obtain another place."

"Well, well!" said Pitkin, wagging his head. "If that isn't impudence."

"What is impudence?" asked Phil. "I did as well as I could, and that I am ready to do for another employer. But all ask me for a letter from you."

"You won't get any!" said Pitkin abruptly.

"Where is your home?"

"I have none except in this city."

"Where did you come from?"

"From the country."

"Then I advise you to go back there. You may do for the country. You are out of place in the city." Poor Phil! Things did indeed look dark for him. Without a letter of recommendation from Mr. Pitkin it would be almost impossible for him to secure another place, and how could he maintain himself in the city? He didn't wish to sell papers or black boots, and those were about the only paths now open to him.

"I am having a rough time!" he thought, "but I will try not to get discouraged."

He turned upon his heel and walked out of the store.

As he passed the counter where Wilbur was standing, the young man said:

"I am awfully sorry, Philip. It's a shame! If I wasn't broke I'd offer to lend you a fiver."

"Thank you all the same for your kind offer Wilbur," said Phil.

"Come round and see me."

"So I will — soon."

He left the store and wandered aimlessly about the streets.

Four days later, sick with hope deferred, he made his way down to the wharf of the Charleston and Savannah boats, with a vague idea that he might get a job of carrying baggage, for he felt that he must not let his pride interfere with doing anything by which he could earn an honest penny.

It so happened that the Charleston boat was just in, and the passengers were just landing. Phil stood on the pier and gazed listlessly at them as they disembarked.

All at once he started in surprise, and his heart beat joyfully.

There, just descending the gang−plank, was his tried friend, Mr. Oliver Carter, whom he supposed over a thousand miles away in Florida.

"Mr. Carter!" exclaimed Phil, dashing forward.

"Philip!" exclaimed the old gentleman, much surprised. "How came you here? Did Mr. Pitkin send you?"

CHAPTER XXIII. AN EXPLANATION.

IT WOULD be hard to tell which of the two was the more surprised at the meeting, Philip or Mr. Carter.

"I don't understand how Mr. Pitkin came to hear of my return. I didn't telegraph," said the old gentleman.

"I don't think he knows anything about it," said Phil.

"Didn't he send you to the pier?"

"No, sir."

"Then how is it that you are not in the store at this time?" asked Mr. Carter, puzzled.

"Because I am no longer in Mr. Pitkin's employ. I was discharged last Saturday."

"Discharged! What for?"

"Mr. Pitkin gave no reason. He said my services were no longer required. He spoke roughly to me, and has since declined to give me a recommendation, though I told him that without it I should be unable to secure employment elsewhere."

Mr. Carter frowned. He was evidently annoyed and indignant.

Phil stood on the pier as Mr. Carter descended the gang−plank. (See page 151.)

"This must be inquired into," he said. "Philip, call a carriage, and I will at once go to the Astor House and take a room. I had intended to go at once to Mr. Pitkin's, but I shall not do so until I have had an explanation of this outrageous piece of business."

Phil was rejoiced to hear this, for he was at the end of his resources, and the outlook for him was decidedly gloomy. He had about made up his mind to sink his pride and go into business as a newsboy the next day, but the very unexpected arrival of Mr. Carter put quite a new face on matters.

He called a carriage, and both he and Mr. Carter entered it.

"How do you happen to be back so soon, sir?" asked Phil, when they were seated. "I thought you were going to Florida for a couple of months."

"I started with that intention, but on reaching Charleston I changed my mind. I expected to find some friends at St. Augustine, but I learned that they were already returning to the North, and I felt that I should be lonely and decided to return. I am very glad I did, now. Did you receive my letter?"

"Your letter?" queried Philip, looking at Mr. Carter in surprise.

"Certainly. I gave Alonzo a letter for you, which I had directed to your boarding−house, and requested him to mail it. It contained a ten−dollar bill."

"I never received any such letter, sir. It would have been of great service to me — the money, I mean; for I have found it hard to live on five dollars a week. Now I have not even that."

"Is it possible that Alonzo could have suppressed the letter?" said Mr. Carter to himself.

"At any rate I never received it."

"Here is something else to inquire into," said Mr. Carter. "If Alonzo has tampered with my letter, perhaps appropriated the money, it will be the worse for him."

"I hardly think he would do that, sir; though I don't like him."

"You are generous; but I know the boy better than you do. He is fond of money, not for the sake of spending it, but for the sake of hoarding it. Tell me, then, how did you learn that I had gone to Florida?"

"I learned it at the house in Twelfth Street."

"Then you called there?"

"Yes, sir; I called to see you. I found it hard to get along on my salary, and I did not want Mrs. Forbush to lose by me, so I — — "

"Mrs. Forbush?" repeated the old gentleman quickly. "That name sounds familiar to me."

"Mrs. Forbush is your niece," said Phil, a hope rising in his heart that he might be able to do his kind landlady a good turn.

"Did she tell you that?"

"No, sir; that is, I was ignorant of it until I met her just as I was going away from Mrs. Pitkin's."

"Did she call there, too — to see me?" asked the old gentleman,

"Yes, sir; but she got a very cold reception. Mrs. Pitkin was very rude to her, and said that you were so much prejudiced against her that she had better not call again."

"That's like her cold selfishness. I understand her motives very well. I had no idea that Mrs. Forbush was in the city. Is she — poor?"

"Yes, sir; she is having a hard struggle to maintain herself and her daughter."

"And you board at her house?"

"Yes, sir."

"How strangely things come about! She is as nearly related to me as Lavinia — Mrs. Pitkin."

"She told me so."

"She married against the wishes of her family, but I can see now that we were all unreasonably prejudiced against her. Lavinia, however, trumped up stories against her husband, which I am now led to believe were quite destitute of foundation, and did all she could to keep alive the feud. I feel now that I was very foolish to lend myself to her selfish ends. Of course her object was to get my whole fortune for herself and her boy."

Phil had no doubt of this, but he did not like to say so, for it would seem that he, too, was influenced by selfish motives. "Then you are not so much prejudiced against Mrs. Forbush as she was told?" he allowed himself to say.

"No, no!" said Mr. Carter earnestly. "Poor Rebecca! She has a much better nature and disposition than Mrs. Pitkin. And you say she is poor?"

"She had great difficulty in paying her last month's rent," said Philip.

"Where does she live?"

Phil told him.

"What sort of a house is it?"

"It isn't a brown−stone front," answered Phil, smiling. "It is a poor, cheap house; but it is as good as she can afford to hire."

"And you like her?"

"Very much, Mr. Carter. She has been very kind to me, and though she finds it so hard to get along, she has told me she will keep me as long as she has a roof over her head, though just now I cannot pay my board, because my income is gone."

"It will come back again, Philip," said the old gentleman.

Phil understood by this that he would be restored to his place in Mr. Pitkin's establishment. This did not yield him unalloyed satisfaction, for he was sure that it would be made unpleasant for him by Mr. Pitkin. Still he would accept it, and meet disagreeable things as well as he could.

By this time they had reached the Astor House. Phil jumped out first, and assisted Mr. Carter to descend.

He took Mr. Carter's hand−bag, and followed him into the hotel.

Mr. Carter entered his name in the register.

"What is your name?" he asked — "Philip Brent?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will enter your name, too."

"Am I to stay here?" asked Phil, in surprise.

"Yes; I shall need a confidential clerk, and for the present you will fill that position. I will take two adjoining rooms — one for you."

Phil listened in surprise.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

Mr. Carter gave orders to have his trunk sent for from the steamer, and took possession of the room. Philip's room was smaller, but considerably more luxurious than the one he occupied at the house of Mrs. Forbush.

"Have you any money, Philip?" asked the old gentleman.

"I have twenty−five cents," answered Philip.

"That isn't a very large sum," said Mr. Carter, smiling. "Here, let me replenish your pocketbook."

He drew four five−dollar bills from his wallet and handed them to Phil.

"How can I thank you, sir?" asked Phil gratefully. "Wait till you have more to thank me for. Let me tell you this, that in trying to harm you, Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin have done you a great service."

"I should like to see Mrs. Forbush this evening, if you can spare me, to let her know that she needn't be anxious about me."

"By all means. You can go."

"Am I at liberty to mention that I have seen you, sir?"

"Yes. Tell her that I will call to−morrow. And you may take her this."

Mr. Carter drew a hundred−dollar bill from his wallet and passed it to Phil.

"Get it changed at the office as you go out," he said. "Come back as soon as you can."

With a joyful heart Phil jumped on a Fourth Avenue car in front of the hotel, and started on his way up town."

CHAPTER XXIV. RAISING THE RENT.

LEAVING Phil, we will precede him to the house of Mrs. Forbush.

She had managed to pay the rent due, but she was not out of trouble. The time had come when it was necessary to decide whether she would retain the house for the following year. In New York, as many of my young readers may know, the first of May is moving−day, and leases generally begin at that date. Engagements are made generally by or before March 1st.

Mr. Stone, the landlord, called upon the widow to ascertain whether she proposed to remain in the house.

"I suppose I may as well do so," said Mrs. Forbush.

She had had difficulty in making her monthly payments, but to move would involve expense, and it might be some time before she could secure boarders in a new location.

"You can't do better," said the landlord. "At fifty dollars a month this is a very cheap house."

"You mean forty−five? Mr. Stone?" said Mrs. Forbush. "No, I don't," said the landlord.

"But that is what I have been paying this last year."

"That is true, but I ought to get fifty dollars, and if you won't pay it somebody else will."

"Mr. Stone," said the widow, in a troubled voice, "I hope you will be considerate. It has been as much as I could do to get together forty−five dollars each month to pay you. Indeed, I can pay no more."

"Pardon me for saying that that is no affair of mine," said the landlord brusquely. "If you can't pay the rent, by all means move into a smaller house. If you stay here you must be prepared to pay fifty dollars a month."

"I don't see how I can," answered the widow in dejection.

"I'll give you three days to consider it," said the landlord indifferently. "You'll make a mistake if you give the house up. However, that is your affair."

The landlord left the house, and Mrs. Forbush sat down depressed.

"Julia," she said to her daughter, "I wish you were old enough to advise me. I dislike to move, but I don't dare to engage to pay such a rent. Fifty dollars a month will amount to — — "

"Six hundred dollars a year!" said Julia, who was good at figures. "And that seems a great sum to us."

"It would be little enough to Mrs. Pitkin," said Julia, who felt that lady's prosperity unjust, while her poor, patient mother had to struggle so hard for a scanty livelihood.

"Oh, yes; Lavinia is rolling in wealth," sighed Mrs. Forbush. "I can't understand how Uncle Oliver can bestow his favors on so selfish a woman."

"Why don't you ask Philip's advice about keeping the house?" said Julia.

It must be explained that Philip and Julia were already excellent friends, and it may be said that each was mutually attracted by the other.

"Poor Philip has his own troubles," said Mrs. Forbush. "He has lost his place through the malice and jealousy of Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin, for I am sure that Lavinia is the cause of his dismissal, and I don't know when he will be able to get another."

"You won't send him away, mother, if he can't pay his board?"

"No," answered her mother warmly. "Philip is welcome to stay with us as long as we have a roof over our heads, whether he can pay his board or not."

This answer seemed very satisfactory to Julia, who rose impulsively and kissed her mother.

"That's a good mother," she said. "It would be a pity to send poor Philip into the street."

"You seem to like Philip," said Mrs. Forbush, smiling faintly.

"Yes, mother. You know I haven't any brother, and Phil seems just like a brother to me."

Just then the door opened, and Philip himself entered the room.

Generally he came home looking depressed, after a long and ineffectual search for employment. Now he was fairly radiant with joy.

"Phil, you've got a place; I know you have!" exclaimed Julia, noticing his glad expression. "Where is it? Is it a good one?"

"Have you really got a place, Philip?" asked Mrs. Forbush.

"Yes, for the present."

"Do you think you shall like your employer?"

"He is certainly treating me very well," said Phil, smiling. "He has paid me twenty dollars in advance."

"Then the age of wonders has not passed," said the widow. "Of course I believe you, Philip, but it seems extraordinary."

"There is something more extraordinary to come," said Phil. "He has sent you some money, too."

"Me!" exclaimed Mrs. Forbush, in great surprise.

"What can he know about me?"

"I told him about you."

"But we are strangers."

"He used to know you, and still feels an interest in you, Mrs. Forbush."

"Who can it be?" said the widow, looking bewildered.

"I don't want to keep you in suspense any longer, so I may as well say that it is your Uncle Oliver."

"Uncle Oliver! Why, he is in Florida."

"No; he came home from Charleston. I happened to be at the pier — I went down to see if I could get a job at smashing baggage — when I saw him walking down the gang−plank."

"Has he gone to his old quarters at Mr. Pitkin's?"

"No; what I told about the way they treated you and me made him angry, and he drove to the Astor House. I have a room there, too, and am to act as his private secretary."

"So that is your new situation, Phil?" said Julia.

"Yes, and it is a good one."

"And he really feels kindly to me?" said Mrs. Forbush hopefully.

"He sends you this and will call to−morrow," said Phil. "Actions speak louder than words. There are a hundred dollars in this roll of bills.

"He sent all this to me?" she said.

"Yes, and of his own accord. It was no suggestion of mine.

"Julia," said Mrs. Forbush, turning to her daughter, "I believe God has heard my prayer, and that better days are in store for all of us."

"Philip included," added Phil, smiling.

"Yes. I want you to share in our good fortune."

"Mother, you had better consult Phil about keeping the house."

"Oh, yes."

Mrs. Forbush thereupon told Philip of the landlord's visit and his proposal to ask a higher rent.

"I hesitated about taking the house," she said; "but with this handsome gift from Uncle Oliver, I don't know but I may venture. What do you think?"

"I think, Mrs. Forbush, you had better not decide till you have seen your uncle. He may have some plan of his own for you. At any rate, you had better consult him. He will call to−morrow. And now, let me pay you for my week's board."

"No, Philip. I shall not want it with all this money, which I should not have received but for you."

"A debt is a debt, Mrs. Forbush, and I prefer to pay it. I shall not be here to supper, as Mr. Carter is expecting me back to the Astor House. I shall probably come with him when he calls upon you to−morrow."

On his return to the hotel, as he was walking on Broadway, Phil came face to face with Alonzo Pitkin.

"I think I'll ask him about that letter his uncle gave him to post to me," thought Phil, and he waited until Alonzo was close at hand.

CHAPTER XXV. ALONZO IS PUZZLED.

ALONZO, who had his share of curiosity, as soon as he saw Phil's approach, determined to speak to him, and ascertain what were his plans and what he was doing. With the petty malice which he inherited from his mother, he hoped that Phil had been unable to find a place and was in distress.

"It would serve him right," said Alonzo to himself, "for trying to get into Uncle Oliver's good graces. "I s'pose he would like to cut me out, but he'll find that he can't fight against ma and me."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" was Alonzo's salutation when they met.

"Yes," answered Phil.

"Pa bounced you, didn't he?" continued Alonzo complacently.

"Yes," answered Phil. "That is, he discharged me. I suppose that is what you meant."

"You've got it right the first time," said Alonzo.

"Have you got another place?"

"Do you ask because you feel interested in me?" asked Phil.

"Well, not particularly," answered Alonzo appearing quite amused by the suggestion. "Then you ask out of curiosity?"

"S'pose I do?"

"I don't mind telling you that I have found a place, then."

"What sort of a place?" asked Alonzo, disappointed.

"There is no need of going into particulars."

"No. I s'pose not," sneered Alonzo. "You're probably selling papers or blacking boots."

"You are mistaken. I have a much better situation than I had with your father."

Alonzo's lower jaw fell. He was very sorry to hear it.

"Didn't your employer ask for a recommendation?"

"He didn't seem to think one necessary!" replied Phil.

"If he'd known pa had sacked you, he wouldn't have wanted you, I guess."

"He knows it. Have you got through asking questions, Alonzo?"

"You are too familiar. You can call me Mr. Pitkin."

Phil laughed at Alonzo's assumption of dignity, but made no comment upon it.

"I want to ask you what you did with that letter Mr. Carter gave you to post for me?" asked Phil.

Alonzo was indeed surprised, not to say dismayed. The truth was that, judging from the "feel" of the letter, it contained money, and he had opened it and appropriated the money to his own use. Moreover he had the bank−note in his pocket at that very moment, not having any wish to spend, but rather to hoard it.

"That's a queer question," he stammered. "What letter do you refer to?"

"A letter Mr. Carter gave you to mail to me."

"If he gave me any such letter I mailed it," answered Alonzo, scarcely knowing what to say.

"I didn't receive it."

"How do you know he gave me any letter?" demanded Alonzo, puzzled.

"I don't care to tell. I only know that there was such a letter handed to you. Do you know what was in it?"

"Writing, I s'pose," said Alonzo flippantly.

"Yes, there was, but there was also a ten−dollar bill. I didn't receive the letter," and Phil fixed his eyes searchingly upon the face of Alonzo.

"That's a pretty story!" said Alonzo. "I don't believe Uncle Oliver would be such a fool as to send you ten dollars. If he did, you got it, and now want to get as much more, pretending you haven't received it."

"You are mistaken," said Phil quietly.

"If you didn't get the letter, how do you know any was written, and that there was anything in it?" asked Alonzo triumphantly, feeling that the question was a crusher."

"I don't care to tell you how I know it. Do you deny it?"

"I don't remember whether Uncle Oliver gave me any letter or not."

"Will you be kind enough to give me his address in Florida, so that I may write to him and find out?"

"No, I won't," said Alonzo angrily, "and I think you are very cheeky to ask such a thing. Ma was right when she said that you were the most impudent boy she ever came across."

"That's enough, Alonzo," said Phil quietly. "I've found out all I wanted to."

"What have you found out?" asked Alonzo, his tone betraying some apprehension.

"Never mind. I think I know what became of that letter."

"Do you mean to say I opened it and took out the money?" demanded Alonzo, reddening.

"I wouldn't charge anybody with such a mean act, unless I felt satisfied of it."

"You'd better not!" said Alonzo, in a bullying tone. "If I find out who you're working for, I'll let him know that pa bounced you."

"Just as you please! I don't think that any words of yours will injure me with the gentleman I have the good fortune to work for."

"Don't you be too sure! If you think he wouldn't mind a boy, I'll refer him to pa and ma. They'll give you a good setting out."

"I don't doubt it," said Phil indifferently, and turned to go away.

He was called back by Alonzo, who had not quite satisfied his curiosity.

"Say, are you boarding with that woman who came to see ma the same day you were at the house?" he asked.

"No; I have left her."

Alonzo looked well pleased. He knew that his mother felt rather uneasy at the two being together, dreading lest they should make a concerted attempt to ingratiate themselves with her rich uncle.

"Ma says she behaved very badly," Alonzo could not help adding.

"Mrs. Forbush is an excellent Lady," said Phil warmly, for he could not hear one of his friends spoken against.

"Lady! She's as poor as poverty," sneered Alonzo.

"She is none the worse for that."

"Uncle Oliver can't bear her!"

"Indeed!" said Phil; pausing to see what else Alonzo would say.

"Ma says she disgraced herself, and all her relations gave her up. When you see her tell her she had better not come sneaking round the house again."

"If you will write a letter to that effect, I will see that she gets it," said Phil. "That letter won't miscarry."

"I don't care to take any notice of her," said Alonzo loftily.

"You are very kind to have wasted so much notice upon me," said Phil, amused.

Alonzo did not see fit to answer this, but walked away with his head in the air. He was, however, not quite easy in mind.

"How in the world," he asked himself, "could that boy have found out that Uncle Oliver gave me a letter to post? If he should learn that I opened it and took the money, there'd be a big fuss. I guess I'd better not meet him again. If I see him any day I'll go in a different direction. He's so artful he may get me into trouble."

It is needless to say that neither Mr. or Mrs. Pitkin knew of Alonzo's tampering with the letter. Much as they would have been opposed to Phil's receiving such a letter, they would have been too wise to sanction such a bold step.

"Well," said Mr. Carter, when Phil returned, "did you see Rebecca — Mrs. Forbush?"

"Yes, sir, and handed her the money. She was overjoyed; not so much at receiving so generous a sum as at learning that you were reconciled to her."

"Poor girl!" said the old man, forgetting that she was now a worn woman. "I am afraid that she must have suffered much."

"She has met with many hardships, sir, but she won't mind them now."

"If I live her future shall be brighter than her past. I will call to−morrow. You, Philip, shall go with me."

"I should like to do so, sir. By the way, I met Alonzo on Broadway."

He detailed the conversation that had taken place between them.

"I am afraid he took the money," said Mr. Carter. "I am sorry any relative of mine should have acted in that way. Let him keep it. Any benefit he may derive from it will prove to have been dearly purchased."

CHAPTER XXVI. A WONDERFUL CHANGE.

YOU MAY order a carriage, Philip," said Mr. Carter the next morning. "Pick out a handsome one with seats for four."

"Yes, sir."

In five minutes the carriage was at the door.

"Now, Philip, we will go to see my long−neglected niece, Mrs. Forbush. Give the driver the necessary directions."

"Mrs. Forbush does not have many carriage−callers," said Philip, smiling.

"Perhaps she will have more hereafter," said Mr. Carter, "I ought not so long to have lost sight of her. I always liked Rebecca better than Lavinia, yet I let the latter prejudice me against her cousin, who is in disposition, education and sincerity her superior. You see, Philip, there are old fools in the world as well as young ones."

"It is never too late to mend, Mr. Carter," said Phil, smiling.

"That's very true, even if it is a young philosopher who says it."

"I don't claim any originality for it, Mr. Carter."

"By the way, Philip, I have noticed that you always express yourself very correctly. Your education must be good."

"Yes, sir, thanks to my father, or the man whom I always regarded as my father. I am a fair Latin scholar, and know something of Greek."

"Were you preparing for college?" asked Mr. Carter, with interest.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you like to go?"

"I should have gone had father lived, but my step−mother said it was foolishness and would be money thrown away."

"Perhaps she preferred to incur that expense for her own son?" suggested the old gentleman.

"Jonas wouldn't consent to that. He detests study, and would decidedly object to going to college."

"By the way, you haven't heard from them lately?"

"Only that they have left our old home and gone no one knows where."

"That is strange."

By this time they had reached the humble dwelling occupied by Mrs. Forbush.

"And so this is where Rebecca lives?" said Mr. Carter.

"Yes, sir. It is not quite so nice as Mrs. Pitkin's."

"No," returned Mr. Carter thoughtfully. Philip rang the bell, and the two were admitted into the humble parlor. They had not long to wait for Mrs. Forbush, who, with an agitation which she could not overcome, entered the presence of her long estranged and wealthy uncle.

"Rebecca!" exclaimed the old gentleman, rising, and showing some emotion as he saw the changes which fifteen years had made in the niece whom he had last met as a girl.

"Uncle Oliver! how kind you are to visit me!" cried Mrs. Forbush, the tears starting from her eyes.

"Kind! Nonsense! I have been very unkind to neglect you so long. But it wasn't all my fault. There were others who did all they could to keep us apart. You have lost your husband?"

"Yes, uncle. He was poor, but he was one of the kindest and best of men, and made me happy."

"I begin to think I have been an old fool, Rebecca. Philip thinks so, too."

"Oh, Mr. Carter!" exclaimed our hero.

"Yes, you do, Philip," asserted Mr. Carter, "and you are quite right. However, as you told me, it is never too late to mend."

"Mrs. Forbush will think I take strange liberties with you, sir."

"I don't object to good advice, even from a boy. But who is this?"

Julia had just entered the room. She was a bright, attractive girl, but held back bashfully until her mother said:

"Julia, this is Uncle Oliver Carter. You have heard me speak of him."

"Yes, mamma."

"And scold about him, I dare say. Well, Julia, come and give your old uncle a kiss.

Julia blushed, but obeyed her uncle's request.

"I should know she was your child, Rebecca. She looks as you did at her age. Now tell me, have you any engagement this morning, you two?"

"No, Uncle Oliver."

"Then I will find one for you. I have a carriage at the door. You will please put on your bonnets. We are going shopping."

"Shopping?"

"Yes, I am going to fit out both of you in a manner more befitting relatives of mine. The fact is, Niece Rebecca, you are actually shabby."

"I know it, uncle, but there has been so many ways of spending money that I have had to neglect my dress.

"Very likely. I understand. Things are different now. Now, don't be over an hour getting ready!"

"We are not fashionable, uncle," said Mrs. Forbush, "and we haven't any change to make."

They entered the carriage, and drove to a large and fashionable store, where everything necessary to a lady's toilet, including dresses quite complete, could be obtained. Mrs. Forbush was in favor of selecting very plain articles, but her uncle overruled her, and pointed out costumes much more costly.

"But, uncle," objected Mrs. Forbush, "these things won't at all correspond with our plain home and mode of living. Think of a boarding−house keeper arrayed like a fine lady."

"You are going to give up taking boarders — that is, you will have none but Philip and myself."

"Will you really live with us, uncle? But the house is too poor."

"Of course it is, but you are going to move. I will speak further on this point when you are through your purchases."

At length the shopping was over, and they re−entered the carriage.

"Drive to No. — Madison Avenue," said Mr. Carter to the driver.

"Uncle Oliver, you have given the wrong direction."

"No, Rebecca, I know what I am about."

"Do you live on Madison Avenue?" asked Mrs. Forbush.

"I am going to and so are you. You must know that I own a furnished house on Madison Avenue. The late occupants sailed for Europe last week, and I was looking out for a tenant when I found you. You will move there to−morrow, and act as house keeper, taking care of Philip and myself. I hope Julia and you will like it as well as your present home."

"How can I thank you for all your kindness, Uncle Oliver?" said Mrs. Forbush, with joyful tears. "It will be living once more. It will be such a rest from the hard struggle I have had of late years."

"You can repay me by humoring all my whims," said Uncle Oliver, smiling. "You will find me very tyrannical. The least infraction of my rules will lead me to send you all packing."

"Am I to be treated in the same way, Mr. Carter?" asked Philip.

"Exactly."

"Then, if you discharge me, I will fly for refuge to Mr. Pitkin."

"That will be `out of the frying−pan into the fire' with a vengeance."

By this time they had reached the house. It was an elegant brown−stone front, and proved, on entrance, to be furnished in the most complete and elegant manner. Mr. Carter selected the second floor for his own use; a good−sized room on the third was assigned to Philip, and Mrs. Forbush was told to select such rooms for Julia and herself as she desired.

"This is much finer than Mrs. Pitkin's house," said Philip. "Yes, it is."

"She will be jealous when she hears of it."

"No doubt. That is precisely what I desire. It will be a fitting punishment for her treatment of her own cousin."

It was arranged that on the morrow Mrs. Forbush and Julia should close their small house, leaving directions to sell the humble furniture at auction, while Mr. Carter and Philip would come up from the Astor House.

"What will the Pitkins say when they hear of it?" thought Philip. "I am afraid they will feel bad."

CHAPTER XXVII. AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

WHILE these important changes were occurring in the lives of Philip Brent and the poor cousin, Mrs. Pitkin remained in blissful ignorance of what was going on. Alonzo had told her of his encounter with Phil on Broadway and the intelligence our hero gave him of his securing a place.

"You may rest assured the boy was lying, Lonny," said Mrs. Pitkin. "Boys don't get places so easily, especially when they can't give a recommendation from their last employer.

"That's just what I thought, ma," said Alonzo.

"Still Phil looked in good spirits, and he was as saucy as ever."

"I can believe the last very well, Lonny. The boy is naturally impertinent. They were probably put on to deceive you."

"But how does he get money to pay his way?" said Alonzo puzzled.

"As to that, he is probably selling papers or blacking boots in the lower part of the city. He could make enough to live on, and of course he wouldn't let you know what he was doing."

"I hope you're right, ma. I'd give ever so much to catch him blacking boots in City Hall Park, or anywhere else; I'd give him a job. Wouldn't he feel mortified to be caught?"

"No doubt he would."

"I've a great mind to go down town to−morrow and look about for him."

"Very well, Lonny. You may to if you want to."

Alonzo did go; but he looked in vain for Phil. The latter was employed in doing some writing and attending to some accounts for Mr. Carter, who had by this time found that his protege was thoroughly well qualified for such work.

So nearly a week passed. It so chanced that though Uncle Oliver had now been in New York a considerable time, not one of the Pitkins had met him or had reason to suspect that he was nearer than Florida.

One day, however, among Mrs. Pitkin's callers was Mrs. Vangriff, a fashionable acquaintance.

"Mr. Oliver Carter is your uncle, I believe?" said the visitor.

"Yes."

"I met him on Broadway the other day. He was looking very well."

"It must have been a fortnight since, then. Uncle Oliver is in Florida."

"In Florida!" repeated Mrs. Vangriff, in surprise.

"When did he go?"

"When was it, Lonny?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, appealing to her son.

"It will be two weeks next Thursday."

"There must be some mistake," said the visitor.

"I saw Mr. Carter on Broadway, near Twentieth Street, day before yesterday."

"Quite a mistake, I assure you, Mrs. Vangriff," said Mrs. Pitkin, smiling. "It was some other person. You were deceived by a fancied resemblance."

"It is you who are wrong, Mrs. Pitkin," said Mrs. Vangriff, positively. "I am somewhat acquainted with Mr. Carter, and I stopped to speak with him."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, looking startled.

"Certainly, I am sure of it."

"Did you call him by name?"

"Certainly; and even inquired after you. He answered that he believed you were well. I thought he was living with you?"

"So he was," answered Mrs. Pitkin coolly as possible, considering the startling nature of the information she had received. "Probably Uncle Oliver returned sooner than he anticipated, and was merely passing through the city. He has important business interests at the West."

"I don't think he was merely passing through the city, for a friend of mine saw him at the Fifth Avenue Theater last evening." Mrs. Pitkin actually turned as pale as her sallow complexion would admit.

"I am rather surprised to hear this, I admit," she said. "Was he alone, do you know?"

"No; he had a lady and a boy with him."

"Is it possible that Uncle Oliver has been married to some designing widow?" Mrs. Pitkin asked herself. "It is positively terrible!"

She did not dare to betray her agitation before Mrs. Vangriff, and sat on thorns till that lady saw fit to take leave. Then she turned to Alonzo and said, in a hollow voice:

"Lonny, you heard what that woman said?"

"You bet!"

"Do you think Uncle Oliver has gone and got married again?" she asked, in a hollow voice.

"I shouldn't wonder a mite, ma," was the not consolitary reply.

"If so, what will become of us? My poor boy, I looked upon you and myself as likely to receive all of Uncle Oliver's handsome property. As it is — — " and she almost broke down.

"Perhaps he's only engaged?" suggested Alonzo.

"To be sure!" said his mother, brightening up.

"If so, the affair may yet be broken off. Oh, Lonny, I never thought your uncle was so artful. His trip to Florida was only a trick to put us off the scent."

"What are you going to do about it, ma?"

"I must find out as soon as possible where Uncle Oliver is staying. Then I will see him, and try to cure him of his infatuation. He is evidently trying to keep us in the dark, or he would have come back to his rooms."

"How are you going to find out, ma?"

"I don't know. That's what puzzles me."

"S'pose you hire a detective?"

"I wouldn't dare to. Your uncle would be angry when he found it out."

"Do you s'pose Phil knows anything about it?" suggested Alonzo.

"I don't know; it is hardly probable. Do you know where he lives?"

"With the woman who called here and said she was your cousin."

"Yes, I remember, Lonny. I will order the carriage, and we will go there. But you must be very careful not to let them know Uncle Oliver is in New York. I don't wish them to meet him."

"All right! I ain't a fool. You can trust me, ma."

Soon the Pitkin carriage was as the door, and Mrs. Pitkin and Alonzo entered it, and were driven to the shabby house so recently occupied by Mrs. Forbush.

"It's a low place!" said Alonzo contemptuously, as he regarded disdainfully the small dwelling.

"Yes; but I suppose it is as good as she can afford to live in. Lonny, will you get out and ring the bell? Ask if Mrs. Forbush lives there." Alonzo did as requested.

The door was opened by a small girl, whose shabby dress was in harmony with the place.

"Rebecca's child, I suppose!" said Mrs. Pitkin, who was looking out of the carriage window.

"Does Mrs. Forbush live here?" asked Alonzo.

"No, she doesn't. Mrs. Kavanagh lives here.

"Didn't Mrs. Forbush used to live here?" further asked Alonzo, at the suggestion of his mother.

"I believe she did. She moved out a week ago."

"Do you know where she moved to?"

"No, I don't."

"Does a boy named Philip Brent live here?"

"No, he doesn't."

"Do you know why Mrs. Forbush moved away?" asked Alonzo again, at the suggestion of his mother.

"Guess she couldn't pay her rent."

"Very likely," said Alonzo, who at last had received an answer with which he was pleased.

"Well, ma, there isn't any more to find out here," he said.

"Tell the driver — home!" said his mother.

When they reached the house in Twelfth Street, there was a surprise in store for them.

"Who do you think's up−stairs, mum?" said Hannah, looking important.

"Who? Tell me quick!"

"It's your Uncle Oliver, mum, just got home from Florida; but I guess he's going somewhere else mum, for he's packing up his things."

"Alonzo, we will go up and see him," said Mrs. Pitkin, excited. "I must know what all this means."

CHAPTER XXVIII. AN UNSATISFACTORY CONFERENCE.

MR. CARTER was taking articles from a bureau and packing them away in an open trunk, when Mrs. Pitkin entered with Alonzo. It is needless to say that his niece regarded his employment with dismay, for it showed clearly that he proposed to leave the shelter of her roof.

"Uncle Oliver!" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair and gazing at the old gentleman spell−bound.

Mr. Carter, whose back had been turned, turned about and faced his niece.

"Oh, it is you, Lavinia!" he said quietly.

"What are you doing?" asked his niece.

"As you see, I am packing my trunk."

"Do you intend to leave us?" faltered Mrs. Pitkin.

"I think it will be well for me to make a change," said Mr. Carter.

"This is, indeed, a sad surprise," said Mrs Pitkin mournfully. When did you return from Florida?"

"I have never been there. I changed my mind when I reached Charleston."

"How long have you been in the city?"

"About a week."

"And never came near us. This is, indeed, unkind. In what way have we offended you?" and Mrs. Pitkin put her handkerchief to her eyes.

There were no tears in them, but she was making an attempt to touch the heart of her uncle.

"Are you aware that Rebecca Forbush is in the city?" asked the old gentleman abruptly.

"Ye−es," answered Mrs. Pitkin, startled.

"Have you seen her?"

"Ye−es. She came here one day."

"And how did you treat her?" asked Mr. Carter, severely. "Did you not turn the poor woman from the house, having no regard for her evident poverty? Did you not tell her that I was very angry with her, and would not hear her name mentioned?"

"Ye−es, I may have said so. You know, Uncle Oliver, you have held no communication with her for many years."

"That is true — more shame to me!"

"And I thought I was carrying out your wishes in discouraging her visits."

"You also thought that she might be a dangerous rival in my favor, and might deprive you and Alonzo of an expected share in my estate."

"Oh, Uncle Oliver! how can you think so poorly of me?"

Mr. Carter eyed his niece with a half−smile.

"So I do you injustice, do I, Lavinia?" he returned. "Yes, great injustice."

"I am glad to hear it. I feel less objection now to telling you what are my future plans."

"What are they?" asked Mrs. Pitkin apprehensively.

"I have lived for ten years under your roof, and have had no communication, as you say, with Rebecca. I think it is only fair now that I should show her some attention. I have accordingly installed her as mistress of my house in Madison Avenue, and shall henceforth make my home with her."

Mrs. Pitkin felt as if the earth was sinking under her feet. The hopes and schemes of so many years had come to naught, and her hated and dreaded cousin was to be constantly in the society of the rich uncle.

"Rebecca has played her cards well," she said bitterly.

"She has not played them at all. She did not seek me. I sought her."

"How did you know she was in the city?"

"I learned it from — Philip!"

There was fresh dismay.

"So that boy has wormed his way into your confidence!" said Mrs. Pitkin bitterly. "After acting so badly that Mr. Pitkin was obliged to discharge him, he ran to you to do us a mischief."

"Why was he discharged?" demanded Mr. Carter sternly. "Why did your husband seize the opportunity to get rid of a boy in whom he knew me to be interested as soon as he thought I was out of the way? Why, moreover, did he refuse the boy a reference, without which Philip could scarcely hope to get employment?"

"You will have to ask Mr. Pitkin. I am sure he had good reason for the course he took. He's an impudent, low upstart in my opinion."

"So he is, ma!" chimed in Alonzo, with heartiness.

"Ah! I have something to say to you, Alonzo," said Mr. Carter, turning his keen glances upon the boy. "What became of that letter I gave to you to post just before I went away?"

"I put it in the letter−box," said Alonzo nervously.

"Do you know what was in it?"

"No," answered Alonzo, but he looked frightened.

"There were ten dollars in it. That letter never reached Phil, to whom it was addressed."

"I — don't know anything about it," faltered Alonzo.

"There are ways of finding out whether letters have been posted," said Mr. Carter. "I might put a detective on the case."

Alonzo turned pale, and looked much discomposed.

"Of what are you accusing my boy?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, ready to contend for her favorite. "So that boy has been telling lies about him, has he? and you believe scandalous stories about your own flesh and blood?"

"Not exactly that, Lavinia."

"Well, your near relation, and that on the testimony of a boy you know nothing about. When Lonny is so devoted to you, too!"

"I never noticed any special devotion," said Mr. Carter, amused. "You are mistaken, however, about Philip trying to injure him. I simply asked Philip whether he had received such a letter, and he said no."

"I dare say he did receive it," said Mrs. Pitkin spitefully.

"We won't argue the matter now," said the old gentleman. "I will only say that you and Alonzo, and Mr. Pitkin also, have gone the wrong way to work to secure my favor. You have done what you could to injure two persons, one your own cousin, because you were jealous."

"You judge me very hardly, uncle," said Mrs. Pitkin, seeing that she must adopt a different course.

"I have no bad feeling against Rebecca, and as to the boy, I will ask my husband to take him back into the store. I am sure he will do it, because you wish it."

"I don't wish it," answered Mr. Carter, rather unexpectedly. "Oh, well," answered Mrs. Pitkin, looking relieved, "that is as you say."

"I have other views for Philip," said Mr. Carter.

"He is with me as my private secretary."

"Is he living with you?" asked his niece, in alarm.

"Yes."

"There was no need of taking a stranger, Uncle Oliver. We should be glad to have Alonzo act as your secretary, though of course we should want him to stay at home."

"I shall not deprive you of Alonzo," said Mr. Carter, with a tinge of sarcasm in his tone. "Philip will suit me better."

Mr. Carter turned and resumed his packing.

"Are you quite determined to leave us?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, in a subdued tone.

"Yes; it will be better."

"But you will come back — say after a few weeks?"

"No, I think not," he answered dryly.

"And shall we not see you at all?"

"Oh, I shall call from time to time, and besides, you will know where I am, and can call whenever you desire."

"People will talk about your leaving us," complained Mrs. Pitkin.

"Let them talk. I never agreed to have my movements controlled by people's gossip. And now, Lavinia, I shall have to neglect you and resume my packing. To−morrow I shall bring Philip here to help me."

"Would you like to have Alonzo help you, Uncle Oliver?"

This offer, much to Alonzo's relief, was declined. He feared that he should be examined more closely by the old gentleman about the missing money, which at that very moment he had in his pocket.

Mrs. Pitkin went down stairs feeling angry and baffled. All that she had done to retain her ascendency over Uncle Oliver had failed, and Mrs. Forbush and Philip seemed to have superseded herself and Alonzo in his regard. She conferred with Mr. Pitkin on his return from the store, but the more they considered the matter the worse it looked for their prospects.

Could anything be done?

CHAPTER XXIX. A TRUCE.

NO MORE distasteful news could have come to the Pitkins than to learn that Philip and their poor cousin had secured a firm place in the good graces of Uncle Oliver. Yet they did not dare to show their resentment. They had found that Uncle Oliver had a will of his own, and meant to exercise it. Had they been more forbearing he would still be an inmate of their house instead of going over to the camp of their enemies, for so they regarded Mrs. Forbush and Phil.

"I hate that woman, Mr. Pitkin!" said his wife fiercely. "I scorn such underhanded work. How she has sneaked into the good graces of poor, deluded Uncle Oliver!"

"You have played your cards wrong, Lavinia," said her husband peevishly.

"I? That is a strange accusation, Mr. Pitkin. It was you, to my thinking. You sent off that errand boy, and that is how the whole thing came about. If he had been in your store he wouldn't have met Uncle Oliver down at the pier.

"You and Alonzo persuaded me to discharge him."

"Oh, of course it's Alonzo and me! When you see Rebecca Forbush and that errand boy making ducks and drakes out of Uncle Oliver's money you may wish you had acted more wisely."

"Really, Lavinia, you are a most unreasonable woman. It's no use criminating and recriminating. We must do what we can to mend matters."

"What can we do?"

"They haven't got the money yet — remember that! We must try to re−establish friendly relations with Mr. Carter."

"Perhaps you'll tell me how?"

"Certainly! Call as soon as possible at the house on Madison Avenue."

"Call on that woman?"

"Yes; and try to smooth matters over as well as you can. Take Alonzo with you, and instruct him to be polite to Philip."

"I don't believe Lonny will be willing to demean himself so far."

"He'll have to," answered Mr. Pitkin firmly.

"We've all made a mistake, and the sooner we remedy it the better.

Mrs. Pitkin thought it over. The advice was unpalatable, but it was evidently sound. Uncle Oliver was rich, and they must not let his money slip through their fingers. So, after duly instructing Alonzo in his part, Mrs. Pitkin, a day or two later, ordered her carriage and drove in state to the house of her once poor relative. "Is Mrs. Forbush at home?" she asked of the servant.

"I believe so, madam," answered a dignified man−servant,

"Take this card to her."

Mrs. Pitkin and Alonzo were ushered into a drawing−room more elegant than their own. She sat on a sofa with Alonzo.

"Who would think that Rebecca Forbush would come to live like this?" she said, half to herself.

"And that boy," supplemented Alonzo.

"To be sure! Your uncle is fairly infatuated."

Just then Mrs. Forbush entered, followed by her daughter. She was no longer clad in a shabby dress, but wore an elegant toilet, handsome beyond her own wishes, but insisted upon by Uncle Oliver.

"I am glad to see you, Lavinia," she said simply. "This is my daughter."

Julia, too, was stylishly dressed, and Alonzo, in spite of his prejudices, could not help regarding this handsome cousin with favor.

I do not propose to detail the interview. Mrs. Pitkin was on her good behavior, and appeared very gracious.

Mrs. Forbush could not help recalling the difference between her demeanor now and on the recent occasion, when in her shabby dress she called at the house in Twelfth Street, but she was too generous to recall it. "As they were about to leave, Mr. Carter and Philip entered the room, sent for by Mrs. Forbush.

"How do you do, Philip?" said Mrs. Pitkin, graciously. "Alonzo, this is Philip."

"How do?" growled Alonzo, staring enviously at Phil's handsome new suit, which was considerably handsomer than his own.

"Very well, Alonzo."

"You must come and see Lonny," said Mrs. Pitkin pleasantly.

"Thank you!" answered Phil politely.

He did not say it was a pleasure, for he was a boy of truth, and he did not feel that it would be.

Uncle Oliver was partially deceived by his niece's new manner. He was glad that there seemed to be a reconciliation, and he grew more cordial than he had been since his return.

After awhile Mrs. Pitkin rose to go.

When she was fairly in the carriage once more, she said passionately:

"How I hate them!"

"You were awful sweet on them, ma!" said Alonzo, opening his eyes.

"I had to be. But the time will come when I will open the eyes of Uncle Oliver to the designs of that scheming woman and that artful errand boy."

It was Mrs. Pitkin's true self that spoke.

CHAPTER XXX. PHIL'S TRUST.

AMONG the duties which devolved upon Phil was Mr. Carter's bank business. He generally made deposits for Uncle Oliver, and drew money on his personal checks whenever he needed it.

It has already been said that Mr. Carter was a silent partner in the firm of which Mr. Pitkin was the active manager. The arrangement between the partners was, that each should draw out two hundred dollars a week toward current expenses, and that the surplus, if any, at the end of the year, should be divided according to the terms of the partnership.

When Phil first presented himself with a note from Mr. Carter, he was an object of attention to the clerks, who knew that he had been discharged by Mr. Pitkin. Yet here he was, dressed in a new suit provided with a watch, and wearing every mark of prosperity. One of the most surprised was Mr. G. Washington Wilbur, with whom, as an old friend, Phil stopped to chat.

"Is old Pitkin going to take you back?" he inquired. "No," answered Phil promptly. "He couldn't have me if he wanted me."

"Have you got another place?"

"Yes."

"What's the firm?"

"It isn't in business. I am private secretary to Mr. Carter."

Mr. Wilbur regarded him with surprise and respect.

"Is it a soft place?" he inquired.

"It's a very pleasant place."

"What wages do you get?"

"Twelve dollars a week and board."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Say, doesn't he want another secretary?" asked Mr. Wilbur.

"No, I think not."

"I'd like a place of that sort. You're a lucky fellow, Phil."

"I begin to think I am."

"Of course you don't live at the old place."

"No; I live on Madison Avenue. By the way, Wilbur, how is your lady−love?"

Mr. Wilbur looked radiant.

"I think I'm getting on," he said. "I met her the other evening, and she smiled."

"That is encouraging," said Phil, as soberly as possible. "All things come to him who waits! That's what I had to write in my copy−book once."

Phil was received by Mr. Pitkin with more graciousness than he expected. He felt that he must do what he could to placate Uncle Oliver, but he was more dangerous when friendly in his manner than when he was rude and impolite. He was even now plotting to get Phil into a scrape which should lose him the confidence of Uncle Oliver.

Generally Phil was paid in a check payable to the order of Mr. Carter. But one Saturday two hundred dollars in bills were placed in his hands instead.

"You see how much confidence I place in your honesty," said Mr. Pitkin. "You couldn't use the check. This money you could make off with."

"It would be very foolish, to say the least," responded Phil.

"Of course, of course. I know you are trustworthy, or I would have given you a check instead."

When Phil left the building he was followed, though he did not know it, by a man looking like a clerk.

Ah, Phil, you are in danger, though you don't suspect it.

CHAPTER XXXI. PHIL IS SHADOWED.

PHIL felt that he must be more than usually careful, because the money he had received was in the form of bills, which, unlike the check, would be of use to any thief appropriating it. That he was in any unusual danger, however, he was far from suspecting.

He reached Broadway, and instead of taking an omnibus, started to walk up−town. He knew there was no haste, and a walk up the great busy thoroughfare had its attractions for him, as it has for many others.

Behind him, preserving a distance of from fifteen to twenty feet, walked a dark−complexioned man of not far

from forty years of age. Of course Phil was not likely to notice him.

Whatever the man's designs might be, he satisfied himself at first with simply keeping our hero in view. But as they both reached Bleecker Street, he suddenly increased his pace and caught up with Phil. He touched the boy on the shoulder, breathing quickly, as if he had been running.

Phil turned quickly. "Do you want me, sir?" he asked, eying the stranger in surprise.

"I don't know. Perhaps I am mistaken. Are you in the employ of Mr. Oliver Carter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah I then you are the boy I want. I have bad news for you."

"Bad news!" repeated Phil, alarmed. "What is it?"

"Mr. Carter was seized with a fit in the street half an hour since."

"Is he — dead?" asked Phil, in dismay.

"No, no! I think he will come out ail right."

"Where is he?"

"In my house. I didn't of course know who he was, but I found in his pocket a letter directed to Oliver Carter, Madison Avenue. There was also a business card. He is connected in business with Mr. Pitkin, is he not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Phil; "where is your house?"

"In Bleecker Street, near by. Mr. Carter is lying on the bed. He is unconscious, but my wife heard him say: `Call Philip.' I suppose that is you?"

"Yes, sir; my name is Philip."

"I went around to his place of business, and was told that you had just left there. I was given a description of you and hurried to find you. Will you come to the house and see Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, sir," answered Phil, forgetting everything except that his kind and generous employer was sick, perhaps dangerously.

"Thank you; I shall feel relieved. Of course you can communicate with his friends and arrange to have him carried home."

"Yes, sir; I live at his house."

"That is well."

They had turned down Bleecker Street, when it occurred to Phil to say:

"I don't understand how Mr. Carter should be in this neighborhood."

"That is something I can't explain, as I know nothing about his affairs," said the stranger pleasantly. "Perhaps he may have property on the street."

"I don't think so. I attend to much of his business, and he would have sent me if there had been anything of that kind to attend to."

"I dare say you are right," said his companion.

"Of course I know nothing about it. I only formed a conjecture."

"Has a physician been sent for?" asked Phil.

"Do you know of any we can call in?"

"My wife agreed to send for one on Sixth Avenue," said the stranger. "I didn't wait for him to come, but set out for the store."

Nothing could be more ready or plausible than the answers of his new acquaintance, and Phil was by no means of a suspicious temperament. Had he lived longer in the city it might have occurred to him that there was something rather unusual in the circumstances, but he knew that Mr. Carter had spoken of leaving the house at the breakfast−table, indeed had left it before he himself had set out for the store. For the time being the thought of the sum of money which he carried with him had escaped his memory, but it was destined very soon to be recalled to his mind.

They had nearly reached Sixth Avenue, when his guide stopped in front of a shabby brick house.

"This is where I live," he said. "We will go in."

He produced a key, opened the door, and Phil accompanied him up a shabby staircase to the third floor. He opened the door of a rear room, and made a sign to Phil to enter.

CHAPTER XXXII. PHIL IS ROBBED.

WHEN he was fairly in the room Phil looked about him expecting to see Mr. Carter, but the room appeared unoccupied. He turned to his companion, a look of surprise on his face, but he was destined to be still more surprised, and that not in a pleasant way. His guide had locked the door from the inside and put the key in his pocket.

"What does that mean?" asked Phil, with sudden apprehension.

"What do you refer to?" asked his guide with an unpleasant smile.

"Why do you lock the door?"

"I thought it might be safest," was the significant answer.

"I don't believe Mr. Carter is in the house at all," said Phil quickly.

"I don't believe he is either, youngster."

"Why did you tell me he was here?" demanded Phil, with rising indignation.

"I thought you wouldn't come if I didn't," replied his companion nonchalantly.

"Answer me one thing, is Mr. Carter sick at all?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then I am trapped!"

"Precisely. You may as well know the truth now."

Phil had already conjectured the reason why he had been enticed to this poor dwelling. The two hundred dollars which he had in his pocket made him feel very uncomfortable. I think I may say truly that if the money had been his own he would have been less disturbed. But he thought, with a sinking heart, that if the money should be taken from him, he would himself fall under suspicion, and he could not bear to have Mr. Carter think that he had repaid his kindness with such black ingratitude. He might be mistaken. The man before him might not know he had such a sum of money in his possession, and of course he was not going to give him the information.

"I am glad Mr. Carter is all right," said Phil. "Now tell me why you have taken such pains to get me here?"

"Why, as to that," said his companion, "there were at least two hundred good reasons."

Phil turned pale, for he understood now that in some way his secret was known.

"What do you mean?" he asked, not wholly able to conceal his perturbed feelings.

"You know well enough, boy," said the other significantly. "You've got two hundred dollars in your pocket. I want it."

"Are you a thief, then?" said Phil, with perhaps imprudent boldness.

"Just take care what you say. I won't be insulted by such a whipper−snapper as you. You'd better not call names. Hand over that money!"

"How do you know I have any money?" Phil asked, trying to gain a little time for deliberation.

"No matter. Hand it over, I say!"

"Don't take it!" said Phil, agitated. "It isn't mine!"

"Then you needn't mind giving it up."

"It belongs to Mr. Carter."

"He has plenty more."

"But he will think I took it. He will think I am dishonest."

"That is nothing to me."

"Let me go," pleaded Phil, "and I will never breathe a word about your wanting to rob me. You know you might get into trouble for it."

"That's all bosh! The money, I say!" said the man sternly.

"I won't give it to you!" said Phil boldly.

"You won't, hey? Then I shall have to take it. If I hurt you, you will have yourself to blame."

So saying the man seized Phil, and then a struggle ensued, the boy defending himself as well as he could. He made a stouter resistance than the thief anticipated, and the latter became irritated with the amount of trouble he had to take it. I should be glad to report that Phil made a successful defense, but this was hardly to be expected. He was a strong boy, but he had to cope with a strong man, and though right was on his side, virtue in his case had to succumb to triumphant vice.

Phil was thrown down, and when prostrate, with the man's knee on his breast, the latter succeeded in stripping him of the money he had so bravely defended.

"There, you young rascal!" he said, as he rose to his feet; "you see how much good you have done. You might as well have given up the money in the first place."

"It was my duty to keep it from you, if I could," said Phil, panting with his exertions.

"Well, if that's any satisfaction to you, you're welcome to it."

He went to the door and unlocked it.

"May I go now?" asked Phil.

"Not much. Stay where you are!"

A moment later and Phil found himself alone and a prisoner.

Phil is seized, thrown down and robbed of his money.

CHAPTER XXXIII. A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

PHIL tried the door, but now it was locked on the outside, and he found that he was securely trapped. He went to the window, but here, too, there was no chance of escape. Even if he had been able to get safely out, he would have landed in a back−yard from which there was no egress except through the house, which was occupied by his enemies.

"What shall I do?" Phil asked himself, despairingly. "Mr. Carter will be anxious about me, and perhaps he may think I have gone off with the money!"

This to Phil was the worst of his troubles. He prized a good reputation and the possession of an honorable name, and to be thought a thief would distress him exceedingly.

"What a fool I was to walk into such a trap!" he said to himself. "I might have known Mr. Carter would not be in such a neighborhood."

Phil was too severe upon himself. I suspect that most of my boy readers, even those who account themselves sharp, might have been deceived as easily. The fact is, rogues are usually plausible, and they are so trained in deception that it is no reflection upon their victims that they allow themselves to be taken in.

Hours passed, and still Phil found himself a prisoner. Each moment he became more anxious and troubled.

"How long will they keep me?" he asked himself. "They can't keep me here forever."

About six o'clock the door was opened slightly, and a plate of bread and butter was thrust in, together with a glass of cold water. Who brought it up Phil did not know, for the person did not show himself or herself.

Phil ate and drank what was provided, not that he was particularly hungry, but he felt that he must keep up his strength.

"They don't mean to starve me, at any rate," he reflected. "That is some consolation. While there is life, there is hope."

A little over an hour passed. It became dark in Phil's prison, but he had no means of lighting the gas. There was a small bed in the room, and he made up his mind that he must sleep there.

All at once there was a confused noise and disturbance. He could not make out what it meant, till above all other sounds he heard the terrible cry of "Fire!"

"Fire! Where is it?" thought Phil. It was not long before he made a terrible discovery. It was the very house in which he was confined! There was a trampling of feet and a chorus of screams. The smoke penetrated into the room.

"Heavens! Am I to be burned alive!" thought our poor hero.

He jumped up and down on the floor, pounded frantically on the door, and at last the door was broken open by a stalwart fireman, and Phil made his way out, half−suffocated.

Once in the street, he made his way as fast as possible homeward.

CHAPTER XXXIV. PHIL'S FRIENDS AND HIS ENEMIES.

MEANWHILE, Phil's long absence had excited anxiety and alarm.

"What can have become of Philip?" said Mr. Carter when supper time came and he did not arrive.

"I can't think," answered Mrs. Forbush. "He is generally very prompt."

"That is what makes me feel anxious. I am afraid something must have happened to him."

"Did you send him anywhere, Uncle Oliver?"

"Yes; he called, as usual, to get my check from Mr. Pitkin."

"And he ought to have been here earlier?"

"Certainly. He wouldn't have to wait for that."

"Philip is very careful. I can't think that he has met with an accident."

"Even the most prudent and careful get into trouble sometimes."

They were finally obliged to sit down to supper alone. None of the three enjoyed it. Not only Mr. Carter and Mrs. Forbush, but Julia was anxious and troubled. "I didn't know I cared so much for the boy," said Uncle Oliver. "He has endeared himself to me. I care nothing for the loss of the money if he will only return safe."

It was about a quarter of eight when the door−bell rang, and the servant ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin and Alonzo.

After the usual greetings were interchanged, Mrs. Pitkin said, looking about her:

"Where is Philip?"

"We are very much concerned about him," said Mr. Carter, his face showing his trouble. "He has not been home since morning. Did he call at your store, Pitkin?"

"Hasn't he been home since?" asked Pitkin, in a tone unpleasantly significant.

"No. At what time did he leave the store?"

"Hours since. I — I am not sure but I may be able to throw some light on his failure to return."

"Do so, if you can!" said Uncle Oliver.

"In place of giving him a check, I gave the boy two hundred dollars in bills."

"Well?"

"Don't you see? The temptation has proved too strong for him. I think, Uncle Oliver, you won't see him back in a hurry."

"Do you mean to say the boy would steal?" demanded the old gentleman indignantly.

"I think it more than likely that he has appropriated the money."

"I am sure he has not," said Mrs. Forbush.

"And so am I," chimed in Julia.

Mr. Pitkin shrugged his shoulders.

"So you think," he answered; "but I don't agree with you."

"Nor I!" said Mrs. Pitkin, nodding her head vigorously. "I never had any confidence in the boy. I don't mind telling you now that I have warned Alonzo not to get too intimate with him. You remember it, Lonny?"

"Yes'm," responded Lonny.

"Then you think the boy capable of appropriating the money?" asked Mr. Carter quietly.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I don't!" said Uncle Oliver emphatically.

"You are very easily deceived," said Mrs. Pitkin.

"Don't be too sure of that," returned Mr. Carter, with a significant glance, that made his niece feel uncomfortable.

"I suspect you will have to admit it," said Mr. Pitkin. "If, contrary to my anticipation, the boy returns, and brings the money with him, I will own myself mistaken."

Just then the front door was heard to open; there was a sound of steps in the hall, and Phil came hurriedly into the room.

Mr. and Mrs. Pitkin exchanged looks of surprise and dismay; but Mrs. Forbush, her daughter and Uncle Oliver looked delighted.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE PITKINS RETIRE IN DISGUST.

WHERE have you been, Philip?" asked Mr. Carter, breaking the silence. "We were getting anxious about you."

"I have bad news for you, sir," returned Phil, saying what stood first in his mind. "I have lost the two hundred dollars Mr. Pitkin paid me this morning."

"So you lost it?" observed Mr. Pitkin with a sneer, emphasizing the word "lost" to show his incredulity.

"Yes, sir, I lost it," answered Phil, looking him fearlessly in the eye; "or, rather, it was stolen from me."

"Oh! now it is stolen, is it?" repeated Pitkin.

"Really, Uncle Oliver, this is getting interesting."

"I believe I am the proper person to question Philip," said Mr. Carter coldly. "It was my money, I take it."

"Yes, it was yours. As I made the payment, I cannot, of course, be responsible for its not reaching you. You will pardon my saying that it would have been wiser to employ a different messenger."

"Why?" demanded Uncle Oliver, looking displeased.

"Why, really, Uncle Oliver," said Mr. Pitkin, "I should think the result might convince you of that."

"We had better let Philip tell his story," said Mr. Carter quietly. "How did it happen, Philip?"

Thereupon Philip told the story already familiar to the reader.

"Upon my word, quite a romantic story!" commented Mr. Pitkin, unable to repress a sneer. "So you were tracked by a rascal, lured into a den of thieves, robbed of your money, or, rather, Mr. Carter's, and only released by the house catching fire?"

"That is exactly what happened to me, sir," said Philip, coloring with indignation, for he saw that Mr. Pitkin was doing his best to discredit him.

"It quite does credit to your imagination. By the way, boy, have you been in the habit of reading dime novels?"

"I never read one in my life, sir."

"Then I think you would succeed in writing them. For a boy of sixteen, you certainly have a vivid imagination."

"I quite agree with my husband," said Mrs. Pitkin. "The boy's story is ridiculously improbable. I can't understand how he has the face to stand there and expect Uncle Oliver to swallow such rubbish."

"I don't expect you to believe it, either of you," said Philip manfully, "for you have never treated me fairly."

"I think you will find, also, that my uncle is too sensible a man to credit it, also," retorted Mrs Pitkin.

"Speak for yourself, Lavinia," said Mr. Carter, who had waited intentionally to let his relatives express themselves. "I believe every word of Philip's story."

"You do?" ejaculated Mrs. Pitkin, rolling her eyes and nodding her head, in the vain endeavor to express her feelings. "Really, Uncle Oliver, for a man of your age and good sense — — "

"Thank you for that admission, Lavinia," said Mr. Carter mockingly. "Go on."

"I was about to say that you seem infatuated with this boy, of whom we know nothing, except from his own account. To my mind his story is a most ridiculous invention."

"Mr. Pitkin, did any one enter your store just after Philip left it to inquire after him?"

"No, sir," answered Pitkin triumphantly. "That's a lie, at any rate."

"You will remember that Philip did not make the assertion himself. This was the statement of the thief who robbed him."

"Yes, of course," sneered Pitkin. "He told his story very shrewdly."

"Mr. Carter," said Philip, "I can show you or any one else the house in which I was confined in Bleecker Street, and there will be no trouble in obtaining proof of the fire."

"I dare say there may have been such a fire," said Mr. Pitkin, "and you may have happened to see it, and decided to weave it into your story."

"Do you think I stole the money or used it for my own purpose?" asked Philip pointedly.

Mr. Pitkin shrugged his shoulders.

"Young man," he said, "upon this point I can only say that your story is grossly improbable. It won't hold water."

"Permit me to judge of that, Mr. Pitkin," said Mr. Carter. "I wish to ask you one question."

"To ask me a question!" said Pitkin, surprised.

"Yes; why did you pay Philip in bills to−day? Why didn't you give him a check, as usual?"

"Why," answered Pitkin, hesitating, "I thought it wouldn't make any difference to you. I thought you would be able to use it more readily."

"Did you suppose I would specially need to use money instead of a check this week? Why break over your usual custom?"

"Really, I didn't give much thought to the matter," answered Pitkin, hesitating. "I acted on a sudden impulse."

"Your impulse has cost me two hundred dollars. Do me the favor, when Philip calls next week, to hand him a check."

"You mean to retain him in your employ after this?" asked Mrs. Pitkin sharply.

"Yes, I do. Why shouldn't I?"

"You are very trustful," observed the lady, tossing her head. "If this had happened to Lonny here, we should never have heard the last of it."

"Perhaps not!" responded the old gentleman dryly. "When a young gentleman is trusted with a letter to mail containing money, and that letter never reaches its destination, it may at least be inferred that he is careless."

It will be remember that this was the first knowledge Mrs. Pitkin or her husband had of the transaction referred to.

"What do you mean, Uncle Oliver?" demanded Mr. Pitkin.

Mr. Carter explained.

"This is too much!" said Mrs. Pitkin angrily.

"You mean to accuse my poor boy of opening the letter and stealing the money?"

"If I was as ready to bring accusations as you, Lavinia, I should undoubtedly say that it looked a little suspicious, but I prefer to let the matter rest."

"I think, Mr. Pitkin, we had better go," said Mrs. Pitkin, rising with dignity. "Since Uncle Oliver chooses to charge his own nephew with being a thief — — "

"I beg pardon, Lavinia, I have not done so."

"You might just as well," said Lavinia Pitkin, tossing her head. "Come, Mr. Pitkin; come, my poor Lonny, we will go home. This is no place for you."

"Good−evening, Lavinia," said Mr. Carter calmly. "I shall be glad to see you whenever you feel like calling."

"When you have discharged that boy, I may call again," said Mrs. Pitkin spitefully.

"You will have to wait some time, then. I am quite capable of managing my own affairs."

When Mr. Pitkin had left the house, by no means in a good humor, Phil turned to his employer and said gratefully:

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Carter, for your kind confidence in me. I admit that the story I told you is a strange one, and I could not have blamed you for doubting me."

"But I don't doubt you, my dear Philip," said Mr. Carter kindly.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Forbush. "I feel provoked with Lavinia and her husband for trying to throw discredit upon your statement."

"In fact," said Mr. Carter humorously, "the only one of us that suspected you was Julia."

"Oh, Uncle Oliver!" exclaimed Julia, in dismay. "I never dreamed of doubting Phil."

"Then," said Mr. Carter, "it appears that you have three friends, at least."

"If," said Phil? "you would allow me to make up part of the loss, by surrendering a part of my salary — — "

"Couldn't be thought of, Philip!" said Uncle Oliver resolutely. "I don't care for the money, but I should like to know how the thief happened to know that to−day you received money instead of a check."

Without saying a word to Phil, Uncle Oliver called the next day on a noted detective and set him to work ferreting out the secret.

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE FALSE HEIR.

IN THE suburbs of Chicago, perhaps a dozen miles from the great city, stands a fine country house, in the midst of a fine natural park. From the cupola which surmounts the roof can be seen in the distance the waters of Lake Michigan, stretching for many miles from north to south and from east to west, like a vast inland sea.

The level lawns, the greenhouses, the garden with rare plants and flowers, show clearly that this is the abode of a rich man. My readers will be specially interested to know that this is the luxurious and stately home of Mr. Granville, whose son's fortunes we have been following.

This, too, is the home of Mrs. Brent and Jonas, who, under false representations, have gained a foothold in the home of the Western millionaire.

Surely it is a great change for one brought up like Jonas to be the recognized heir and supposed son of so rich a man! It is a change, too, for his mother, who, though she dare not avow the relationship, is permitted to share the luxury of her son. Mrs. Brent has for her own use two of the best rooms in the mansion, and so far as money can bring happiness, she has every right to consider herself happy.

Is she?

Not as happy as she anticipated. To begin with, she is always dreading that some untoward circumstance will reveal the imposition she has practiced upon Mr. Granville. In that case what can she expect but to be ejected in disgrace from her luxurious home? To be sure, she will have her husband's property left, but it would be a sad downfall and descent in the social scale.

Besides, she finds cause for anxiety in Jonas, and the change which his sudden and undeserved elevation has wrought in him. It requires a strong mind to withstand the allurements and temptations of prosperity, and Jonas is far from possessing a strong mind. He is, indeed, if I may be allowed the expression, a vulgar little snob, utterly selfish, and intent solely upon his own gratification. He has a love for drink, and against the protests of his mother and the positive command of Mr. Granville, indulges his taste whenever he thinks he can do so without fear of detection. To the servants he makes himself very offensive by assuming consequential airs and a lordly bearing, which excites their hearty dislike.

He is making his way across the lawn at this moment. He is dressed in clothes of the finest material and the most fashionable cut. A thick gold chain is displayed across his waistcoat, attached to an expensive gold watch, bought for him by his supposed father. He carries in his hand a natty cane, and struts along with head aloft and nose in the air.

Two under−gardeners are at work upon a flowerbed as he passes.

"What time is it, Master Philip?" says one, a boy about a year older than Jonas.

"My good boy," said Jonas haughtily, "I don't carry a watch for your benefit."

The gardener bit his lip, and surveyed the heir with unequivocal disgust.

"Very well," he retorted; "I'll wait till a gentleman comes this way."

A flush of anger was visible on the cheek of Jonas despite his freckles.

"Do you mean to say I'm not a gentleman!" he demanded angrily.

"You don't act like one," returned Dan.

"You'd better not be impertinent to me!" exclaimed Jonas, his small gray eyes flashing with indignation. "Take that back!"

"I won't, for it's true!" said Dan undauntedly.

"Take that, then!"

Jonas raised his cane and brought it down smartly on the young gardener's shoulder.

He soon learned that he had acted imprudently. Dan dropped his rake, sprang forward, and seizing the cane, wrenched it from the hands of the young heir, after which he proceeded to break it across his knee.

"There's your cane!" he said contemptuously, as he threw the pieces on the ground.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Jonas, outraged.

"Because you insulted me. That's why."

"How can I insult you? You're only a poor working boy!"

"I wouldn't change places with you," said Dan.

"I'd like well enough to be rich, but I wouldn't be willing to be as mean as you are."

"You'll suffer for this!" said Jonas, his little bead−like eyes glowing with anger. "I'll have you turned off this very day, or as soon as my father get's home."

"If he says I'm to go, I'll go!" said Dan. "He's a gentleman."

Jonas made his way to his mother's room. She noticed his perturbed look.

"What's the matter, my dear boy?" she asked.

"What's the matter, Jonas?"

"I wish you'd stop calling me your dear boy," said Jonas angrily.

"I — I forget sometimes," said Mrs. Brent, with a half−sigh.

"Then you ought not to forget. Do you want to spoil everything?"

"We are alone now, Jonas, and I cannot forget that I am your mother."

"You'd better, if you know what's best for both of us," said Jonas.

Mrs. Brent was far from being a kind−hearted woman. Indeed she was very cold, but Jonas was her only son, and to him she was as much attached as it was possible for her to be to any one. Formerly he had returned her affection in a slight degree, but since he had figured as a rich man's son and heir he had begun, incredible as it may appear, to look down upon his own mother. She was not wholly ignorant of this change in his feelings, and it made her unhappy. He was all she had to live for. But for him she would not have stooped to take part in the conspiracy in which she was now a participant. It seemed hard that her only son, for whom she had sinned, should prove so ungrateful.

"My boy," she said, "I would not on any account harm you or injure your prospects, but when we are alone there can be no harm in my treating you as my son."

"It can't do any good," grumbled Jonas, "and we might be overheard."

"I will be cautious. You may be sure of that. But why do you look so annoyed?"

"Why? Reason enough. That boy Dan, the under−gardener, has been impudent to me."

"He has?" said Mrs. Brent quickly. "What has he done?" Jonas rehearsed the story. He found in his mother a sympathetic listener.

"He is bold!" she said, compressing her lips.

"Yes, he is. When I told him I would have him turned off, he coolly turned round and said that my father was a gentleman, and wouldn't send him away. Ma, will you do me a favor?"

"What is it, Jonas?"

"Send him off before the governor gets home. You can make it all right with him."

Mrs. Brent hesitated.

"Mr. Granville might think I was taking a liberty."

"Oh, you can make it all right with him. Say that he was very impudent to me. After what has happened, if he stays he'll think he can treat me just as he pleases."

Again Mrs. Brent hesitated, but her own inclination prompted her to do as her son desired.

"You may tell Dan to come here. I wish to speak to him," she said.

Jonas went out and did the errand.

"Mrs. Brent wants to see me?" said Dan. "I have nothing to do with her."

"You'd better come in if you know what's best for yourself." said Jonas, with an exultation he did not attempt to conceal.

"Oh, well, I have no objection to meeting Mrs. Brent," said Dan. "I'll go in." Mrs. Brent eyed the young gardener with cold animosity.

"You have been impudent to Master Philip," she said. "Of course you cannot remain any longer in his father's employment. Here are five dollars — more than is due you. Take it, and leave the estate."

"I won't take your money, Mrs. Brent," said Dan independently, "and I won't take my dismissal from any one but Mr. Granville himself."

"Do you defy me, then?" said Mrs. Brent, with a firmer compression of her lips.

"No, Mrs. Brent, I don't defy you, but you have nothing to do with me, and I shall not take any orders or any dismissal from you."

"Don't be impertinent to my — — " burst forth from Jonas, and then he stopped in confusion.

"To your — what?" asked Dan quickly.

"To my — nurse," faltered Jonas.

Dan looked suspiciously from one to the other.

"There's something between those two," he said to himself. "Something we don't know of."

CHAPTER XXXVII. MRS. BRENT'S PANIC.

THE CHAMBERMAID in the Granville household was a cousin of Dan, older by three years. She took a warm interest in Dan's welfare, though there was nothing but cousinly affection between them.

Fresh from his interview with Mrs. Brent, Dan made his way to the kitchen.

"Well, Aggie," he said, "I may have to say good−by soon."

"What, Dan! You're not for lavin', are you?" asked Aggie, in surprise.

"Mrs. Brent has just given me notice," answered Dan.

"Mrs. Brent! What business is it of her's, and how did it happen, anyway?"

"She thinks it's her business, and it's all on account of that stuck−up Philip."

"Tell me about it, Cousin Dan."

Dan did so, and wound up by repeating his young master's unfinished sentence.

"It's my belief," he said, "that there's something between those two. If there wasn't, why is Mrs. Brent here?"

"Why, indeed, Dan?" chimed in Aggie. "Perhaps I can guess something."

"What is it?"

"Never you mind. I'll only say I overheard Mrs. Brent one day speaking to Master Philip, but she didn't call him Philip."

"What then?"

"Jonas! I'm ready to take my oath she called him Jonas."

"Perhaps that is his real name. He may have it for his middle name."

"I don't believe it. Dan, I've an idea. I'm going to see Mrs. Brent and make her think I know something. You see?"

"Do as you think best, Aggie. I told her wouldn't take a dismissal from her.

Mrs. Brent was in her own room. She was not a woman who easily forgave, and she was provoked with Dan, who had defied her authority. She knew very well that in dismissing him she had wholly exceeded her authority, but this, as may readily be supposed, did not make her feel any more friendly to the young gardener. Jonas artfully led her indignation.

"Dan doesn't have much respect for you, mother," he said. "He doesn't mind you any more than he does a kitchen−girl."

"He may find he has made a mistake," said Mrs. Brent, a bright red spot in each cheek, indicating her anger. "He may find he has made a mistake in defying my authority."

"I wouldn't stand it if I was you, ma."

"I won't!" said Mrs. Brent decidedly, nodding vigorously and compressing her lips more firmly.

Soon after a knock was heard at Mrs. Brent's door.

"Come in!" she said in a sharp, incisive voice.

The door was opened and Aggie entered.

"What do you want of me, Aggie?" asked Mrs. Brent, in some surprise.

"I hear you've been tellin' Dan he'll have to go," said the chambermaid.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Brent, "but I fail to see what business it is of yours."

"Dan's me cousin, ma'am."

"That's nothing to me. He has been impertinent to Master Philip, and afterward to me."

"I know all about it, ma'am. He told me."

"Then you understand why he must leave. He will do well to be more respectful in his next place."

"It wasn't his fault, ma'am, accordin' to what he told me."

"No doubt!" sneered Mrs. Brent. "It is hardly likely that he would admit himself to be in fault."

"Dan's a good, truthful boy, ma'am."

"What did he tell you?"

The moment had come for Aggie's master−stroke, and she fixed her eyes keenly on Mrs. Brent to watch the effect of her words.

"He said he was at work in the garden, ma'am, when Master Jonas

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Brent, staring at the girl in dismay.

"He was at work in the garden, ma'am when Master Jonas — — "

"What do you mean, girl? Who is Master Jonas?" asked Mrs. Brent, trying to conceal her agitation.

"Did I say Jonas, ma'am. La, what could I be thinking of? Of course I mean Master Philip."

"What should have put the name of Jonas into your head?" demanded Mrs. Brent nervously.

"I must have heard it somewhere," said Aggie, with a quick, shrewd look out of the corner of her eyes. "Well, Dan just asked the young master a civil question, and Master Philip, he snapped him up rude−like. Mrs. Brent I think you'd better not make any fuss about Dan. It wasn't so much his fault as the fault of Master Jonas — oh, dear! I beg pardon, I mean Master Philip."

"Don't repeat that ridiculous name again, Aggie!" said Mrs. Brent. "Your young master has nothing to do with it. You ought to know that his name is Philip."

"I should say so!" broke in Jonas. "I ain't goin' to be called out of my name!"

"As to Dan," proceeded Mrs. Brent. "I am willing to overlook his impertinence this time. I won't say a word to Mr. Granville, but he must be more careful hereafter."

"I'm sure I'm obliged to you, ma'am," said Aggie demurely.

When she was out of the room she nodded to herself triumphantly.

"Sure, I've got the old lady under me thumb, but divil a bit I know how. It's all in the word Jonas. When I want a favor, all I've got to do is to say that word. I wonder what it manes now, anyhow."

However, Aggie communicated to Dan the welcome intelligence that he would have no trouble with Mrs. Brent or Philip, but as to the way in which she had managed she kept that to herself.

"I want to think it over," she said. "There's a secret, and it's about Jonas. I'll wait patiently, and maybe I'll hear some more about it."

As for Mrs. Brent, she was panic−stricken. Uncertain how much Aggie knew, she feared that she knew all. But how could she have discovered it? And was it come to this that she and Jonas were in the power of an Irish chambermaid? It was galling to her pride.

She turned to her son when they were left alone.

"How could she have found out?" she asked. "Found out what, mother?"

"That your name is Jonas. She evidently knows it. I could see that in her eyes."

"She must have heard you calling me so. I've told you more than once, ma, that you must never call me anything but Philip."

"It is hard to have to keep silent always, never to speak to you as my own boy. I begin to think it is a dear price to pay, Jonas."

"There you go again, mother!" said Jonas, peevishly.

His mother had seated herself and spoke despondently.

"I am afraid it will all come out some day," she said.

"It will if you don't take better care, ma. I tell you, it would be the best thing for you to go away. Mr. Granville will give you a good income. If I was left alone, there'd be no fear of its leaking out."

"Oh, Jonas! would you really have me leave you? Would you really have me live by myself, separated from my only child?"

Cold as she was, her heart was keenly wounded, for, looking at the boy, she saw that he was in earnest, and that he would prefer to have her go, since thereby he would be safer in the position he had usurped.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

MR. CARTER, can you spare me a couple of days?" asked Philip.

"Certainly, Phil," answered the old gentleman.

"May I ask how you wish to dispose of the time?"

"I would like to go to Planktown to see my friends there. It is now some months since I left the village, and I would like to see my old friends."

"The desire is a natural one. Your home is broken up, is it not?"

"Yes, but I can stay at the house of Tommy Kavanagh. I know he will be glad to have me."

"It is strange that your step−mother and her son have left no trace behind them," said Mr. Carter thoughtfully. "It looks suspicious, as if they had some good reason for their disappearance."

"I can't understand why they should have left Planktown," said Philip, appearing puzzled.

"Is the house occupied?"

"Yes. I hear that a cousin of Mrs. Brent occupies it. I shall call and inquire after her."

"Very well, Philip. Go when you please. You may be sure of a welcome when you return."

"In Planktown, though his home relations latterly had not been pleasant, Philip had many friends, and when he appeared on the street, he met everywhere glances of friendly welcome. One of the first to meet him was Tommy Kavanagh.

"Where did you come from, Phil?" he asked.

"I am glad enough to see you. Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere, Tommy, at present. If your mother can take me in, I will stay at your house."

"Take you? Yes, and will be glad enough to have you stay with us. You know we live in a small house, but if you don't mind — — "

"What do you take me for, Tommy?" Whatever is good enough for you and your mother will be good enough for me."

"What are you doing, Phil? You don't look as if you had hard work making a living."

"I am well fixed now, but I have had some anxious days. But all's well that ends well. I am private secretary to a rich man, and live in a fine brown−stone house on Madison Avenue."

"Good for you, Phil! I knew you'd succeed."

"Where is Mrs. Brent?" Has anything been heard from her?"

"I don't think anybody in the village knows where she is — that is, except her cousin, who lives in your old house."

"What is his name?"

"Hugh Raynor."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"The people in the village don't like him. He lives alone, and I hear that he cooks for himself. He is not at all social, and no one feels very much acquainted with him."

"I shall call upon him and inquire after Mrs. Brent."

"Then, Phil, you had better go alone, for he doesn't like callers, and he will be more ready to receive one than two."

Philip enjoyed his visit, and was busied making calls on his old acquaintances. He was much pleased with the cordiality with which he had been received.

It was not till the afternoon of the second day that he turned his steps toward the house which had been his home for so long a time.

We will precede him, and explain matters which made his visit very seasonable.

In the sitting−room sat Hugh Raynor, the present occupant of the house. He was a small, dark−complexioned man, with a large Roman nose, and his face was at this moment expressive of discontent. This seemed to be connected with a letter which he had just been reading. Not to keep the reader in suspense, it was mailed at Chicago, and was written by Mrs. Brent. We will quote a paragraph: "You seem to me very unreasonable in expecting me not only to give you the house rent−free, but also to give you a salary. I would like to know what you do to merit a salary. You merely take care of the house. As for that, there are plenty who would be glad to take charge of so good a house, and pay me a fair rent. Indeed, I am thinking that it will be best for me to make some such arrangement, especially as you do not seem satisfied with your sinecure position. You represent me as rolling in wealth. Jonas and I are living very comfortably, and we have nothing to complain of, but that is no reason for my squandering the small fortune left me by my husband. I advise you to be a little more reasonable in your demands, or I shall request you to leave my house."

"Selfish as ever," muttered Mr. Raynor, after reading this letter over again. "Cousin Jane never was willing that any one elso should prosper. But she has made a mistake in thinking she can treat me meanly. I am in a position to turn the tables upon her! This paper — if she dreamed I had found it, she would yield to all my demands."

He laid his hand upon a paper, folded lengthwise, and presenting the appearance of a legal document.

He opened the paper and read aloud:

"To the boy generally known as Philip Brent and supposed, though incorrectly, to be my son, I bequeath the sum of five thousand dollars, and direct the same to be paid over to any one whom he may select as guardian, to hold in trust for him until he attains the age of twenty−one."

"This will Mrs. Brent carefully concealed," continued Mr. Raynor, "in order to save the money for herself and Jonas. I wonder she was not prudent enough to burn it, or, at any rate, to take it with her when she left Planktown. It is a damaging secret, but I hold it, and I mean to use it, too. Let me see, what is it best to do?"

Mr. Raynor spent some time in quiet thought.

It seemed to him that it might be well to hint his discovery in a letter to Mrs. Brent, and to make it the basis of a demand for a generous sum of hush−money — one thousand dollars, at least. He might have decided to do this but for an incident which suggested another course.

The door−bell rang, and when he opened the door with some surprise, for callers were few, he saw standing before him a tall, handsome boy, whom he did not recognize.

"Do you wish to see me?" he asked. "What is your name?"

"My name is Philip Brent."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Raynor, in visible excitement, "are you the son of the late Mr. Brent?"

"I was always regarded as such," answered Philip.

"Come in, then. I am glad to see you," said Mr. Raynor; and Phil entered the house, surprised at a reception much more cordial than he had expected. In that brief moment Mr. Raynor had decided to reveal the secret to Phil, and trust to his gratitude for a suitable acknowledgment. In this way he would revenge himself upon Mrs. Brent, who had treated him so meanly.

"I have been wishing to see you, for I have a secret of importance to communicate," said Mr. Raynor.

"If it relates to my parents, I know it already," said Phil.

"No; it is something to your advantage. In revealing it I make Mrs. Brent my enemy, and shall forfeit the help she is giving me."

"If it is really of advantrge to me, and I am able to make up your loss to you, I will do it," said Phil.

"That is sufficient. I will trust to your honor. You look like a boy who will keep a promise though not legally bound."

"You only do me justice, Mr. Raynor."

"Then cast your eye upon this paper and you will know the secret."

"Is it a will?" exclaimed Phil, in surprise.

"Yes, it is the will of the late Gerald Brent. By it he bequeaths to you five thousand dollars."

"Then he did not forget me," said Phil, more pleased with the assurance that he had been remembered than by the sum of money bequeathed to him. "But why have I not known this before?" he asked, looking up from the will "You must ask that of Mrs. Brent!" said Mr. Raynor significantly.

"Do you think she suppressed it purposely?"

"I do," answered Raynor laconically.

"I must see her. Where can I find her?"

"I can only say that her letters to me are mailed in Chicago, but she scrupulously keeps her address a secret."

"Then I must go to Chicago. May I take this paper with me?"

"Yes. I advise you to put it into the hands of a lawyer for safe keeping. You will not forget that you are indebted to me for it?"

"No, Mr. Raynor. I will take care you lose nothing by your revelation."

The next morning Phil returned to New York.

Phil is shown the will giving him five thousand dollars.

CHAPTER XXXIX. AT THE PALMER HOUSE.

IT MAY be readily supposed that Phil's New York friends listened with the greatest attention to his account of what he had learned in his visit to Planktown.

"Your step−mother is certainly an unscrupulous woman," said Mr. Carter. "Doubtless she has left your old town in order to escape accountability to you for your stolen inheritance. What puzzles me however, is her leaving behind such tell−tale evidence. It is a remarkable oversight. Do you think she is aware of the existence of the will?"

"I think she must be, though I hope not," answered Phil. "I should like to think that she had not conspired to keep back my share of father's estate."

"At any rate, the first thing to do is evidently to find her out, and confront her with the evidence of her crime — that is, supposing her to be really culpable."

"Then you approve of my going to Chicago?" said Phil. "Most emphatically. Nay, more — I will go with you."

"Will you indeed, sir?" said Phil joyfully. "You are very kind. I shrank from going alone, being a boy ignorant of business."

"A pretty shrewd boy, however," said Mr. Carter, smiling. "I don't claim much credit, however, as I have some interests in Chicago to which I can attend with advantage personally. I am interested in a Western railroad, the main office of which is in that city."

"When shall we go, sir?"

"To−morrow," answered Mr. Carter promptly. "The sooner the better. You may go down town and procure the necessary tickets, and engage sleeping−berths."

Here followed the necessary directions, which need not be repeated.

It is enough to say that twenty−four hours later Phil and his employer were passengers on a lightning express train bound for Chicago.

They arrived in due season, without any adventure worth naming, and took rooms at the Palmer House.

Now, it so happened that in the same hotel at the very same moment were three persons in whom Phil was vitally interested. These were Mrs. Brent, Jonas, otherwise called Philip Granville, and Mr. Granville himself.

Let me explain their presence in Chicago, when, as we know, Mr. Granville's house was situated at some distance

away.

Jonas had preferred a petition to go to Chicago for a week, in order to attend some of the amusements there to be enjoyed, alleging that it was awfully dull in the country.

Mr. Granville was inclined to be very indulgent, to make up for the long years in which he had been compelled practically to desert his son. The petition therefore received favor.

"It is only natural that you should wish to see something of the city, my son," he said. "I will grant your request. We will go to Chicago, and remain a week at the Palmer House. Mrs. Brent, will you accompany us?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Granville," answered that lady. "It is not dull here for me, still I shall no doubt enjoy a little excitement. At any rate, I shall be best pleased to be where you and your son are."

"Then so let it be. We will go to−morrow."

One secret wish and scheme of Mrs. Brent has not been referred to. She felt that her present position was a precarious one. She might at any time be found out, and then farewell to wealth and luxury! But if she could induce Mr. Granville to marry her, she would then be secure, even if found out, and Jonas would be the son of Mr. Granville, though detected as a usurper. She, therefore, made herself as agreeable as possible to Mr. Granville, anticipated his every wish, and assumed the character, which she did not possess, of a gracious and feminine woman of unruffled good humor and sweetness of disposition.

"I say, ma," Jonas observed on one occasion, "you've improved ever so much since you came here. You're a good deal better natured than you were."

Mrs. Brent smiled, but she did not care to take her son into her confidence.

"Here I have no cares to trouble me," she said. "I live here in a way that suits me."

But when they were about starting for Chicago, Mrs. Brent felt herself becoming unaccountably depressed.

"Jonas," she said, "I am sorry we are going to Chicago."

"Why, ma? We'll have a splendid time."

"I feel as if some misfortune were impending over us," said his mother, and she shivered apprehensively.

But it was too late to recede. Besides, Jonas wished to go, and she had no good reason to allege for breaking the arrangement.

CHAPTER XL. A SCENE NOT ON THE BILLS.

PHIL was in Chicago, but that was only the first step toward finding those of whom he was in search. Had he been sure that they were in the city, it would have simplified matters, but the fact that Mrs. Brent directed her letters to be sent to that city proved nothing. It did not make it certain that she lived in the town.

"We are only at the beginning of our perplexities, Philip," said Mr. Carter. "Your friends may be near us, or they may be a hundred miles away."

"That is true, sir."

"One method of finding them is barred, that of advertising, since they undoubtedly do not care to be found, and an advertisement would only place them on their guard."

"What would you advise, sir?"

"We might employ a detective to watch the post−office, but here again there might be disappointment. Mrs. Brent might employ a third person to call for her letters. However, I have faith to believe that sooner or later we shall find her. Time and patience accomplishes much."

"Were you ever a detective, sir?" asked Phil, smiling.

"No, Philip, but I have had occasion to employ them. Now how would you like to go to the theater this evening?"

"Very much, sir."

"There is a good play running at McVicker's Theatre. We will go there."

"Anywhere will suit me, Mr. Carter."

"Young people are easily satisfied," he said. "When they get older they get more fastidious. However, there is generally something attractive at McVicker's."

It so happened that Philip and his employer took a late dinner, and did not reach the theater till ten minutes after the hour. They had seats in the seventh row of orchestra chairs, a very eligible portion of the house.

The curtain had risen, and Philip's attention was given to the stage till the end of the first act. Then he began to look around him.

Suddenly he started and half rose from his seat.

"What is the matter, Philip?" asked Mr. Carter.

"There, sir! look there!" said the boy, in excitement, pointing to two persons in the fourth row in front.

"Do you recognize acquaintances, Philip?"

"It is my step−mother and Jonas," answered Philip eagerly. "It is, indeed, wonderful!" said Mr. Carter, sharing the boy's excitement. "You are confident, are you?"

"Oh, sir, I couldn't be mistaken about that."

Just then Mrs. Brent turned to a gentleman at her side and spoke. It was Mr. Granville.

"Who is that gentleman?" said Mr. Carter reflectively. "Do you think Mrs. Brent is married again?"

"I don't know what to think!" said Philip, bewildered.

"I will tell you what to do. You cannot allow these people to elude you. Go to the hotel, ask a direction to the nearest detective office, have a man detailed to come here directly, and let him find, if necessary, where your

step−mother and her son are living."

Philip did so, and it was the close of the second act before he returned. With him was a small, quiet gentleman, of unpretending appearance, but skilled as a detective.

"Now," continued Mr. Carter, "you may venture at any time to go forward and speak to your friends — if they can be called such."

"I don't think they can, sir. I won't go till the last intermission."

Phil was forestalled, however. At the close of the fourth act Jonas happened to look back, and his glance fell upon Philip. A scared, dismayed look was on his face as he clutched his mother's arm and whispered:

"Ma, Philip is sitting just back of us."

Mrs. Brent's heart almost ceased to beat. She saw that the moment of exposure was probably at hand.

With pale face she whispered:

"Has he seen us?"

"He is looking right at us."

She had time to say no more. Philip left his seat, and coming forward, approached the seat of his step−mother.

"How do you do, Mrs. Brent?" he said.

She stared at him, but did not speak.

"How are you, Jonas?" continued our hero.

"My name isn't Jonas," muttered the boy addressed.

Mr. Granville meanwhile had been eagerly looking at Philip. There appeared to be something in his appearance which riveted the attention of the beholder. Was it the voice of nature which spoke from the striking face of the boy?

"You have made a mistake, boy," said Mrs. Brent, summoning all her nerve. "I am not the lady you mention, and this boy does not bear the name of Jonas."

"What is his name, then?" demanded Philip.

"My name is Philip Granville," answered Jonas quickly. "Is it? Then it has changed suddenly," answered Phil, in a sarcastic voice. "Six months ago, when we were all living at Planktown, your name was Jonas Webb."

"You must be a lunatic!" said Mrs. Brent, with audacious falsehood.

"My own name is Philip, as you very well know."

"Your name Philip?" exclaimed Mr. Granville, with an excitement which he found it hard to control.

"Yes, sir; the lady is my step−mother, and this boy is her son Jonas."

"And you — whose son are you?" gasped Mr. Granville.

"I don't know, sir. I was left at an early age at a hotel kept by this lady's husband, by my father, who never returned."

"Then you must be my son!" said Mr. Granville. "You and not this boy!"

"You, sir? Did you leave me?"

"I left my son with Mr. Brent. This lady led me to believe that the boy at my side was my son."

Here, then, was a sudden and startling occurrence. Mrs. Brent fainted. The strain had been too much for her nerves, strong as they were. Of course she must be attended to.

"Come with me; I cannot lose sight of you now, my son!" said Mr. Granville. "Where are you staying?"

"At the Palmer House."

"So am I. Will you be kind enough to order a carriage."

Mrs. Brent was conveyed to the hotel, and Jonas followed sullenly.

Of course Philip, Mr. Granville and M. Carter left the theater.

Later the last three held a conference in the parlor.

It took little to convince Mr. Granville that Philip was his son.

"I am overjoyed!" he said. "I have never been able to feel toward the boy whom you call Jonas as a father should. He was very distasteful to me."

"It was an extraordinary deception on the part of Mrs. Brent," said Mr. Carter thoughtfully.

"She is a very unprincipled woman," said Mr. Granville. "Even now that matters have come right, I find it hard to forgive her."

"You do not know all the harm she has sought to do your son. The sum of five thousand dollars was left him by Mr. Brent, and she suppressed the will."

"Good heavens! is this true?"

"We have the evidence of it." — —

The next day an important interview was held at the Palmer House. Mrs. Brent was forced to acknowledge the imposition she had practiced upon Mr. Granville. "What could induce you to enter into such a wicked conspiracy?" asked Mr. Granville, shocked.

"The temptation was strong — I wished to make my son rich. Besides, I hated Philip."

"It is well your wicked plan has been defeated; it might have marred my happiness forever."

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked coolly, but not without anxiety.

It was finally settled that the matter should be hushed up. Philip wished to give up the sum bequeathed him by Mr. Brent; but to this Mr. Granville objected, feeling that it would constitute a premium on fraud. Besides, Mrs. Brent would have the residue of the estate, amounting to nearly ten thousand dollars. Being allowed to do what he chose with this money, he gave it in equal portions to Tommy Kavanagh and Mr. Raynor, who had informed him of the existence of Mr. Brent's will.

Mrs. Brent decided not to go back to Planktown. She judged that the story of her wickedness would reach that village and make it disagreeable for her. She opened a small millinery store in Chicago, and is doing fairly well. But Jonas is her chief trouble, as he is lazy and addicted to intemperate habits. His chances of success and an honorable career are small.

"How can I spare you, Philip?" said Mr. Carter regretfully. "I know your father has the best right to you, but I don't like to give you up."

"You need not," said Mr. Granville. "I propose to remove to New York; but in the summer I shall come to my estate near Chicago, and hope, since the house is large enough, that I may persuade you and your niece, Mrs. Forbush, to be my guests."

This arrangement was carried out. Mrs. Forbush and her daughter are the recognized heirs of Mr. Carter, who is wholly estranged from the Pitkins. He ascertained, through a detective, that the attack upon Philip by the man who stole from him the roll of bills was privately instigated by Mr. Pitkin himself, in the hope of getting Philip into trouble. Mr. Carter, thereupon, withdrew his capital from the firm, and Mr. Pitkin is generally supposed to be on the verge of bankruptcy. At any rate, his credit is very poor, and there is a chance that the Pitkins may be reduced to comparative poverty.

"I won't let Lavinia suffer," said Uncle Oliver; "if the worst comes to the worst, I will settle a small income, say twelve hundred dollars, on her, but we can never be friends."

As Phil grew older — he is now twenty−one — it seems probable that he and Mr. Carter may be more closely connected, judging from his gallant attentions to Julia Forbush, who has developed into a charming young lady. Nothing would suit Mr. Carter better, for there is no one who stands higher in his regard than Philip Granville, the Errand Boy.

CHAPTER XLI. FRED SARGENT'S REVENGE.

FRED SARGENT, upon this day from which my story dates, went to the head of his Latin class, in the high school of Andrewsville. The school was a fine one, the teachers strict, the classes large, the boys generally gentlemanly, and the moral tone pervading the whole, of the very best character.

To lead a class in a school like this was an honor of which any boy might have been proud; and Fred, when he heard his name read off at the head of the roll, could have thrown up his well−worn Latin grammar, which he happened to have in his hand just at that moment, and hurrahed. It was quite a wonder to him afterward that he did not.

As a class, boys are supposed to be generous. I really don't know whether they deserve to be considered so or not, but some four or five only in this large school envied Fred. The rest would probably have hurrahed with him; for

Fred was a "capital good fellow," and quite a favorite.

"Bully for you!" whispered Ned Brown, his right−hand neighbor; but Ned was instantly disgraced, the eye of the teacher catching the words as they dropped from his lips. When school was over several of the boys rushed to the spot where Fred — his cap in his hand, and his dark hair blowing about every way — was standing.

"I say," said James Duncan, "I thought you would get it. You've worked like a Trojan and you deserve it."

"It's as good as getting the valedictory," said Joe Stone.

"And that is entering into any college in the land without an examination," said Peter Crane.

Now Peter had run shoulder to shoulder with Fred and it does him great credit that, being beaten, he was thoroughly good−natured about it.

"I say, Fred, you ought to treat for this;" and Noah Holmes, standing on tiptoe, looked over the heads of the other boys significantly at Fred.

"I wish I could; but here's all the money I've got," said Fred, taking about twenty−five cents from his pocket — all that was left of his monthly allowance.

"That's better than nothing. It will buy an apple apiece. Come on! Let's go down to old Granger's. I saw some apples there big as your head; and bigger, too," said Noah, with a droll wink.

"Well, come on, then;" and away went the boys at Fred's heels, pushing and shouting, laughing and frolicking, until they came to Abel Granger's little grocery.

"Now hush up, you fellows," said Noah, turning round upon them. "Let Fred go in by himself. Old Grange can't abide a crowd and noise. It will make him cross, and all we shall get will be the specked and worm−eaten ones. Come, fall back, there!"

Very quietly and obediently the boys, who always knew their leader, fell back, and Fred went into the little dark grocery alone.

He was so pleasant and gentlemanly that, let him go where he would and do what he would, in some mysterious way he always found the right side of people and got what he wanted, in the most satisfactory manner.

Now Abel Granger was "as cross as a meat axe." Noah said, and all the boys were afraid of him. If the apples had been anywhere else they would have been much surer of their treat; but in spite of their fears, back came Fred in a few moments, with a heaping measure of nice red apples — apples that made the boys' mouths water.

Fred said that old Abel had given him as near a smile as could come to his yellow, wrinkled face.

"Treat 'em," he said, "treat 'em, eh? Wal, now, 'pears likely they'd eat you out of house and home. I never see a boy vet that couldn't go through a tenpenny nail, easy as not."

"We are always hungry, I believe," said Fred.

"Allers, allers — that's a fact," picking out the best apples as he spoke and heaping up the measure. "There, now if you'll find a better lot than that, for the money, you are welcome to it, that's all."

"Couldn't do it. Thank you very much," said Fred.

As the boys took the apples eagerly and began to bite them, they saw the old face looking out of the dirty panes of window glass upon them.

Fred loved to make everybody happy around him, and this treating was only second best to leading his class; so when, at the corner of the street turning to his father's house, he parted from his young companions, I doubt whether there was a happier boy in all Andrewsville.

I do not think we shall blame him very much if he unconsciously carried his head pretty high and looked proudly happy.

Out from under the low archway leading to Bill Crandon's house a boy about as tall as Fred, but stout and coarse, in ragged clothes, stood staring up and down the street as Fred came toward him.

Something in Fred's looks and manner seemed especially to displease him. He moved directly into the middle of the sidewalk, and squared himself as if for a fight.

There was no other boy in town whom Fred disliked so much, and of whom he felt so afraid.

Sam Crandon, everybody knew, was a bully. He treated boys who were larger and stronger than himself civilly, but was cruel and domineering over the poor and weak.

So far in his life, though they met often, Fred had avoided coming into contact with Sam, and Sam had seemed to feel just a little awe of him; for Mr. Sargent was one of the wealthiest leading men in town, and Sam, in spite of himself, found something in the handsome, gentlemanly boy that held him in check; but to−day Sam's father had just beaten him, and the boy was smarting from the blows.

I dare say he was hungry, and uncomfortable from many other causes; but however this may have been, he felt in the mood for making trouble; for seeing somebody else unhappy beside himself. This prosperous, well−dressed boy, with his books under his arm, and his happy face, was the first person he had come across — and here then was his opportunity.

Fred saw him assume the attitude of a prize fighter and knew what it meant. Sam had a cut, red and swollen, across one cheek, and this helped to make his unpleasant face more ugly and lowering than usual.

What was to be done? To turn and run never occurred to Fred. To meet him and fight it out was equally impossible; so Fred stopped and looked at him irresolutely.

"You're afraid of a licking?" asked Sam, grinning ominously.

"I don't want to fight," said Fred, quietly.

"No more you don't, but you've got to."

Fred's blood began to rise. The words and looks of the rough boy were a little too much for his temper.

"Move out of the way," he said, walking directly up to him.

Sam hesitated for a moment. The steady, honest, bold look in Fred's eyes was far more effective than a blow would have been; but as soon as Fred had passed him he turned and struck him a quick, stinging blow between his

shoulders.

"That's mean," said Fred, wheeling round.

"Strike fair and in front if you want to, but don't hit in the back — that's a coward's trick."

"Take it there, then," said Sam, aiming a heavy blow at Fred's breast. But the latter skillfully raised his books, and Sam's knuckles were the worse for the encounter.

"Hurt, did it?" said Fred, laughing.

"What if it did?"

"Say quits, then."

"Not by a good deal;" and in spite of himself Fred was dragged into an ignominious street fight.

Oh, how grieved and mortified he was when his father, coming down the street, saw and called to him. Hearing his voice Sam ran away and Fred, bruised and smarting, with his books torn and his clothes, too, went over to his father.

Not a word did Mr. Sargent say. He took Fred's hand in his, and the two walked silently to their home.

I doubt whether Mr. Sargent was acting wisely. Fred never had told him an untruth in his life, and a few words now might have set matters right. But to this roughness in boys Mr. Sargent had a special aversion. He had so often taken pains to instill its impropriety and vulgarity into Fred's mind that he could not now imagine an excuse.

"He should not have done so under any circumstances," said his father sternly, to himself. "I am both surprised and shocked, and the punishment must be severe."

Unfortunately for Fred, his mother was out of town for a few days — a mother so much sooner than a father reaches the heart of her son — so now his father said:

"You will keep your room for the next week. I shall send your excuse to your teacher. Ellen will bring your meals to you. At the end of that time I will see and talk with you."

Without a word Fred hung his cap upon its nail, and went to his room. Such a sudden change from success and elation to shame and condign punishment was too much for him.

He felt confused and bewildered. Things looked dark around him, and the great boughs of the Norway spruce, close up by his window, nodded and winked at him in a very odd way.

He had been often reproved, and sometimes had received a slight punishment, but never anything like this. And now he felt innocent, or rather at first he did not feel at all, everything was so strange and unreal.

He heard Ellen come into his room after a few minutes with his dinner, but he did not turn.

A cold numbing sense of disgrace crept over him. He felt as if, even before this Irish girl, he could never hold up his head again. He did not wish to eat or do anything. What could it all mean?

Slowly the whole position in which he was placed came to him. The boys gathering at school; the surprise with which his absence would be noted; the lost honor, so lately won; his father's sad, grave face; his sisters' unhappiness; his mother's sorrow; and even Sam's face, so ugly in its triumph, all were there.

What an afternoon that was! How slowly the long hours dragged themselves away! And yet until dusk Fred bore up bravely. Then he leaned his head on his hands. Tired, hungry, worn out with sorrow, he burst into tears and cried like a baby.

Don't blame him. I think any one of us would have done the same.

"Oh, mother! mother!" said Fred aloud, to himself, "do come home! do come home!"

Ellen looked very sympathizing when she came in with his tea, and found his dinner untouched.

"Eat your tea, Master Fred," she said, gently. "The like of ye can't go without your victuals, no way. I don't know what you've done, but I ain't afeared there is any great harm in it, though your collar is on crooked and there's a tear in your jacket, to say nothing of a black and blue place under your left eye. But eat your tea. Here's some fruit cake Biddy sent o' purpose."

Somebody did think of and feel sorry for him! Fred felt comforted on the instant by Ellen's kind words and Biddy's plum cake; and I must say, ate a hearty, hungry boy's supper; then went to bed and slept soundly until late the next morning

We have not space to follow Fred through the tediousness of the following week. His father strictly carried out the punishment to the letter No one came near him but Ellen, though he heard the voices of his sisters and the usual happy home sounds constantly about him.

Had Fred really been guilty, even in the matter of a street fight, he would have been the unhappiest boy living during this time; but we know he was not, so we shall be glad to hear that with his books and the usual medley of playthings with which a boy's room is piled, he contrived to make the time pass without being very wretched. It was the disgrace of being punished, the lost position in school, and above all, the triumph which it would be to Sam, which made him the most miserable. The very injustice of the thing was its balm in this case. May it be so, my young readers, with any punishment which may ever happen to you!

All these things, however, were opening the way to make Fred's revenge, when it came, the more complete.

Fred Sargent, of course, had lost his place, and was subjected to a great many curious inquiries when he returned to school.

He had done his best, in his room, to keep up with his class, but his books, studied "in prison," as he had learned to call it, and in the sitting−room, with his sister Nellie and his mother to help him, were very different things. Still, "doing your best" always brings its reward; and let me say in passing, before the close of the month Fred had won his place again.

This was more easily done than satisfying the kind inquiries of the boys. So after trying the first day to evade them, Fred made a clean breast of it and told the whole story.

I think, perhaps, Mr. Sargent's severe and unjust discipline had a far better effect upon the boys generally than upon Fred particularly. They did not know how entirely Fred had acted on the defensive, and so they received a lesson which most of them never forgot on the importance which a kind, genial man, with a smile and a cheery word for every child in town, attached to brawling.

After all, the worst effect of this punishment came upon Sam Crandon himself. Very much disliked as his wicked ways had made him before, he was now considered as a town nuisance. Everybody avoided him, and when forced to speak to him did so in the coldest, and often in the most unkind manner.

Sam, not three weeks after his wanton assault upon Fred, was guilty of his first theft and of drinking his first glass of liquor. In short, he was going headlong to destruction and no one seemed to think him worth the saving. Skulking by day, prowling by night — hungry, dirty, beaten and sworn at — no wonder that he seemed God−forsaken as well as man−forsaken.

Mr. Sargent had a large store in Rutgers street. He was a wholesale dealer in iron ware, and Andrewsville was such an honest, quiet town ordinary means were not taken to keep the goods from the hands of thieves.

Back doors, side doors and front doors stood open all the day, and no one went in or out but those who had dealings with the firm.

Suddenly, however, articles began to be missed — a package of knives, a bolt, a hatchet, an axe, a pair of skates, flat−irons, knives and forks, indeed hardly a day passed without a new thing being taken, and though every clerk in the store was on the alert and very watchful, still the thief, or thieves remained undetected.

At last matters grew very serious. It was not so much the pecuniary value of the losses — that was never large — but the uncertainty into which it threw Mr. Sargent. The dishonest person might be one of his own trusted clerks; such things had happened, and sad to say, probably would again.

"Fred," said his father, one Saturday afternoon, "I should like to have you come down to the store and watch in one of the rooms. There is a great run of business to−day, and the clerks have their hands more than full. I must find out, if possible who it is that is stealing so freely. Yesterday I lost six pearl−handled knives worth two dollars apiece. Can you come?"

"Yes, sir," said Fred, promptly, "I will be there at one, to a minute; and if I catch him, let him look out sharp, that is all."

This acting as police officer was new business to Fred and made him feel very important, so when the town clock was on the stroke of one he entered the store and began his patrol.

It was fun for the first hour, and he was so much on the alert that old Mr. Stone, from his high stool before the desk, had frequently to put his pen behind his ear and watch him. It was quite a scene in a play to see how Fred would start at the least sound. A mouse nibbling behind a box of iron chains made him beside himself until he had scared the little gray thing from its hole, and saw it scamper away out of the shop. But after the first hour the watching for nothing became a little tedious. There was a "splendid" game of base ball to come off on the public green that afternoon; and after that the boys were going to the "Shaw−seen" for a swim; then there was to be a picnic on the "Indian Ridge," and — well, Fred had thought of all these losses when he so pleasantly assented to his father's request, and he was not going to complain now. He sat down on a box, and commenced drumming tunes with his heels on its sides. This disturbed Mr. Stone. He looked at him sharply, so he stopped and sauntered out into a corner of the back store, where there was a trap−door leading down into the water. A small river ran by under the end of the store, also by the depot, which was near at hand, and his father used to have some of his goods brought down in boats and hoisted up through this door.

It was always one of the most interesting places in the store to Fred; he liked to sit with his feet hanging down over the water, watching it as it came in and dashed against the cellar walls.

To−day it was high, and a smart breeze drove it in with unusual force. Bending down as far as he could safely to look under the store, Fred saw the end of a hatchet sticking out from the corner of one of the abutments that projected from the cellar, to support the end of the store in which the trap−door was.

"What a curious place this is for a hatchet!" thought Fred, as he stooped a little further, holding on very tight to the floor above. What he saw made him almost lose his hold and drop into the water below. There, stretched along on a beam was Sam Crandon, with some stolen packages near him.

For a moment Fred's astonishment was too great to allow him to speak; and Sam glared at him like a wild beast brought suddenly to bay.

"Oh, Sam! Sam!" said Fred, at length, "how could you?"

Sam caught up a hatchet and looked as if he was going to aim it at him, then suddenly dropped it into the water.

Fred's heart beat fast, and the blood came and went from his cheeks; he caught his breath heavily, and the water, the abutment and even Sam with his wicked ugly face were for a moment darkened. Then, recovering himself, he said:

"Was it you, Sam? I'm sorry for you!"

"Don't lie!" said Sam, glowering back, "you know you're glad!"

"Glad? Why should I be glad to have you steal?"

"Cause I licked you, and you caught it."

"So I did; but I am sorry, for all that."

"You lie!"

Fred had thought very fast while this conversation was going on. He had only to lift his head and call his father, then the boat would be immediately pushed in under the store, Sam secured and his punishment certain. There were stolen goods enough to convict him, and his mode of ingress into the store was now certain. This trap−door was never locked; very often it was left open — the water being considered the most effectual bolt and bar that could be used; but Sam, a good swimmer and climber, had come in without difficulty and had quite a store of his own hidden away there for future use. This course was very plain; but for some reason, which Fred could not explain even to himself, he did not feel inclined to take it; so he sat looking steadily in Sam's face until he said:

"Look here, Sam, I want to show you I mean what I say. I'm sorry you have turned thief and if I can help you to be a better boy, I should be glad to."

Again Fred's honest kindly face had the same effect upon Sam that it had at the commencement of their street fight; he respected and trusted it unconsciously.

"Here!" said he, crawling along on the beam and handing back the package of knives, the last theft of which his father had complained.

"Yes, that is right," said Fred, leaning down and taking it, "give them all back, if you can; that is what my father calls `making restitution,' and then you won't be a thief any longer."

Something in the boy's tone touched Sam's heart still more; so he handed back one thing after another as rapidly as he could until nearly everything was restored.

"Bravo for you, Sam! I won't tell who took them, and there is a chance for you. Here, give me your hand now, honor bright you'll never come here again to steal, if I don't tell my father."

Sam looked at him a moment, as if he would read his very soul; then he said sulkily:

"You'll tell; I know you will, 'cause I licked you when you didn't want me to; but you've got 'em all back, and I s'pose it won't go very hard."

"What won't go very hard?"

"The prison."

"You sha'n't go to prison at all. Here, give me your hand; I promise not to tell if you will promise not to steal any more. Ain't that fair?"

"Yes," said Sam, a sudden change coming over his face, "but you will!"

"Try me and see."

Sam slowly and really at a great deal of peril, considering his situation, put his rough, grimed hand into Fred's — a dishonest hand it was, and that more than the other thing made Fred recoil a little as he touched it; but that clasp sealed the compact between these two boys. It began Fred Sargent's revenge.

"Now be off, will you, before the clerks come? They will see the things and catch you here. I'll be round to your house soon and we will see."

Even in this short time Fred had formed a general plan for saving Sam.

The boy, stretching himself out flat, slipped down the tranverse beam into the water, dived at once and came up under the bridge a few rods distant, then coolly passed down the river and swam to shore under a bunch of alder−bushes, by which he was concealed from the sight of the passers−by.

Fred sought his father, told him the story, then brought him to the spot, showed the goods which the boy had returned, and begged as a reward for the discovery to be allowed to conceal his name.

His father of course hesitated at so unusual a proposition; but there was something so very much in earnest in all Fred did and said that he became convinced it was best, for the present at least, to allow him to have his own way; and this he was very glad he had done when a few days after Fred asked him to do something for Sam Crandon.

"Sam Crandon?" he asked in surprise. "Is not that the very boy I found you fighting in the street with?"

"Yes, sir," said Fred, hanging his head, "but he promises to do well, if he can only find work — honest work; you see, sir, he is so bad nobody helps him."

Mr. Sargent smiled. "A strange recommendation, Fred," he said, "but I will try what can be done. A boy who wants to reform should have a helping hand."

"He does want to — he wants to heartily; he says he does. Father, if you only will!"

Fred, as he stood there, his whole face lit up with the glow of this generous, noble emotion, never was dearer to his father's heart; indeed his father's eyes were dim, and his voice a little husky, as he said again:

"I will look after him, Fred, for your sake."

And so he did; but where and how I have not space now to tell my readers. Perhaps, at some future time, I may finish this story; for the present let me say there is a new boy in Mr. Sargent's store, with rough, coarse face, voice and manners; everybody wonders at seeing him there; everybody prophesies future trouble; but nobody knows that this step up in Sam Crandon's life is Fred Sargent's revenge.

CHAPTER XLII. THE SMUGGLER'S TRAP.

HUBERT had accompanied his father on a visit to his uncle, who lived in a fine old country mansion, on the shore of Caermarthen Bay.

In front of the house spread a long beach, which terminated in precipitous cliffs and rocky ledges. On the, afternoon of the day following his arrival, he declared his intention of exploring the beach.

"Don't get caught in `The Smuggler's Trap,' " said his uncle, as he mentioned his plan.

" `The Smuggler's Trap?' "

"Yes. It's at the end of the beach where you see the cliffs. It's a hollow cave, which you can only walk at very low tide. You'd better not go in there."

"Oh, never fear," said Hubert carelessly, and in a few minutes he was wandering over the beach, and after walking about two miles reached the end of the beach at the base of the great cliffs.

The precipice towered frowningly overhead, its base all worn and furrowed by the furious surges that for ages had dashed against it. All around lay a chaos of huge boulders covered with seaweed. The tide was now at the lowest ebb. The surf here was moderate, for the seaweed on the rocks interfered with the swell of the waters, and the waves broke outside at some distance.

Between the base of the precipice and the edge of the water there was a space left dry by the ebb tide about two yards in width; and Hubert walked forward over the space thus uncovered to see what lay before him.

He soon found himself in a place which seemed like a fissure rent in a mountain side, by some extraordinary convulsion of nature. All around rose black, precipitous cliffs. On the side nearest was the precipice by whose base he had passed; while over opposite was a gigantic wall of dark rock, Which extended far out into the sea. Huge waves thundered at its feet and dashed their spray far upward into the air. The space was about fifty yards across.

The fissure extended back for about two hundred yards, and there terminated in a sharp angle formed by the abrupt walls of the cliffs which enclosed it. All around there were caverns worn into the base of the precipices by the action of the sea.

The floor of this place was gravelly, but near the water it was strewn with large boulders. Further in there were no boulders and it was easy to walk about.

At the furthest extremity there was a flat rock that seemed to have fallen from the cliff above in some former age.

The cliffs around were about two hundred feet in height. They were perfectly bare, and intensely black. On their storm−riven summits not a sign of verdure appeared. Everything had the aspect of gloom, which was heightened by the mournful monotone of the sea waves as they dashed against the rock.

After the first feeling of awe had passed, Hubert ran forward, leaping from rock to rock, till he came to where the beach or floor of the fissure was gravelly. Over this he walked and hastened to the caverns, looking into them one after another.

Then he busied himself by searching among the pebbles for curious stones and shells. He found here numerous specimens of the rarest and finest treasures of the sea — shells of a delicacy of tint and perfection of outline; seaweeds of new and exquisite forms with rich hues which he had hitherto believed impossible.

In the hollows of the rocks, where the water yet lay in pools, he found little minnows; and delicate jelly fish, with their long slender fibers; and sea anemones; and sea urchins with their spires extended; and star−fish moving about with their innumerable creepers. It was a new world, a world which had thus far been only visible to him in the aquarium, and now as it stood before him he forgot all else.

He did not feel the wind as it blew in fresh from the sea — the dread "sou'wester," the terror of fishermen. He did not notice the waves that rolled in more furiously from without, and were now beginning to break in wrath upon the rocky ledges and boulders. He did not see that the water had crept on nearer to the cliff, and that a white line of foam now lay on that narrow belt of beach which he had traversed at the foot of the cliff.

Suddenly a sound burst upon his ears that roused him, and sent all the blood back to his heart. It was his own name, called out in a voice of anguish and almost of despair by his father.

He sprang to his feet, started forward and rushed with the speed of the wind to the place by which he had entered the enclosure. But a barrier lay before him. The rolling waves were there, rushing in over the rocks, dashing against the cliff, tossing their white and quivering spray exulting in the air.

At once Hubert knew his danger.

He was caught in the "Smuggler's Trap," and the full meaning of his uncle's warning flashed upon his mind as in his terror he shrieked back to his father.

Then there was silence for a time

While Hubert had been in the "Trap," his father and uncle had been walking along the beach, and the former heard for the first time the nature and danger of the "Smuggler's Trap." He was at once filled with anxiety about his son, and had hurried to the place to call him back, when to his horror he found that the tide had already covered the only way by which the dangerous place might be approached.

No sooner had he heard Hubert's answering cry than he rushed forward to try and save him. But the next moment a great wave came rolling in and dashed him upon the cliff. Terribly bruised, he clung to the cliff till the surf fell back, and then ran on again.

He slipped over a rock and fell, but instantly regaining his feet he advanced further, and in his haste fell into a hollow which was filled with water.

Before he could emerge another wave was upon him. This one beat him down, and it was only by clinging to the seaweed that he escaped being sucked back by the retreating surge. Bold and frenzied though he was, he had to start back from the fury of such an assault as this. He rushed backward and waited.

His eyes searched wildly around. He noticed that the surf grew more violent every moment, and every moment took away hope. But he would not yield.

Once more he rushed forward. The waves rolled in, but he grasped the rocks and withstood the surf, and still advanced. Another followed. He bowed before it, and clinging to the rocks as before came forth triumphant.

Already he was nearly halfway. He sprang upon a rock that rose above the level of the seething flood, and stood for a moment panting and gasping. But now a great wave came rolling in upon him. He fell on his knees and clung to the seaweed.

The wave struck. It hurled him from the rock. He rolled over and over. Blinded, bruised and half drowned, he felt himself dashed against the cliff. He threw his arms wildly about, but found nothing which he could seize. The retreating wave sucked him back. But a rock stayed him. This he grasped and was saved.

Then, hastily scrambling to his feet, he staggered back to the place from which he had started. Before he could get back another wave threw him down, and this time he might have been drowned had not his brother plunged in and dragged him out.

Of all this Hubert had seen nothing, and known nothing. He waited for some time in silence, and then called. There was no answer. He called again and again. But at that time his father was struggling with the waves and did not hear him. At last, after what seemed an interminable time, he heard once more his father's voice. He shouted back.

"Don't be afraid!" cried the voice. "I'll get you out. Wait."

And then there were no more voices.

It was about two o'clock when Hubert had entered the gorge. It was after three when his father had roused him, and made his vain effort to save him. Hubert was now left alone with the rising tide, whose waters rolled forward with fearful rapidity. The beach inside was nearly level and he saw that in an hour or so it would be covered with the waters. He tried to trust to his father's promise, but the precious moments passed and he began to look with terror upon the increasing storm; for every moment the wind grew fiercer, and the surf rolled in with ever increasing impetuosity. He looked all around for a place of refuge, and saw nothing except the rock which arose at the extremity of the place, at the foot of the overhanging cliffs. It was about five feet high, and was the only place that afforded anything like safety.

Up this he clambered, and from this he could survey the scene, but only to perceive the full extent of his danger. For the tide rushed in more and more swiftly, the surf grew higher and higher and he saw plainly that before long the water would reach the summit of the rock, and that even before then the surf in its violence would sweep him away.

The moments passed slowly. Minutes seemed in his suspense to be transformed to hours. The sky was overspread now with black clouds; and the gloom increased. At length the waves rolled in until they covered all the beach in front, and began to dash against the rock on which he had taken refuge.

The precious moments passed. Higher and higher grew the waters. They came rolling into the cave, urged on by the fury of the billows outside, and heaping themselves up as they were compressed into this narrow gorge. They dashed up around the rock. The spray was tossed in his face. Already he felt their inexorable grasp. Death seemed so near that hope left him. He fell upon his knees with his hands clasped, and his white face upturned. Just then a great wave rolled up and flung itself over the rock, and over his knees as he knelt, and over his hands as he clasped them in prayer. A few more moments and all would be over.

As hope left a calmness came — the calmness that is born of despair. Face to face with death, he had tasted the bitterness of death, but now he flung aside the agony of his fear and rose to his feet, and his soul prepared itself for the end. Just then, in the midst of the uproar of wind and wave, there came a sudden sound, which roused to quick, feverish throbs the young lad's heart. It was a voice — and sounded just above him:

"Hubert!"

He looked up.

There far above him, in the gloom, he saw faces projecting over the edge of the cliff. The cry came again; he recognized the voice of his father.

For a moment Hubert could not speak. Hope returned. He threw up his arms wildly, and cried:

"Make haste! Oh, make haste!"

A rope was made fast about Hubert's father, and he was let down over the edge of the cliff. He would allow no other than himself to undertake this journey.

He had hurried away and gathered a number of fishermen, whose stout arms and sinewy hands now held the rope by which he descended to save his son.

It was a perilous journey. The wind blew and the rope swayed more and more as it was let down, and sometimes he was dashed against the rocky sides of the precipice; but still he descended, and at last stood on the rock and clasped his son in his arms.

But there was no time to lose. Hubert mounted on his father's shoulders, holding the rope while his father bound his boy close to him. Then the word was given, and they were slowly pulled up.

They reached the summit in safety, and as they reached it those who looked down through the gloom saw the white foam of the surf as it boiled in fury over the rock where Hubert had been standing.

THE END