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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ERIE TRAIN BOY ***

THE ERIE TRAIN BOY

By Horatio Alger, Jr.

1891

*If this is borrowed by a friend
Right welcome shall he be
To read, to study, not to lend
But to return to me.
Not that imparted knowledge doth
Diminish learning's store
But books I find if often lent
Return to me no more.*

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THE ERIE TRAIN BOY

CHAPTER I. — ON THE ERIE ROAD.

"Papers, magazines, all the popular novels! Can't I sell you something this morning?"

Joshua Bascom turned as the train boy addressed him, and revealed an honest, sunburned face, lighted up with pleasurable excitement, for he was a farmer's son and was making his first visit to the city of New York.

"I ain't much on story readin'," he said, "I tried to read a story book once, but I couldn't seem to get interested in it."

"What was the name of it?" asked Fred, the train boy, smiling.

"It was the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or some such name. It had pictures into it. Aunt Nancy give it to dad for a birthday present once."

"I have heard of it."

"It was a mighty queer book. I couldn't make head nor tail on't."

"All books are not like that."

"I don't feel like readin'. It's a nuff sight more interestin' lookin' out of the winder at the sights."

"I'm going to York to spend a week," added Joshua, with an air of importance.

"That's where I live," said the train boy.

"Do you? Then you might tell me where to put up. I've got ten dollars. I reckon that ought to keep me a week."

Fred smiled.

"That is more than enough to keep me," he said, "but it costs a stranger considerable to go around. But I shall have to go my rounds."

It was a train on the Erie road, and the car had just passed Middletown. Joshua was sitting by the window, and the seat beside him was vacant. The train boy had scarcely left the car when a stylishly dressed young man, who had been sitting behind, came forward and accosted Joshua.

"Is this seat engaged?" he asked.

"Not as I know of," answered the young farmer.

"Then with your permission I will take it," said the stranger.

"Why of course; I hain't no objection. He's dreadful polite!" thought Joshua.

"You are from the country, I presume?" said the newcomer as he sank into the seat.

"Yes, I be. I live up Elmira way—town of Barton. Was you ever in Barton?"

"I have passed through it. I suppose you are engaged in agricultural pursuits?"

"Hey?"

"You are a farmer, I take it."

"Yes; I work on dad's farm. He owns a hundred and seventy-five acres, and me and a hired man help him to carry it on. I tell you we have to work."

"Just so! And now you are taking a vacation?"

"Yes. I've come to see the sights of York."

"I think you will enjoy your visit. Ahem! the mayor of New York is my uncle."

"You don't say?" ejaculated Joshua, awestruck.

"Yes! My name is Ferdinand Morris."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Morris. My name is Joshua Bascom."

"Indeed! An aunt of mine married a Bascom. Perhaps we are related."

Joshua was quite elated at the thought that he might in some way be related to the mayor of New York without knowing it, and he resolved to expatiate on that subject when he went back to Barton. He decided that his new acquaintance must be rich, for he was dressed in showy style and had a violet in his buttonhole.

"Be you in business, Mr Morris?" he asked.

"Well, ahem! I am afraid that I am rather an idler. My father left me a quarter of a million, and so I don't feel the need of working."

"Quarter of a million!" ejaculated Joshua. "Why, that's two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Just so," said Morris, smiling.

"That's an awful pile of money! Why, dad's been workin' all his life, and he isn't wuth more'n three thousand dollars at the outside."

"I am afraid three thousand dollars wouldn't last me a very long time," said Morris, with an amused smile.

"Gosh! Where can anybody get such a pile of money? That's what beats me!"

"Business, my young friend, business! Why I've made that amount of money in one day."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, by speculating in Wall Street."

"You must be smart!"

"My teachers didn't seem to think so. But life in the city is very different from life in the country."

"I wish I could make some money."

"A man must have money to make money. If now you had a little money——"

"I've got ten dollars to pay my expenses."

"Is that all?"

"No; I've got fifteen dollars to buy a shawl and dress for marm, and some shirts for dad. He thought he'd like some boughten shirts. The last marm made for him didn't fit very well."

"You must take good care of your money, Mr. Bascom. I regret to say that we have a great many pickpockets in New York."

"So I've heerd. That's what Jim Duffy told me. He went to York last spring. But I guess Jim was keerless or he wouldn't have been robbed. It would take a smart pickpocket to rob me."

"Then you keep your money in a safe place?"

"Yes, I keep my wallet in my breeches pocket;" and Joshua slapped the right leg of his trousers in a well satisfied way.

"You are right! I see you are a man of the world. You are a sharp one."

Joshua laughed gleefully. He felt pleased at the compliment.

"Yes," he chuckled, "I ain't easy taken in, I tell you, ef I was born in the woods."

"It is easy to see that. You can take care of yourself."

"So I can."

"That comes of being a Bascom. I am glad to know that we are related. You must call on me in New York."

"Where do you live?"

"At the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Just ask for Ferdinand Morris. They all know me there."

"Is that a good place to stop?"

"Yes, if you've got money enough. I pay five dollars a day for my board, and some extras carry it up to fifty dollars a week."

"Gosh all hemlock!" ejaculated Joshua, "I don't want to pay no more'n five dollars a week."

"You can perhaps find a cheap boarding-house for that sum—with plain board, of course."

"That's what I'm used to. I'm willin' to get along without pie."

"You like pie, then?"

"We ginerally have it on the table at every meal, but I can wait till I get home."

"I will see what I can do for you. In fact, all you've got to do is to buy a morning paper, and pick out a boarding-house where the price will suit you. You must come and dine with me some day at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"Thank you! You're awful kind, but I'm afraid I ain't dressed up enough for such a stylish place."

"Well, perhaps not, but I might lend you a suit to go to the table in. We are about the same build."

"If you've got an extra suit——"

"An extra suit? Mr. Bascom, I have at least twenty extra suits."

"Gee-whillikens! What do you want with so many clothes?"

"I never wear the same suit two days in succession. But I must bid you good morning, Mr. Bascom. I have a friend in the next car."

Morris rose, and Joshua, feeling much flattered with his polite attentions, resumed his glances out of the window.

"Apples, oranges, bananas!" called the train boy, entering the car with a basket of fruit.

"How much do you charge?" asked Joshua. "I feel kind of hungry, and I haven't ate an orange for an age. Last time I bought one was at the grocery up to hum."

"The large oranges are five cents apiece," said Fred. "I can give you two small ones for the same price."

"I'll take two small ones. It seems a great deal of money, but I'm traveling and that makes a difference."

"Here are two good ones!" said Fred, picking out a couple.

"All right! I'll take 'em!"

Joshua Bascom thrust his hand into his pocket, and then a wild spasm contracted his features. He explored it with growing excitement, and a sickly pallor overspread his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Fred.

"I've been robbed. My wallet's gone!" groaned Joshua in a husky voice.

CHAPTER II. — A FAIR EXCHANGE.

"Who can have robbed you?" asked the train boy, sympathetically.

"I dunno," answered Joshua sadly.

"How much have you lost?"

"Twenty-five dollars. No," continued Mr. Bascom with a shade of relief. "I put dad's fifteen dollars in my inside vest pocket."

"That is lucky. So you've only lost ten."

"It was all I had to spend in York. I guess I'll have to turn round and go back."

"But who could have taken it? Who has been with you?"

"Only Mr. Morris, a rich young man. He is nephew to the mayor of New York."

"Who said so?"

"He told me so himself."

"How was he dressed?" asked Fred, whose suspicions were aroused. "Did he wear a white hat?"

"Yes."

"And looked like a swell?"

"Yes."

"He got off at the last station. It is he that robbed you."

"But it can't be," said Joshua earnestly. "He told me he was worth quarter of a million dollars, and boarded at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"And was nephew of the mayor?"

"Yes."

Fred laughed.

"He is no more the mayor's nephew than I am," he said. "He is a confidence man."

"How do you know?" asked Joshua, perplexed.

"That is the way they all act. He saw you were a countryman, and made up his mind to rob you. Did you tell him where you kept your money?"

"Yes, I did. He told me there was lots of pickpockets in New York, and said I ought to be keeferful."

"He ought to know."

"Can't I get my money back?" asked Mr. Bascom anxiously.

"I don't think there's much chance. Even if you should see him some time, you couldn't prove that he robbed you."

"I'd like to see him—for five minutes," said the young farmer, with a vengeful light in his eyes.

"What would you do?"

"I'd give him an all-fired shakin' up, that's what I'd do."

Looking at Mr. Bascom's broad shoulders and muscular arms, Fred felt that he would be likely to keep his word in a most effectual manner.

"I don't know what to do," groaned Joshua, relapsing into gloom.

As he spoke he slid his hand into his pocket once more, and quickly drew it out with an expression of surprise. He held between two fingers a handsome gold ring set with a neat stone.

"Where did that come from?" he asked.

"Didn't you ever see it before?" inquired the train boy.

"Never set eyes on it in my life."

"That's a joke!" exclaimed Fred with a laugh.

"What's a joke?"

"Why, the thief in drawing your wallet from your pocket dropped his ring. You've made an exchange, that is all."

"What is it worth?" asked Joshua, eagerly. "Permit me, my friend," said a gentleman sitting just behind, as he extended his hand for the ring. "I am a jeweler and can probably give you an idea of the value of the ring."

Joshua handed it over readily.

The jeweler eyed it carefully, and after a pause, handed it back.

"My friend," he said, "that ring is worth fifty dollars!"

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Joshua, his eyes distended with surprise. "I can't understand it. Cousin Sue has got a gold ring as big as this that only cost three dollars and a half."

"Very likely, but the stone of this is valuable. You've made money out of your pickpocket, if he only took ten dollars from you."

"But he'll come back for it."

The jeweler laughed.

"If he does, tell him where you found it, and ask how it came in your pocket. He won't dare to call for it."

"I'd rather have the ten dollars than the ring."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll advance you twenty-five dollars on the ring, and agree to give it back to you any time within a year on payment of that sum, and suitable interest."

"You can have it, mister," said Joshua promptly.

As he pocketed the roll of bills given him in exchange, his face glowed with returning sunshine.

"By gosh!" he said, "I've made fifteen dollars."

"That' isn't a bad day's work!" said Fred.

"It's more'n I ever earned in a month before," said the young farmer. "I declare it's paid me to come to the city."

"You are lucky! Look out for pickpockets, as they don't always give anything in exchange. Now you can afford to buy some oranges."

"Give me two five-cent oranges and a banana," said Mr. Bascom with reckless extravagance. "I guess I can afford it, now I've made fifteen dollars."

"I wish that pickpocket would rob me," said Fred smiling. "Fifteen dollars would come in handy just now," and his smile was succeeded by a grave look, for money was scarce with the little household of which he was a member.

It is time to speak more particularly of Fred, who is the hero of this story. He was a pleasant-looking, but resolute and manly boy of seventeen, who had now been for some months employed on the Erie road. He had lost a place which he formerly occupied in a store, on account of the failure of the man whom he served, and after some weeks of enforced leisure had obtained his present position. Train boys are required to deposit with the company ten dollars to protect their employer from possible loss, this sum to be returned at the end of their term of service. They are, besides, obliged to buy an official cap, such as those of my readers who have traveled on any line of railroad are familiar with. Fred had been prevented for some weeks from taking the place because he had not the money required as a deposit. At length a gentleman who had confidence in him went with him to the superintendent and supplied the sum, and this removing the last obstacle, Fred Fenton began his daily runs. He was paid by a twenty per cent, commission on sales. It was necessary, therefore, for him to take in five dollars in order to make one for himself. He had thus far managed to average about a dollar a day, and this, though small, was an essential help to his widowed mother with whom he lived.

Just before reaching Jersey City, Joshua Bascom appealed to Fred.

"Could you tell me where to stop in York?" he asked. "Some nice cheap place?"

"I know a plain boarding-house kept by a policeman's wife, who lives near us," said Fred. "She would probably board you for five dollars a week."

"By hokey, that's just the place." said Joshua. "If you do it, I'll make it right with you."

"Never mind about that!" said Fred. "All you've got to do is to come with me. It will be no trouble."

CHAPTER III. — FRED'S RICH RELATION.

It was seven o'clock when Fred reached home. He and his mother occupied three rooms in a tenement house, at a rental of ten dollars a month. It was a small sum for the city, but as Fred was the chief contributor to the family funds, rent day was always one of anxiety. It so happened that this very day rent was due, and Fred felt anxious, for his mother, when he left home, had but seven dollars towards it.

He opened the door of their humble home, and received a welcoming smile from Mrs. Fenton, a pleasant-looking woman of middle age.

"I am glad to see you back, Fred," she said. "The days seem long without you."

"Have you brought me a picture book, Fred?" asked his little brother.

"No, Bertie, I can't bring you picture books every day. I wish I could."

"Albert has been drawing from his last book," said Mrs. Fenton. "He really has quite a taste for it."

"We must send him to the Cooper Institute Drawing School when he gets older. Did the landlord come, mother?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Fenton, a shade passing over her face.

"What did he say? Did he make any fuss?"

"He was rough and unpleasant. He said he must have his money promptly or we must vacate the rooms."

"Did he take the seven dollars?"

"Yes, he took it and gave me a receipt on account. He said he must have the balance to-morrow."

"I don't see how we can pay it. The company owes me more, but I shan't get paid till Saturday night."

"Don't they advance it to you?"

"It is against the rule. Besides I couldn't get it in time."

"There is a lady in Lexington Avenue owing me four dollars for sewing, but when I went there today I heard that she was out of town."

"It is very provoking to be kept out of your money when you need it so much. If we only had a little money ahead, we could get along well. Something must be done, but I don't know what."

"You might go round to Cousin Ferguson."

"I hate to ask a favor of that man, mother."

"You remember that your poor father owned a small tract of land in Colorado. When Robert Ferguson went out three months since I asked him to look after it, and ascertain whether it was of any value. As I have heard nothing from him, I am afraid it is worthless."

"I will go and ask him, mother. That is a matter of business, and I don't mind speaking to him on that subject. I will go at once."

"Perhaps he may be willing to advance a few dollars on it."

"At any rate I will go."

Robert Ferguson lived in a plain brick house on East Thirty-Ninth Street. He was a down-town merchant, and in possession of a snug competence. Mrs. Fenton was his own cousin, but he had never offered to help her in any way, though he was quite aware of the fact that she was struggling hard to support her little family. He had a son Raymond who was by no means as plain in his tastes as his father, but had developed a tendency to extravagance which augured ill for his future. He had never cared to cultivate the acquaintance of his poor cousins, and whenever he met Fred treated him with ill-concealed contempt.

It so happened that he was just leaving the house as Fred ascended the steps.

"Good morning, Raymond," said Fred politely.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes," answered Fred briefly, for he did not like the style in which his cousin addressed him.

"What do you want round here?"

"I want to see your father."

"I guess he's busy."

"I want to see him on business," said Fred, pulling the bell.

"If you want to borrow any money it's no use. I struck him for ten dollars just now, and he only gave me two."

"Did I say I wanted to borrow any money?"

"No, you didn't say so, but I couldn't think of any other business you could have."

Fred did not have occasion to answer, for here the door opened, and the servant stood on the threshold.

"Is Mr. Ferguson at home?" he asked.

"Yes; will you come in?"

Fred followed the girl into the back parlor where Robert Ferguson sat reading the evening paper.

He looked up as Fred entered.

"Good evening, Mr. Ferguson," he said.

"Good evening, Frederick," said his relative coldly.

"My mother asked me to call and inquire whether you heard anything of father's land in Colorado."

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Ferguson. "I hope she built no day dreams on its possible value."

"No sir; but she hoped it might be worth something—even a small sum would be of value to us."

"The fact is, these Western lands are worth little or nothing."

"Father used to say that some time or other the land would be worth a good sum."

"Then I don't think much of your father's judgment. Why, I don't believe you could give it away. Let me see, how much was there?"

"A hundred and twenty-five acres."

"How did you father get possession of it?"

"There was a man he took care of in his sickness, who gave it to him out of gratitude."

Robert Ferguson shrugged his shoulders.

"It would have been better if he had given him the same number of dollars," he said.

"Then you don't think it worth as much as that?"

"No, I don't."

Fred looked disappointed. In their darkest days, he and his mother had always thought of this land as likely some time to bring them handsomely out of their troubles, and make a modest provision for their comfort. Now there seemed to be an end to this hope.

"I would have sent your mother word before," said Robert Ferguson, "but as the news was bad I thought it would keep. I don't see what possessed your father to go out to Colorado."

"He was doing poorly here, and some one recommended him to try his chances at the West."

"Well, he did a foolish thing. If a man improves his opportunities here he needn't wander away from home to earn a living. That's my view."

"Then," said Fred slowly, "you don't think the land of any value?"

"No, I don't. Of course I am sorry for your disappointment, and I am going to show it. Let your mother make over to me all claim to this land, and I will give her twenty-five dollars."

"That isn't much," said Fred soberly.

"No, it isn't much, but it's better than nothing, and I shall lose by my bargain."

Fred sat in silence thinking over this proposal. The land was the only property his poor father had left, and to sell it for twenty-five dollars seemed like parting with a birthright for a mess of pottage.

On the other hand twenty-five dollars would be of great service to them under present circumstances.

"I don't know what to say," he answered slowly.

"Oh, well, it is your lookout. I only made the offer as a personal favor."

Mr. Ferguson resumed the perusal of his paper, and thus implied that the interview was over.

"Cousin Ferguson," said Fred, with an effort, "our rent is due to-day, and we are a little short of the money to meet it. Could you lend me three dollars till Saturday night?"

"No," answered Robert Ferguson coldly. "I don't approve of borrowing money. As a matter of principle I decline to lend. But if your mother agrees to sell the land she shall have twenty-five dollars at once."

Fred rose with a heavy heart.

"I will tell mother what you propose," he said. "Good evening!"

"Good evening!" rejoined Mr. Ferguson without raising his eyes from the paper.

"Twenty-five dollars would be very acceptable just now," said Mrs. Fenton thoughtfully, when Fred reported the offer of his rich relative.

"But it wouldn't last long, mother."

"It would do us good while it lasted."

"You are right there, mother, but I have no doubt the land is worth a good deal more."

"What makes you think so? Cousin Ferguson——"

"Wouldn't have made the offer he did if he hadn't thought so, too."

"He might have done it to help us."

"He isn't that kind of a man. No, mother, it is for our interest to hold on to the land till we know more about it."

"How shall we manage about the rent?"

Fred looked troubled.

"Something may turn up to-morrow. When the landlord comes, ask him to come again at eight o'clock, when I shall be home."

"Very well, Fred."

Mrs. Fenton was so much in the habit of trusting to her son that she dismissed the matter with less anxiety than Fred felt. He knew very well that trusting for something to turn up is a precarious dependence, but there seemed nothing better to do.

CHAPTER IV. — ZEBULON MACK.

At twelve that day the landlord, Zebulon Mack, presented himself promptly at the door of Mrs. Fenton's room.

He was a small, thin, wrinkled man, whose suit would have been refused as a gift by the average tramp, yet he had an income of four thousand dollars a year from rents. He was now sixty years of age. At twenty-one he was working for eight dollars a week, and saving three-fifths of that. By slow degrees he had made himself rich, but in so doing he had denied himself all but the barest necessaries. What he expected to do with his money, as he was a bachelor with no near relatives, was a mystery, and he had probably formed no definite ideas himself. But it was his great enjoyment to see his hoards annually increasing, and he had no mercy for needy or unfortunate tenants who found themselves unable to pay their rent promptly.

Mrs. Fenton opened the door with a troubled look.

"I've come for that other three dollars, ma'am," said Zebulon Mack, standing on the threshold.

"I'm very sorry, sir——" began the widow.

"What! haven't you got the money?" snarled Mack, screwing up his features into a frown that made him look even more unprepossessing.

"My son Fred will be paid on Saturday night, and then——"

"Saturday night won't do. Didn't you promise it to-day?"

"Yes; and Fred tried to get an advance, but could not."

"Where is he working?"

"On the Erie road."

"Most likely he spends all his money for beer and cigarettes. I know him. He looks like it."

"You are very much mistaken, sir," said Mrs. Fenton, indignantly.

"Oh, you think so, of course," sneered the landlord. "Mothers don't know much about their boys, nor fathers either. I am glad I haven't a son."

"I wouldn't be your son for a million dollars," said little Albert, who resented the allusion to his big brother.

"Hey?" snarled Mack, opening his mouth and showing his tobacco-stained tusks. "What business has a whipper-snapper like you to put in your oar?"

"I ain't a whipper-snapper!" retorted Albert, who did not know the meaning of the word, but concluded that it was not complimentary.

"Well, ma'am, what are you going to do? I can't stay here all day."

"Fred thought he would have the money by to-night. He asked if you would call round after he got home."

"When is that?"

"He generally gets home at seven o'clock."

"Then I'll be here at seven, but if you haven't the money, then out you go! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then mind you remember it. With so many swindling tenants a landlord has a hard time."

He shambled off, and Mrs. Fenton breathed a sigh of temporary relief. All the afternoon she felt troubled and anxious, and her anxiety increased as the hours wore away.

"If Fred should be late as he sometimes is," she said to Bertie about six o'clock, "I am afraid Mr. Mack will carry out his threat and turn us out on the street."

"I won't let him," said Albert manfully.

"We can't help it," said Mrs. Fenton. "Do you think you could find your way to the depot to meet Fred and hurry him home?"

"Oh, yes," answered the little boy. "I went there with Fred last week."

"You are sure you won't get lost?"

"What do you take me for, mother? I'd be ashamed to get lost anywhere round the city."

"Then go, and tell Fred to hurry up. Mr. Mack is so strict and severe that I am sure he won't wait a minute."

At seven o'clock precisely Mr. Mack returned and, looking at his watch, said, "Time's up, ma'am."

"Wait just a few minutes!" pleaded Mrs. Fenton. "I expect Fred home every minute."

"My time's valuable, ma'am. It is not likely the boy will have the money any way."

"Won't you wait, then?"

"Do you take me for a fool, ma'am? Here, Finnegan."

He had brought with him a man in his employ who for starvation wages helped him move out tenants, and made himself useful in a general way.

"Here I am, Mr. Mack," said Finnegan.

"Just give me a hand with this bureau. We'll take that first."

"Oh, sir," pleaded Mrs. Fenton, "how can you be so merciless? In a few minutes Fred will be here."

"I'm not a fool, ma'am. I told you I'd move you at seven o'clock, and I'm a man of my word."

"Wait a minute and I'll see if I can borrow the money of Mrs. Sheehan."

"You ought to have thought of that before. I'll give you two minutes."

Mrs. Fenton sped down to the rooms of Mrs. Sheehan on the next lower floor.

"Can you lend me three dollars, Mrs. Sheehan?" asked Mrs. Fenton, breathless. "Mr. Mack threatens to turn us out on the sidewalk."

"I wish I could, Mrs. Fenton," said Mrs. Sheehan heartily, "but I bought my John a suit yesterday, and it's taken all my money except seventy-five cents. I'd be glad to oblige you, indeed I would."

"I've no doubt of it," sighed the widow, for it was her last hope.

"Well, have you got the money?" asked Zebulon Mack, as she reappeared.

"No, sir."

"Just what I thought. Go ahead, Finnegan."

They took up the bureau and slowly moved to the door, and down the staircase with it.

"It's a shame!" said Mrs. Sheehan, standing at her door.

"You'd better look out, ma'am! It may be your turn next," said the landlord with a scowl. "If it is I won't wait for you a minute."

"It's a hard man, you are, Mr. Mack."

"I need to be," said Zebulon Mack grimly. "If I wasn't it's precious little rent I'd get in."

The outlook for the Fentons was dark indeed.

CHAPTER V. — AN ADVENTURE ON THE TRAIN.

Fred was on board his regular train that same morning at the usual hour, and started on his round of duty. He sold four morning papers, but trade seemed rather dull. About eleven o'clock he went through the first car distributing some packages of candy to the various passengers. On reaching the end of the car he returned, collecting the money for those purchased, and reclaiming those not wanted.

About midway of the car was a man of middle age, with small, insignificant features, and a mean look. He seemed very much absorbed in reading a penny paper when the train boy came up.

"Will you buy the package of candy?" asked Fred.

"What package?" asked the passenger, looking up.

"The one I left with you when I passed through the car."

"I don't know what you mean. You left no package with me."

"I remember distinctly leaving you a package."

"You are thinking of some other man."

"No, I am not."

"You are mistaken!" said the passenger, frowning.

"Will you be kind enough to get up and let me see if it is on the seat, or has fallen underneath?"

"No, I won't."

Fred was convinced that the passenger had secreted the package, and was scheming to cheat him out of the dime. He was a boy of spirit, and he did not propose to be swindled.

"Sir," he said in a louder tone, "I am a poor boy trying to earn an honest living. If you don't pay for this package I shall have to."

"That is none of my business. I shall not pay for what I haven't got. Boy, you are very impertinent. I shall report you to the president of the road."

"You may do so if you want to. I can't afford to give away my stock in trade."

"Boy," interposed a pompous gentleman sitting opposite, "I quite agree with this gentleman. You are not employed to insult passengers."

"Or to be cheated by them," said Fred hotly.

"If you treated me in this way, I would make it my business to have you discharged."

"Even if I was right?"

"Of course you are not right. This gentleman's word outweighs yours."

"Why should it?"

"He is a respectable gentleman, and you are only a poor train boy."

"That may be, sir, but I always tell the truth."

"Like George Washington," sneered the stout gentleman.

Fred felt that he was losing his case, and the mean passenger smiled with satisfaction. But his triumph was short-lived. The train boy found an unexpected defender.

"The boy is right," said a young lady sitting directly behind the passenger with whom Fred had his difficulty. "I saw this man take the package and put it in his pocket. I have waited with some curiosity to see whether he would persist in his attempt to cheat the boy out of his money."

There was an instant revulsion of feeling. The attempted swindler looked as if a bombshell had exploded at his feet.

"There is some error," he stammered. "The young lady is mistaken."

"I am not mistaken," said the young lady positively "If this man will allow his pockets to be examined, the package will be found."

The man rose from his seat and prepared to leave the car.

"I ain't used to being insulted," he said.

"Gentlemen," said the young lady, "you have only to look at this man's side-pocket to see that it contains the

package."

The passenger wore a sack coat, and it was plain to all that the young lady was right.

"I will pay for the package if the passenger is not honest enough to do it himself."

"No, miss," said a rough-looking man who looked like a western miner. "This man must pay, or I'll pitch him out of the car myself."

"I think you had better pay, sir," said the pompous looking man with an air of disgust. "I took your part, because I supposed you were a gentleman."

The other, without a word, drew out a dime from his pocket and handed it to Fred. Then, looking very ill at ease, he left the car hurriedly, and went as far forward as possible.

"Do you have many experiences like this?" asked the young lady, with a smile.

"Yes, miss, quite frequently," said Fred, "and it isn't the poor passengers that try to cheat me. Sometimes I travel on emigrant trains, but I never lost a cent by an emigrant. It is those who are able to pay, like this man, who try to take advantage of me."

"Do you make good pay?"

"I average about a dollar a day."

"I suppose that is fair pay for a boy of your age."

"Yes, it is; but I need it all. I have a mother and brother to support."

"Have you, indeed?" said the young lady sympathetically. "You can't all three live on six dollars a week."

"Mother earns a little by sewing, but that isn't paid very well."

"Very true. So you sometimes get into difficulties?"

"We are in difficulties now. The rent is due, and we lack three dollars to make it up."

"That is easily remedied," said the young lady. "It is my birthday to-day, and I shall allow myself the luxury of doing good. Here are five dollars which you will use to pay the landlord."

"Thank you, miss," said Fred gladly. "You have lifted a weight from my mind. Our landlord is a strict man, and I was afraid we would be turned out on the street."

"Miss, will you let me shake hands with you? You're a trump!"

It was the western miner who spoke, and he had come forward impulsively from his seat, and was extending a rough, sunburned hand to the young lady.

She did not hesitate a moment, but with a pleasant smile placed her hand in his.

"I wish all high-toned gals was like you, miss," said the miner, as he shook her hand heartily.

"I am sure you would do the same, sir," said Isabel Archer.

"Yes, I would, and I meant to if you hadn't got the start of me. You'll excuse the liberty I took," said the miner.

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"I'm a rough miner, but——"

"You are a kind-hearted man. You may hereafter have it in your power to help the boy."

"So I can," and the miner retreated to his seat.

Arrived at the Erie depot, Fred found his little brother waiting for him.

"Oh, Fred," he said, "I hope you've got money for the rent. The landlord said he would turn us out at seven o'clock if we didn't pay."

"And I am a little late," said Fred, anxiously.

"Let me go with you!" said the miner, "I want to see what sort of a critter your landlord is. The mean scoundrel! It would do me good to shake him out of his boots."

Zebulon Mack and his assistant had just succeeded in placing the bureau on the sidewalk when Fred and his mining friend turned the corner of the street.

"There's mother's bureau!" exclaimed Fred in excitement. "He's begun to move us out."

"He has, hey?" said Sloan the miner. "We'll soon stop that."

"What are you doing here?" demanded Fred, hurrying up.

Zebulon Mack turned round, and eyed the boy with an ugly frown.

"I told your mother I'd move her out, and I've done it."

"Why didn't you wait for me? I've got the money."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have."

"Pay it over, then."

Fred was about to do so when the miner interposed.

"Don't pay him till he carries back the bureau!" said Sloan.

"You and your friend can do that!" said the landlord.

"If you don't catch hold of that bureau and take it back I'll wring your neck, you mean scoundrel!" said the miner sternly.

Zebulon Mack looked into the miner's face and thought it wisest to obey.

"Here, Finnegan!" he said sullenly. "Take hold, and don't be all night about it."

When the bureau was in place, Fred, who had changed the five-dollar bill, handed Mr. Mack the three dollars.

"Now, my friend," said the miner, "you can reckon up how much you made by your meanness. You and that understrapper of yours must enjoy moving bureaus. I only wish you'd got down the rest of the furniture, so that I might have the satisfaction of seeing you carry it back."

The landlord glared at Tom Sloan as if he would like to tear him to pieces. But he took it out in looks.

"Good night, sir," said the miner, "we don't care to have the pleasure of your company any longer."

"I'll be even with you for all this," growled Mack.

"Don't feel bad, squire. You've got your money."

"Mother," said Fred, "this is my friend, Mr. Sloan."

"I am glad to see any friend of my boy," said Mrs. Fenton. "Won't you stay and take supper with Fred?"

"I'd like to, ma'am, if it won't be intruding."

"Not at all," said Fred cordially. "I've had luck to-day, mother. A beautiful young lady gave me five dollars."

"God bless her!" said Mrs. Fenton. "She couldn't have given it at a better time."

CHAPTER VI. — MR. BASCOM'S PERIL.

Tom Sloan made himself very much at home with the Fentons. The widow sent out for a steak, and this, with a cup of tea and some fresh rolls, furnished a plain but excellent repast.

"I haven't eaten so good a supper for a long time," said the miner. "It seems just like the suppers I used to get at home in Vermont."

"It was very plain," said Mrs. Fenton, "but probably you had a good appetite."

"You are right there, ma'am."

Mr. Sloan remained chatting for a couple of hours. He told his new friends that he had been away two years, spending the time in Nevada and California.

"I hope you have had good luck, Mr. Sloan," said Fred.

"Yes, I've made a few thousand dollars, but I'm going back again next month."

"To California?"

"No, to Colorado."

Fred and his mother exchanged looks.

"My father left us some land in Colorado," said the train boy—"a hundred and twenty-five acres—but we can't find out whether it has any value or not."

"Let me know where it is," said the miner, "and I'll find out and send you word."

"Thank you! It will be a great favor," said Mrs. Fenton warmly. "A cousin of my husband went out there three months since, and visited the land. He reports that it is of no value, but offers to buy it for twenty-five dollars. Fred thinks he wouldn't make the offer if it was not worth a good deal more."

"That's where Fred's head is level. Depend upon it your cousin is foxy and wants to take you in. I'll tell you just how the matter stands."

Mrs. Fenton produced her husband's papers, and Mr. Sloan made an entry of the location in a small notebook which he carried.

"Don't worry about it any more, ma'am," he said. "I'll do all I can for you, and I hope for your sake there's a gold mine on the land."

Mrs. Fenton smiled.

"I shall be satisfied with less than that," she answered.

"How long are you going to stay in New York?" asked Fred.

"I am going to Vermont to-morrow, and, likely as not I shan't come back this way, but go West from Boston. Anyway you'll hear from me occasionally. I ain't much of a writer, but I guess you can make out my pot-hooks."

"I'll take the risk, Mr. Sloan," said Fred, "I am no writing master myself, but my little brother Albert can draw nicely, and writes a handsome hand. Bertie, bring your last writing-book."

The little boy did so, and exhibited it to the miner.

"Why, the kid beats my old teacher all hollow," said Sloan. "I've a great mind to take him with me to Vermont, and have him start a writing school."

"I'm afraid Albert couldn't keep order among the big boys."

"Well, there might be some trouble that way. How much do you weigh, kid?"

"Ninety pounds," answered Albert.

"Well, that isn't exactly a heavy weight. But, Fred, I must be going out and finding a room somewhere. Do you know of any good place?"

"There's a hotel close by. I'll go with you."

"Good evening, ma'am," said the miner, as he rose to go. "I may not see you again just at present, but I'll look after that business of yourn. Come here, kid, you ought to get a prize for your writing. Here's something for you," and he handed the delighted boy a five-dollar gold piece.

"Oh, ma, now may I have a new suit?" asked Albert.

"If you want a new suit," said the miner, "I haven't given you enough. Here's another five to help along."

"You are very kind, sir," said Mrs. Fenton. "Albert is really in need of clothes, and this will buy him something more than a suit."

"All the better, ma'am. I'm glad to have the chance of doing a little good with my money."

"I wish all who have money were like you. I wish you health and good fortune, and a safe return to your friends."

"Those are three good things, ma'am. If I get there I won't kick."

"Do you ever kick?" asked Albert, puzzled.

"I see you don't understand me, kid. It's a slang term we miners use. I won't complain. That's a little better English, isn't it?"

Fred conducted Mr. Sloan to the hotel nearby and saw him secure a good room. Then he was about to retire.

"Hold on a minute!" said the miner. "Come up to my room. I want to talk a little to you on business."

"Certainly, Mr. Sloan."

Reaching the chamber, the miner unbuckled a belt that spanned his waist, and drew therefrom a large sum in gold pieces. He counted out five double eagles—a hundred dollars—and turning to Fred, said: "I want you to keep that money for me till I come back."

"But, Mr. Sloan," said Fred surprised, "why not leave it with your other money? I might lose it."

"I want you to put it in some savings bank in your own name, and, if you need it, to draw out any part of it. I don't want that mean scamp, the landlord, to get a chance to turn you out into the street."

"But I might not be able to pay it back, Mr. Sloan."

"I'll take the risk. I lend it to you without interest for a year, and if you have to use any of it I won't sue you."

"You are very kind! It will make me feel much more easy in mind. I wouldn't mind being turned into the street on my own account, but mother couldn't stand it."

"Just so, Fred. You've got a good mother, and you must look out for her."

"I don't often meet a good friend like you, Mr. Sloan."

"Oh, pshaw! you mustn't make too much of a little thing," said the miner modestly. "I'm only giving you the interest on a hundred dollars."

Fred walked slowly homeward, feeling very cheerful. He hoped he should not need to use any of Mr. Sloan's kind loan, but it gave him a feeling of relief to know that he had a fund to draw from in case of need.

On his way home, in passing a drinking saloon, Fred's attention was drawn to two men who came out, arm in arm, both of whom appeared to be under the influence of liquor. Something in the dress and figure of one looked familiar. Coming closer Fred recognized his country friend, Joshua Bascom.

"What, Mr. Bascom! Is this you?"

"Why, it's Fred!" said Bascom stopping short and trying to stand erect.

"Oh, come along!" said his companion impatiently.

"No, I want to see the train boy. Good night, old fellow!"

The other angrily protested against being shaken off, but Joshua dropped his arm, and took Fred's instead.

"How came you with that man?" asked Fred.

"He's a jolly, sociable chap. Wanted to take me to a little card party, but I guess it's too late."

"Did he meet you in the saloon?"

"No; he took me in there, and treated me to three glasses of milk punch. I guess it's got into my head. Do you think I am—intoxicated, Fred?"

"It looks very much like it, Mr. Bascom."

"I hope they won't hear of it at home. Dad would get the minister to come and give me a talkin' to."

"I hope this stranger didn't get any of your money?"

"No; he wouldn't let me pay for a thing."

"He meant to get the money back. He was carrying you to some gambling house, where he would have won all your money."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Joshua, panic-stricken. "I thought he was a nice fellow."

"Be careful how you trust strangers, and don't go to any more drinking saloons!"

"I won't," said Mr. Bascom, fervently.

"I will take you to your room, and you had better take a good long sleep. If you want to go round, I'll call tomorrow evening, and go to some place of amusement with you."

"I think Mr. Bascom had better go back to his farm soon," thought Fred, as he returned from piloting Joshua home. "If he doesn't he is likely to get into trouble."

CHAPTER VII. — FERDINAND MORRIS.

When Ferdinand Morris left the train after robbing Joshua Bascom, as described in the first chapter, he was in excellent spirits. He had effected his purpose, and got off scot free. He walked briskly away from the station at which he got out, and didn't stop to examine the wallet till he had got half a mile away.

When he discovered that it contained only ten dollars, he was filled with disgust.

"What could the fellow mean by coming to the city with only ten dollars in his pocketbook?" he muttered. "It's a regular imposition. It wasn't worth taking. Here I am, stranded in the country, and my ticket of no value, for only ten dollars! I should like to see my rural friend's wo-begone look when he discovers the loss of his wallet, though."

This thought helped to reconcile Morris to the situation. The picture which he had conjured up tickled his fancy, and he laughed heartily. But his merriment was short-lived. Incidentally he noticed the loss of the ring, and his countenance changed.

"My ring gone!" he exclaimed. "What can have become of it? It was worth fifty dollars at least. I must have dropped it into that fellow's pocket when I took his wallet. That's a pretty bad exchange. What an unlucky chap I am! I am about forty dollars out of pocket."

The satisfaction of Mr. Morris was quite destroyed. There seemed little hope of his recovering the ring, for he could not make known its loss without betraying himself.

"I may as well be going back to New York," he said moodily. "If I meet that fellow again, I must get up some scheme for recovering the ring from him. He is a countryman and I can frighten him into giving it to me. The worst of it is, the ring is not mine, and the owner will make a fuss about it. She is inclined to be suspicious, and I shall find it hard work to explain."

In a house on Lexington Avenue lived a maiden lady, close upon forty years of age, though she called herself thirty-one. Miss Josephine Harden had been left independent through the will of an aunt who had left her the sum of thirty-five thousand dollars. She had been for eight years an humble attendant, subject to the numerous whims and caprices of her relative, but two years since had been repaid by a legacy. Ever since Miss Marden had been looking about for a suitable matrimonial partner. There were some difficulties in the way, for she was thin, long-nosed, and with a yellow complexion. Three impecunious bachelors, lured by her money, had paid her some attentions, but their courage failed at last, and they silently slunk away. At length, however, Ferdinand Morris met Miss Harden, and conceived the idea of marrying her for her money. When he had once got possession of her fortune, he proposed to leave her in the lurch.

Morris was a stylish-looking man, and the spinster received his attentions very favorably. She knew very little about him except that he was in some mysterious business about which he did not speak definitely, except that it required him to travel constantly. Matters progressed until they became engaged. At this point, rather reversing the usual order of things, Miss Marden gave her suitor the ring which he had now lost.

"If we don't marry," she said cautiously, "I shall expect you to give it back."

"Certainly, my dear Josephine," said Morris, "but I shall hold you to your promise."

"You might see some girl younger and fair," said Miss Marden coyly.

"How could that be?" said Morris with mock ardor, as he bent over her hand and kissed it with secret facial contortions. "Do you doubt my love?"

"I try not to, Ferdinand, but I am no longer in my first youth. I shudder to say it I am twenty nine."

"You were two years older last week," thought Morris.

"I—I don't feel so old," said the spinster, "but I am afraid it is a fact."

"I don't believe you will ever be forty again," thought Morris. "By the way, Josephine, have you thought of that investment I spoke to you about? I can get a hundred shares of mining stock for you, at five dollars a share—the inside price—while to the general public it is only sold at ten."

"It may be as you say, Ferdinand, but my aunt lost money in mining stocks, and I shall hardly dare to venture."

"Confound your aunt!" said Morris to himself. "I assure you, Josephine, this is a chance to double your money in three months."

"Have you invested in it yourself, Ferdinand?"

"Oh, yes," answered Morris, glibly, "I have a hundred and fifty shares."

Suspicious as she was, Miss Morris believed her suitor to be a man of means, and did not doubt his statement.

"Then I hope for your sake it will prove a good investment."

"Confound her!" thought Morris, "there seems no chance to make her open her purse strings. She has got to come down liberally, or I won't marry her."

It was at Miss Marden's door that Ferdinand Morris rang on the evening after the loss of the ring. He would have kept away, but he had promised to call, and Miss Morris was very strict in requiring him to keep his engagements.

He had hardly entered the room when she discovered the loss of the ring.

"What has become of the ring, Ferdinand?" she asked quickly.

"I thought you would miss it," he replied in some confusion.

"Where is it?" I asked Miss Harden peremptorily.

"Plague take the old cat," thought Morris. "I suppose I may as well tell the truth."

"The fact is," he stammered, "it was stolen from me on an Erie train to-day by a pickpocket."

"And you let him do it? What could you be thinking of, Ferdinand?"

"You have no idea how expert these fellows are, Josephine," said Morris, who certainly ought to know.

"I think a man must be inexcusably careless or simple," returned the spinster, "to allow a man to steal a ring from his finger. Do you suspect anybody?"

"Yes; I sat beside a young man dressed up as a countryman. He was such a good imitation, that I was positively taken in. He looked as if he had been driving the plow all his life."

"And he stole the ring?"

"He must have done it. There was no one else near who had the chance."

"But how could he slip it off your finger without your knowing it?"

"The fact is, I fell into a doze, and when I was half asleep the ring was taken. After he had got it he got out at some station, and I am afraid I never shall see him again."

"I am not satisfied with your explanation, Ferdinand."

"You don't mean to say you doubt my word, Josephine?"

"I paid fifty dollars for that ring at a jeweler's on Sixth Avenue, and I don't feel like losing so much money."

"But it is my loss, as you gave it to me."

"You forget that in case our engagement was broken, it was to be returned."

"But you really don't think of breaking the engagement? You don't want to drive me to despair?"

"Do you really love me so much, Ferdinand?" said the spinster, smiling complacently.

"Can you doubt it? It makes me very unhappy to have you find fault with me."

"But you must admit that you were very careless."

"I confess it, but the man looked so innocent."

"Do you think you shall ever meet him again?"

"I think so. He may be in another disguise."

"I will give you four weeks to do so, Ferdinand. If you don't succeed I shall require you to buy another in its place."

"I will do my best," said Morris.

"I really thought you were sharper, Ferdinand. No pickpocket could rob me."

"I may try it some time," thought Morris. "It would be rather a satisfaction to do it too."

"I wonder if I shall meet that country fellow again," thought Morris as he left the house. "If I do I'll see if I can't frighten him into returning my ring."

The very next evening, in passing the Standard Theater, near the corner of Thirty-Third Street Morris saw and instantly recognized the tall, rustic figure and slouching walk of Joshua Bascom. He paused a moment in indecision, then summoning up all his native bravado, he stepped forward, and laid his hand on Joshua's shoulder.

"Look here, my friend," he said in tone of authority, "I have some business with you."

CHAPTER VIII. — MR. BASCOM'S SAD PLIGHT.

Joshua turned in alarm, fearing that he was in the hands of a policeman.

"What have I done?" he began. Then recognizing Morris, he said, "Why, it's the man who stole my wallet."

"You must be crazy," rejoined Morris. "I charge you with theft."

"Well, that beats all!" ejaculated Joshua. "Just give me back my ten dollars."

"I admire your cheek, my friend," said Morris, "but it won't go down. Where is that ring you stole from my finger?"

"You left it in my pocket when you put in your hand and stole my wallet."

"Ha, you confess that you have got it. Where is it?"

"Give me back my wallet and I may tell you."

"My rural friend, you are in great danger. Do you see that policeman coming up the street? Well, I propose to give you in charge unless you give me back my ring."

"I haven't got it," said Joshua, beginning to feel uneasy.

"Then give me fifty dollars, the sum I paid for it."

"Gosh all hemlock!" exclaimed Joshua impatiently. "You talk as if I was a thief instead of you."

"So you are."

"It's a lie."

"Of course you say so. If you haven't fifty dollars, give me all you have, and I'll let you off."

"I won't do it."

"Then you must take the consequences. Here, policeman, I give this man in charge for stealing a valuable ring from me."

"When did he do it—just now?"

"Yes," answered Morris, with unexpected audacity. "He looks like a countryman but he is a crook in disguise."

"Come along, my man!" said the policeman, taking Joshua in tow. "You must come with me."

"I hain't done nothing," said Joshua. "Please let me go, Mr. Policeman."

"That's what they all say," remarked Morris, shrugging his shoulders.

"I see, he's an old offender," said the intelligent policeman, who had only been on the force three months.

"He's one of the most artful crooks I ever met," said Morris. "You'd swear he was a countryman."

"So I be," insisted Joshua. "I came from Barton, up Elmira way, and I've never been in the city before."

"Hear him!" said Morris, laughing heartily. "Ask him his name."

"My name's Joshua Bascom, and I go to the Baptist church reg'lar—just write and ask Parson Peabody, and he'll tell you I'm perfectly respectable."

"My friend," said Morris, "you can't fool an experienced officer by any such rigmarole. He can read you like a book."

"Of course I can," said the policeman, who felt the more flattered by this tribute because he was really a novice. "As this gentleman says, I knew you to be a crook the moment I set eyes on you."

They turned the corner of Thirtieth Street on their way to the station house. Poor Joshua felt keenly the humiliation and disgrace of his position. It would be in all the papers, he had no doubt, for all such items got into the home papers, and he would not dare show his face in Barton again.

"Am I going to jail?" he asked with keen anguish.

"You'll land there shortly," said Morris.

"But I hain't done a thing."

"Is it necessary for me to go in?" asked Ferdinand Morris, with considerable uneasiness, for he feared to be recognized by some older member of the force.

"Certainly," replied the policeman, "you must enter a complaint against this man."

Morris peered into the station house, but saw no officer likely to remember him, so he summoned up all his audacity and followed the policeman and his prisoner inside. There happened to be no other case ahead, so Joshua was brought forward.

"What has this man done?" asked the sergeant.

"Stolen a ring from this gentleman here," answered the policeman.

"Was the ring found on his person?"

"No, sergeant. He has not been searched."

"Search me if you want to. You won't find anything," said Joshua.

"He has probably thrown it away," said Ferdinand Morris, *sotto voce*.

"No, I hain't."

"What is your name, sir?" asked the sergeant, addressing Morris.

"My name is Clarence Hale," answered Morris, boldly, taking the name of a young man of respectable family whom he had met casually.

"Where do you live?"

"On Fourth Avenue, sir, near Eleventh Street."

"Do you swear that this man stole your ring?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"In front of the Standard Theater."

"How could he do it?" continued the sergeant. "He could not take it from your hand?"

"It was in my pocket. I found him with his hand in my pocket," answered Morris, glibly.

"By gracious!" ejaculated Joshua, his eyes distended with amazement, "I never heard a fellow lie so slick before, in all my life."

"Silence!" said the sergeant. "Mr. Hale, will you appear to-morrow morning at Jefferson Market, and testify against this man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Officer, have you ever arrested this man before?" went on the sergeant.

"I'm not quite sure, sir. You see he's in disguise now. I think he's *wan* of the gang."

Things began to look bad for poor Joshua, who was in a fair way to be railroaded to the penitentiary, as no doubt more than one innocent man has been before now, through an unfortunate complication.

"I wish I had some friend to speak up for me," he said, almost sobbing. "This is awful!"

"So you have!" said an unexpected voice.

Joshua turned, and to his inexpressible relief saw Fred standing on the threshold.

"It's the train boy!" he exclaimed joyfully.

Fred had set out to call upon Joshua that evening, and had chanced to see him going into the station house with the confidence man. He had followed to find out what it meant.

There was one who was not so well pleased to see him. Ferdinand Morris turned pale, and tried to make his escape.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am faint, and must get out into the air."

But Fred stood in his way.

"Not so fast, Mr. Ferdinand Morris," he said. "What trick are you up to now?"

"Do you know this man, Fred?" asked the sergeant, who had known the train boy for three years, for he lived only one block away on the same street.

"Yes, sir, he stole the wallet of this young man on my train on the Erie less than a week since."

"But he said the prisoner stole his ring."

"He left the ring in Mr. Bascom's pocket, when he was feeling for the wallet."

"This is a great mistake," said Morris, hurriedly. "I never saw this train boy before, and haven't traveled on the Erie road for a year."

"This man is telling a falsehood," said Fred.

"Will you swear that he was on your train and robbed this countryman?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any officer who recognizes him?" the sergeant inquired, looking round the room.

"I do," answered a stout policeman, who just then entered the station house. "I arrested him six months since, but he managed to slip away."

"The prisoner is discharged," said the sergeant. "Hold the complainant instead."

To his great joy Joshua was set free, and Mr. Morris, alias Hale, was collared by a policeman, though he made a desperate struggle to escape.

"I'll get even with you, boy!" said Morris savagely, addressing Fred.

"Come along, Mr. Bascom," said Fred. "I presume you don't care to stay here any longer."

"Not if I know it," said Joshua, fervently. "If I live till to-morrow morning, I'll start back to Barton. I've seen all I want to of York. I won't feel safe till I get home, in sight of the old meetin' house. I wouldn't have dad know I'd been arrested for a load of pumpkins."

CHAPTER IX. — A LONG TRIP.

Fred appeared at the depot the next morning the superintendent said to him, "I shall have to change your train to-day. You will wait for the nine o'clock train for Suspension Bridge."

"When shall I get there?"

The superintendent, referring to his schedule of trains, answered, "At 11.44 to-night. The boy who usually goes on this train is sick."

"When shall I return?"

"Let me see, it is Saturday. If you would like to stay over a day and see Niagara Falls, you can do so, and start on your return Monday morning at 8.35. How do you like the arrangement?"

"Very much. I was only thinking how I could get word to my mother. She will feel anxious if I am not back at the usual time."

"You might send her a note by a telegraph messenger."

At this moment Fred espied a boy of his acquaintance in the street outside.

"Here, Charlie Schaeffer," he called, "do you want to earn a quarter?"

"Yes," answered the boy quickly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take a note to my mother."

"It'll cost me almost a quarter for expenses."

"I will pay that besides."

"All right! Give me the letter."

Fred scribbled these few lines:

DEAR MOTHER,

I am sent to Suspension Bridge and shall not probably be back till late Monday evening, or perhaps Tuesday morning. Don't worry.

FRED.

Charlie Schaeffer, a stout German boy, who was temporarily out of work, was glad of the chance of earning a quarter for himself, and started at once on his errand. Fred, quite elated at the prospect of seeing Niagara Falls, prepared for his trip. He had to carry a larger supply of stock on account of the length of the journey, and was instructed to lay in a fresh supply at Buffalo for the home trip.

He was about to enter the car at ten minutes of nine when Joshua Bascom appeared on the platform with a well-worn carpet-bag in his hand.

"Are you going back, Mr. Bascom?" asked the train boy.

"Yes," answered Joshua. "I don't want to go to no more station houses. I shan't rest easy til I'm back in Barton. You hain't seen any policeman lookin' for me, have you?"

"No; you haven't done anything wrong, have you?"

"Not as I know of, but them cops is very meddlesome. I thought that pickpocket might have set 'em on my track."

"You are safe here. This is New Jersey, and a New York policeman can't arrest you here."

"That's good," said Joshua with an air of relief. "Where are you going to-day?"

"I'm going all the way with you."

"You ain't goin' as far as Barton?"

"Yes, I am, and farther too. I'm going to Niagara."

"You don't say? And you don't have to pay a cent either?"

"No, I get paid for going."

"I wish I was goin' to Niagara with you. By hokey, wouldn't the folks stare if I was to come home and tell 'em I'd seen the Falls!"

"Can't you go?"

"No, I've spent all the money I can afford. I must wait till next year."

"Did you spend all of your money, Mr. Bascom?"

"No," chuckled Joshua. "I've only spent the fifteen dollars I got for that ring, and shall carry home the ten dollars."

"You are an able financier, Mr. Bascom. You've made your expenses, and can afford to go again. You must tell your father how you got the best of a pickpocket."

"So I will. I guess he'll think I'm smarter than he reckoned for."

At about half-past four in the afternoon, Fred was called upon to bid his country friend good-by. Looking from the door of the car, he saw Joshua climb into a hay wagon driven by an elderly man whose appearance led him to conclude that he was the "dad" to whom Joshua had frequently referred.

The sun sank, the darkness came on, but still the train sped swiftly over its iron pathway. The passengers settled back in their seats, some fell asleep, and the hum of conversation ceased. Fred too gave up his trips through the cars, and stretching himself out on a seat, closed his eyes. Presently the train came to a stop, and the conductor, putting in his head at the door, called out "Niagara Falls."

Fred rose hastily, for he had made up his mind to get out at this point. He descended from the train, and found himself on the platform of the station.

He had already selected the hotel, a small one where the rate was very moderate, and as there was no carriage representing it at the train he set out to walk. It was a small, plain-looking inn, of perhaps thirty rooms, named after the proprietor:

THE LYNCH HOUSE.

On the road thither he was overtaken by a stranger, whom he remembered as one of the passengers on the second car. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and though it was a warm summer evening he was muffled up about the neck.

"Are you going to stop here over night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You are the train boy, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What hotel shall you put up at?"

"One recommended to me by the conductor—the Lynch House."

"I think I will stop there too."

"You may not like it. It is a small, cheap house."

"It doesn't matter. I am well provided with money, but I don't care for style or fashion. I am an invalid, and I prefer the quiet of a small hotel. There will be less noise and confusion."

"Very well, sir. I think that is the hotel yonder."

Such proved to be the case. It was large on the ground, but only three stories in height. Over the portico was a sign, bearing the name. It was by no means fashionable in its appearance, but looked comfortable.

Fred and the stranger entered. A sleepy-looking clerk sat behind the desk. He opened his eyes, and surveyed the late comers.

"Can you give me a room?" asked Fred.

"I would like one too," said the other.

"We've only got one room left," said the clerk. "That's a back room on the second story. Are you gentlemen in company?"

"No," answered Fred. "We are strangers to each other."

"Then I can't give but one of you a room. If you don't mind rooming together, you can both be accommodated."

"Are there two beds in a room?" asked the stranger.

"Yes."

"Then I don't object to occupying it with this young man. He is a stranger to me, but I watched him on board the train, and I am sure he is all right."

"Thank you, sir," said Fred.

"Well," said the clerk, "what does the boy say?"

Fred looked curiously at his companion. He was so muffled up that he could only see a pair of black eyes, a long sallow nose, and cheeks covered with dark whiskers. The train boy did not fancy his looks much, but could think of no good reason for declining him as a room companion. He felt that the gentleman had paid him a compliment in offering to room with him, particularly when, as he stated, he had a considerable amount of money about him. He paused a moment only, before he said, "Perhaps we may as well room together, then."

"All right! I will go up with you, as the hall boy has gone to bed. I hardly expected any guests by this late train."

The clerk took the stranger's valise—Fred had only a small paper parcel in his hand, containing a clean shirt and a collar which he had bought in Jersey City before taking passage on the train. Up one flight of stairs the clerk preceded them and paused in front of No. 21, the back room referred to. He unlocked the

door, and entering, lighted the gas.

It was a room about twelve feet wide by twenty in depth. At each end was a single bedstead.

"I think you will be comfortable," said the clerk. "Is there anything you want before retiring?"

"No," answered both.

CHAPTER X. — WHAT TOOK PLACE IN NO. 21.

The clerk closed the door, leaving Fred alone with the stranger.

The latter sat down in one of the two chairs with which the room was provided.

"I am not sleepy," he said. "Are you?"

"Yes," answered Fred, gaping. "I am not used to late hours. Besides, I was up early this morning."

"That makes a difference. I didn't get up till eleven. I was about to propose a game of cards."

"I don't care for playing cards," said Fred. "Besides, I am sleepy."

"All right! You won't object to my sitting up awhile and reading?"

Fred would have preferred to have his companion go to bed, as he was not used to sleep with a light burning. He did not wish to be disobliging, however, and answered that he didn't mind.

The stranger took from his hand-bag a paper-covered novel, and seating himself near the gas jet, began to read.

Fred undressed himself and lay down. He remembered with a little uneasiness that he had with him the hundred dollars in gold which had been intrusted to him by the miner. He had had no opportunity as yet to deposit it in the Union Dime Savings Bank, as he had decided to do, and had not thought to leave it with his mother. He wished now that he had done so, for he was about to pass several hours in the company of a man whom he knew nothing about. Still, the man had plenty of money of his own, or at least he had said so, and was not likely therefore to be tempted to steal.

Fred took his place in bed, and looked over toward the stranger with some uneasiness.

"Are you a good sleeper?" asked his companion carelessly.

"Yes," answered Fred.

"So am I. I don't feel sleepy just at present, but presume I shall within twenty minutes. I hope I don't inconvenience you by sitting up."

"No," answered Fred slowly.

"I've got my book nearly finished—I began to read it on the train. When do you expect to go back?"

"Monday morning," Fred answered.

"That's good! We will go and see the Falls together to-morrow. Ever seen them?"

"No, sir; this is my first visit to Niagara."

"I have been here several times, so I know the ropes. I shall be glad to show you just where to go. But pardon me. I see you are sleepy. I won't say another word. Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

"Good night."

The stranger continued to read for twenty minutes. At any rate he appeared to do so. Occasionally he glanced over toward Fred's bed. The train boy meant to keep awake till his companion got ready to go to bed, but he was naturally a good sleeper, and his eyes would close in spite of him; and finally he gave up all hope of resistance, and yielded to the inevitable.

Soon his deep, regular breathing showed that he was unconscious of what was passing around him.

The stranger rose, walked cautiously to the bed, and surveyed the sleeping boy.

"How peacefully he sleeps!" he said. "He has nothing on his conscience. At his age it was the same with me. I started right, but—circumstances have been too much for me. There won't be much sleep for me to-night, for the detectives are doubtless on my track. I must get rid of one damaging piece of evidence."

He opened his valise, and, after searching a little, drew therefrom a massive gold watch rather old-

fashioned in appearance, attached to a solid gold chain. Neither was new, and both had evidently been used for a considerable number of years.

"I was a fool to take these," said the stranger. "They are more likely to fasten suspicion on me than anything else. However, I have a good chance now to get rid of them."

Fred had laid his newspaper parcel on a small table near his bed. The other carefully untied the twine with which he had fastened it, and, putting the watch and chain inside the shirt, he carefully wrapped it up again, and tied it with the same cord.

"The boy will be considerably surprised he opens his bundle and discovers these," he reflected, with a smile. "He will be a little puzzled to know how they came there. Well, that is none of my business. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and it is important I should get rid of such tell-tale clews."

This piece of business over, the stranger stretched himself and took off his coat. He was proceeding to undress when a sudden thought deterred him.

"On the whole," he said to himself, "I will go to bed as I am. I may have occasion for a sudden start. It is best to be on the safe side."

He laid his coat on the back of a chair, and putting out the gas, stretched himself on the bed. He had not thought himself sleepy, but a recumbent position brought on a drowsy feeling, and before he was well aware of it he had sunk to sleep. But his slumber was not as sound or restful as the train boy's. From time to time he uttered ejaculations, as if he were terror-stricken, and once he waked up with a cold perspiration on his brow. It took a minute for him to realize his position.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered in disgust. "I thought the police had nabbed me, but all's safe so far. If I could only get a little more sleep—as sound and peaceful as that boy is enjoying—I should wake revived in the morning. There is no reason why I shouldn't. They can't have got on my track so soon."

He closed his eyes, and succeeded in dispelling the uneasy feeling which sprang from the consciousness of having exposed himself to the danger of arrest. It was now three o'clock. In fifteen minutes he was sleeping again, and this time his slumbers were less disturbed and uneasy. He awoke suddenly to find the sun streaming into the room.

"It must be late!" he thought, a little nervously.

But on examining his watch he found that it was only six o'clock.

"I may as well get up," he said to himself. "I shall be safer on the Canada side. I don't want to wake the boy, for he might be tempted to get up with me. Besides, if he opened his bundle, the sight of the watch might arouse his suspicions, and get me into trouble. Fortunately I did not undress, and can be up and away in two minutes."

He put on his coat, and descended to the office.

"You are down early," said the clerk in some surprise.

"Yes. I want to see the Falls and take an early train West. How much is my bill?"

He was told, and laid the money on the desk.

"The boy with you remains?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The boy is no acquaintance of mine. I only met him on the train. There is something about that boy that excites my curiosity," he added thoughtfully.

"Such as what?" asked the clerk, his curiosity aroused.

"He seems to have something on his mind. His sleep was very much disturbed. He moved about a good deal, and muttered frequently, but I could not make out any words."

"Perhaps he has run away from home," suggested the clerk.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"He may have had good reasons for running away," he said. "However, that is none of my business. I suppose you missed nothing during the night."

"No. Good morning."

The stranger went out, directing his steps toward the Falls.

An hour later a quiet-looking man entered the office.

"Good morning, Mr. Ferguson," said the clerk. "What brings you here so early?"

"Business," answered the other briefly. "Did you have any late arrivals last evening?"

"Yes; two."

"Who were they?"

"A man and boy."

"Are they here still?"

"The boy is up-stairs. The man left at six o'clock. He wanted to see the Falls before taking an early train. He said the boy seemed very nervous, and had a troubled sleep."

The detective nodded. "I think he must be the party I want."

"Why, what has happened?"

"The house of a wealthy old gentleman in Elmira was entered yesterday afternoon, and articles of value taken. I received a telegram this morning which should have reached me last night, asking me to be on the watch for any suspicious parties."

"And you think the boy committed the burglary?" asked the clerk in excitement.

"It looks like it. With your permission I will go up-stairs and take a look at him."

CHAPTER XI. — FRED FALLS UNDER A TERRIBLE SUSPICION.

About ten minutes before the arrival of the detective Fred woke up. He generally awoke earlier, but his long ride of the day before had fatigued him more than usual. It was natural for him to glance over to the opposite bed, occupied by his traveling companion. He was surprised to find it empty.

"He must have got up early," thought Fred. "I wonder if he has gone for good."

This seemed likely, for the stranger's valise had disappeared also.

"I wonder he didn't wake me up and bid me good-by," thought the train boy.

Then a momentary suspicion led him to search for the hundred dollars in gold which he had carefully concealed in his inside vest pocket. If that were taken, he would be in a quandary, for there would be little chance of his being able to make up the loss to his friend, the Western miner.

He found, to his relief, that the gold had not been touched, and he reproached himself for the injustice he had in his thoughts, done his late room-mate.

"Well," soliloquized Fred, as he lazily got out of bed and drew on his clothes, "I am not sorry to have the room alone. If I could have a friend from home with me I should like it, but I don't care for the company of a stranger."

Fred reflected that he had all the day to himself. He could hear the roar of the famous cataract, which he had not yet seen on account of his late arrival the night before, and he determined to go there immediately after breakfast, or even before breakfast if he found that it was quite near. He went to the window and looked out, but it was not in sight.

"I may as well put on a clean shirt," thought Fred, and he went to the table to open the bundle which he had brought from Jersey City. He had just unfastened the string when a quick, imperative knock was heard at the door of his room.

"Come in!" said Fred, with some surprise.

He turned his face to the door, and his wonder increased as it opened and he saw the clerk and a stranger standing on the threshold. They entered the room and closed the door behind them.

"What is the matter?" asked the train boy. "Has anything happened?"

"When did your room-mate leave?" asked the detective, not answering his question.

"I don't know; I only just woke up."

"Did you rest well?"

"That's a very queer question to ask me," thought Fred. "Yes," he answered, "I rested very well."

The detective and the clerk exchanged glances. This statement did not accord with what Fred's room-mate had said down-stairs.

"The bed was very comfortable," added Fred by way of compliment to the house.

"I am glad you found it so," said the detective dryly.

"Did you come upstairs to ask how I rested?" asked Fred, with a smile.

"You are sharp, my young friend," said the detective, "and I think I may say wonderfully cool under the circumstances."

"Under what circumstances?" asked Fred, his attention drawn to the last part of the detective's speech.

"There was a burglary committed yesterday afternoon in Elmira," said the detective, fastening his eyes keenly on the face of the train boy.

"Was there?" asked Fred, not seeing in what way this information was likely to affect him. "I thought most burglaries were committed in the night."

"They are, generally, but this was an exception. There was no one in the house except old Mr. Carver, who is quite hard of hearing. The burglary probably took place about five o'clock, and the burglar is supposed to have taken the 5:51 train from Elmira."

"Why, that is the train I was on," said Fred in surprise.

"By a curious coincidence," said the detective with a queer smile, "it was by your train that the burglar probably traveled."

His tone was so significant that Fred asked quickly, "What do you mean?"

"I mean, my young friend," said the detective, "that you are suspected to know something of this affair."

"If you are a detective," retorted Fred, "I don't think much of your sharpness. I have never been in Elmira in my life."

"Probably not," said Ferguson, the detective, with a provoking smile.

"I passed through there yesterday on my way from New York. With that exception, I never saw the place."

"That may be true," said the detective cautiously, "or it may not. I will take the liberty of examining your luggage to see if I can find any of the stolen articles."

"You are welcome to do it," said Fred.

"Bring it out then. Where have you put it—under the bed?"

"All the luggage I have is in this bundle," said the train boy. "You can open that if you think it will do you any good."

"You are sure you have no valise?"

Ferguson, who, like most of his class, was suspicious, peeped under each bed, but found nothing to reward his search. Somewhat disappointed, he went to the table and opened the newspaper bundle. He did so listlessly, not really expecting to find anything, but as he unrolled Fred's shirt there was a triumphant look in his eyes when he uncovered the gold watch and chain.

"Just as I thought," he said, with a nod to the clerk.

"What is that?" gasped Fred.

"It appears to be a watch and chain," answered Ferguson coolly. "Possibly you can tell me how it came there."

"I know nothing about it," said Fred in dire amazement.

"You do not claim it as yours, then?"

"Certainly not. I never saw it before in my life."

"Is this shirt yours?"

"Yes."

"You brought it with you?"

"Yes."

"Let me open the watch. Do you see this inscription?"

Fred and the clerk approached, and on the inside of the case read the name, "Philo Carver, Elmira, 1865."

"You see? This is one of the articles stolen from Mr. Carver's house yesterday afternoon. It is a little odd that this young man in whose bundle I find it cannot explain its presence."

"You may believe me or not," said Fred desperately, "but it is true all the same. I know nothing of this watch or chain, and I never saw either before. Can you tell me what other articles were taken by the burglar?"

"Some government bonds, and a small sum of bank bills."

"Then you had better search for them also here: I will help you all I can."

"Well, you are a cool hand."

"No; I am innocent, that is all."

"It is pretty clear you have nothing else with you, or you wouldn't be so willing. However, I consider it my duty to do as you suggest."

He hunted under the mattresses, and finally examined Fred's pockets. At last he felt in the inside vest pocket and drew out the gold coins.

"Ha, we have something here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Fred, "but those happen to belong to me."

"Where did you get them?"

"From a friend in New York. He intrusted them to me to use if I needed. Meanwhile I was to put them in the savings bank."

"Not a very likely story," said the detective suspiciously.

"Likely or not, it is a true story. Does this man Carver claim to have lost any gold coins?"

"No."

"I thought not."

"However, we come back to the inquiry—where did you get the watch?"

"The man who slept in the room with me must have left it here to throw suspicion on me," said Fred, with sudden inspiration.

"That is possible," said the clerk, who was favorably impressed by Fred's manner.

"We must not jump at conclusions," said the detective warily. "I shall feel justified in detaining the boy after what I have found."

"You won't take me to the station house?" said Fred nervously.

"No; it will answer the purpose if you are locked up in this room—for the present."

"Then," said Fred, turning to the clerk, "I shall be much obliged if you will send me up some breakfast."

"It shall be done."

Within half an hour Fred was discussing a beefsteak and fried potatoes with hearty enjoyment. It takes a good deal to spoil the appetite of a healthy boy of seventeen.

CHAPTER XII. — FRED AS A PRISONER.

After breakfast Fred became restless. It was tantalizing to be so near the Falls, and yet to be locked up, and prevented from seeing them. Of course it would all come right in time, but it was hard to bear the suspense and confinement. Hunting round the room he found a juvenile book, and sitting down at the window read it. It helped to while away the time till twelve o'clock. He had scarcely read the last page when he heard the key turning in the lock outside. The door opened and two persons appeared at the entrance. One was the clerk the other a boy, rather short, with a bright, attractive face.

"I thought you might like company," said the clerk in a friendly manner. "This is my young cousin, Frank Hamblin, who will remain with you for a while."

"I am glad to see you, Frank," said Fred offering his hand. "You are very kind to come and see a bold, bad burglar."

"You don't look much like it," said Frank, laughing. "Still appearances are deceitful."

"I don't think I look wicked," said Fred meditatively, as he glanced at his reflection in a small mirror that hung over the washstand. "Yet it appears that I have broken into a gentleman's house in Elmira, and stolen a gold watch and chain and some government bonds."

"How could you do it?" asked Frank with much seriousness. "So young and yet so wicked!"

"That's the question that puzzles me," said Fred. "How could I do it when at the time the burglary was committed I was speeding over the Erie road at the rate of thirty miles an hour?"

"Can you prove this?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Certainly I could, if the conductor or brakeman of my car were here."

"Where are they?"

"Probably on their way back to New York."

"Do you live there?"

"Yes."

"I have always wanted to see the city of New York. It must be a gay place."

"You are right there, Frank. Whenever you do come, just inquire for Fred Fenton, and I will show you round. There is my address."

"Thank you! I should like it ever so much. Have you ever been here before?"

"No. I wanted very much to see the Falls, but here I am locked up in a hotel chamber. I wish the Falls were visible from the window."

"They are on the other side of the house."

"Do you know this detective—the one that searched me?"

"Yes, I have seen him. I heard him tell my cousin that he did not believe you guilty, but that finding the watch and chain in your bundle was a suspicious circumstance."

"I suppose it is. Now I can understand how innocent people get into trouble. Do you live here?"

"No, I am only visiting some friends here. I live in Auburn."

"That's where the State's prison is, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I hope I shan't go to Auburn to live. Have you any idea how long I shall have to stay here?"

"Till evening, I suppose. You will probably be brought before a justice in the morning," was Frank's reply.

Fred sighed.

"How differently things have turned out from what I anticipated," he said. "I expected to be walking round, and looking at the Falls to-day."

"Hold on a minute!" said Frank. "Mr. Ferguson boards here, and he may be down-stairs now. I'll ask him if you can't go out under my charge if you'll promise not to run away."

"I'll promise that fast enough. You can knock me down if I attempt to escape."

"I am afraid I might find that difficult, as you are at least two inches taller than I."

"I will be very gentle and submissive. I wouldn't be willing to run away with such a suspicion hanging over me."

"Excuse me a minute! I'll do what I can for you."

Frank went to the door and attempted to open it, but it was locked on the outside and resisted his efforts.

"I forgot," he said, laughing, "that I am a prisoner too. Really it makes a fellow feel queer to be locked up."

"That's the way I feel. You can ring the bell, can't you?"

"A good thought!"

Frank rang the bell, and presently a hall boy opened the door about an inch, and looked in.

"Is anything wanted?" he asked.

"Is Mr. Ferguson down-stairs?" said Frank.

"He has just come in."

"Won't you ask him to step up here a minute?"

"All right, sir."

The door was relocked, but two minutes later it was opened and the detective walked in.

"Ha!" he said. "So we have two burglars instead of one."

"I am just as much a burglar as Fred is," said Frank.

"Then," said the detective with a smile, "I may feel it my duty to search you. You do have rather a hardened expression."

"Do you think I have?" asked Fred smiling.

"Well, no. I wouldn't pick you out for a professional criminal, and to be honest with you, I doubt whether you know anything of the burglary."

"Thank you! I am glad you have a better opinion of me than that."

"But what is it you want of me, Frank?"

"I want Fred to have a chance to see the Falls. He has never been here before, and it will be a great disappointment to him if he has to go away without seeing them."

"To be sure, to be sure!" said the detective thoughtfully.

"I thought you might let him go out under my escort."

Mr. Ferguson smiled.

"What could you do if he took it into his head to escape?"

"You couldn't lend me a club, could you?"

"I don't carry any. That is for policemen, and I have never acted in that capacity."

"But he won't run away, will you, Fred?"

"No, I prefer to stay here till I am cleared of suspicion."

"You see, Mr. Ferguson," said Frank, eagerly, "there will be no risk about it. He can give you his *parole*—that's the word, isn't it?"

"Yes; but this privilege is never accorded to those who are arrested for burglary."

"It is certainly inconvenient to be a burglar," said Fred, smiling in spite of his secret anxiety.

"Then you can't let him go?" questioned Frank, regretfully.

"Well, there is one way. I should not consider it safe to let him go with you, but I might accompany you."

"That will be capital! You will, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," said Ferguson, after a momentary pause. "I have a boy of my own about the age of—the young burglar—and that perhaps inclines me to be more indulgent. But you must wait till after dinner."

"Will dinner be sent up here?" asked Frank.

"Yes, for him; but you are not staying at the house."

"I forgot; and I haven't got money enough to pay for a hotel dinner."

"That's all right, Frank," said Fred. "I invite you to dine with me, and it shall be charged on my bill. I shall enjoy dinner better if I have company."

"Thank you. I accept the invitation, but I don't like to be an expense to you."

"Never mind."

Dinner was sent up in the course of half an hour, and the two boys enjoyed it.

"Are you still attending school, Frank?" asked Fred.

"Yes."

"I should like to, but poor boys like me have to work for a living."

"If you won't tell I will let you into a secret."

"What is it?"

"I am writing a long story. I want to be an author some time. I've written twenty chapters already."

"You must be smart," said Fred in surprise. "Why, I couldn't write as much in a whole year."

"Of course I can't tell whether it is good for anything, but some time I mean to write well."

"Well, Frank, I wish you success, I am sure. Some day I may be proud to know you."

"Now I might write a story about you, and call it 'The Boy Burglar.'"

"Don't! I have no wish to figure in that character."

Half an hour later the door opened, and the detective entered, dressed for a walk.

"Now, if you two burglars are ready," he said, "we will take a stroll."

CHAPTER XIII. — THE HOTEL CLERK'S MISTAKE.

"What was the name of your room-mate, Fred?" asked Frank Hamblin, as they went down-stairs.

"I didn't notice. He registered before me."

"Suppose we look and see. It may be well to know."

They opened the hotel register, and saw written in a bold, free hand:

"F. GRANT PALMER, CHICAGO."

"It may be another Fred," suggested Frank.

"Or Frank. Either name would do for a burglar," said Mr. Ferguson, smiling. "But it is hardly consistent with professional etiquette to joke on such a subject. I will endeavor to forget while we are walking together that one of the party is an offender against the laws, or under suspicion as such."

"I want to forget it myself," said Fred, "or it will spoil my enjoyment of Niagara."

"I wonder where Mr. F. Grant Palmer is now," said Frank. "I feel sure he is the real burglar."

"Then he has probably gone over into Canada," returned Fred. "It is unlucky for me that he left the watch and chain, but lucky for Mr. Carver, who will now recover them."

Meanwhile let us follow Mr. Palmer, whose movements are of interest to us in connection with the suspicion he has managed to throw on Fred. When he left the Lynch House he proposed, as a measure of safety, to go over to the Canada side, and indeed he did so. He made his way to the Clifton House, and registered there, depositing his valise at the office while he went in to breakfast.

"We have no room at present," said the clerk, politely, "but by the middle of the forenoon we shall undoubtedly have a few vacancies. Will that answer?"

"Oh, yes," said Palmer easily. "I am in no special hurry for a room, but will take breakfast and go out for a walk."

It did occur to Mr. Palmer that the valise, containing as it did the bonds stolen from Mr. Carver in Elmira, should be carefully guarded. However, it would surely be as safe in the care of the hotel clerk of the Clifton as in any hotel room, and probably even safer. So he ate breakfast with an easy mind, and then, purchasing a cigar, took a walk along the road which presents the best views of the Falls.

Mr. Palmer felt very complacent.

"It is a blessing to gentlemen in my profession," he soliloquized, "that Canada is so conveniently near. Here the minions of the law cannot touch us for any little indiscretion committed under the stars and stripes. I hear people talking of annexing Canada to the States, but to that I am unalterably opposed. I should have to retire from business, and I am not able to do that at present."

He was standing at a convenient point surveying the Falls, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. Such was the force of habit that Mr. Palmer started violently, and turned round nervously.

It was a stout man with a smiling face that confronted him.

"Ha, Palmer!" said the new arrival. "Did you mistake me for——"

"How are you, Wellington? I am glad to see you."

"Instead of——"

"Oh, pshaw! A man naturally starts when he is tapped on the shoulder unexpectedly."

"I see. You were admiring the Falls."

"Yes."

"There is a good deal of romance in your composition, my dear Palmer," said his friend banteringly. "Anything new?"

"Well, yes," said Palmer, glancing around him cautiously.

"Made a strike, eh?"

"Well, something of the sort."

"What is it?"

"I managed to have a stroke of luck at Elmira, yesterday afternoon."

"How much did you get away with?"

"Hush! don't speak so plainly. Suppose any one should hear you?"

"My dear fellow, there is no one within two hundred yards."

"Well, there must be five thousand dollars in bonds and money."

"Very neat, upon my word! You are in luck!"

"How about you?"

"I made a small raise at Buffalo—a paltry three hundred dollars' worth. It was hardly worth the trouble of taking. Still, a man must live."

"To be sure!"

"Now with what you picked up you can live a year or two in comfort. Upon my soul, I envy you. Are you suspected?"

"I have managed to divert suspicion, I think," and Palmer told his friend the story of his secreting the gold watch and chain in Fred's luggage.

"Very shrewd!" said his friend approvingly. "Palmer, you are a credit to our profession. I shall be content to take lessons of you."

"Oh, you are only joking," said Palmer, his expression showing, however, that he felt proud of the compliment.

They took a long and leisurely walk together, talking over their mutual experiences. They had known each other for ten years, having been fellow boarders together as far back as that at Sing Sing, since then neither had been caught, though both had been engaged in violating the laws. Their similar professions had given them a common bond of sympathy, and they found so much satisfaction in each other's company that the time slipped by insensibly, and it was half-past twelve before they found their way back to the Clifton.

Mr. Palmer stepped up to the desk.

"Have you a room for me yet?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir; I can give you No. 67. Here, front!"

A hall boy answered the summons.

"Take the gentleman up to 67," said the clerk.

"Any luggage, sir?"

"You may hand me my valise, if you please."

"Beg pardon; here it is."

"Come up with me, Wellington. We'll continue our talk up stairs."

Palmer merely glanced at the valise, and continued talking with his friend. The hall boy unlocked the door of No. 67 and led the way inside.

It was a pleasant room, and Palmer looked about him approvingly.

"I shall be very comfortable here," he said.

"Is everything right?" asked the hall boy, lingering.

Palmer smiled, drew a quarter from his pocket and put it into the ready hand of the young man.

"You take American coins, don't you?" he asked with a smile.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir. Thank you!"

"That is all for the present. If I want anything I will ring."

Wellington scanned the valise with an eye of interest.

"So that holds the swag, does it?" he asked.

"My dear friend, don't use such vulgar terms!" said Palmer reproachfully. "It's not only inelegant, but it's imprudent. Suppose anybody heard you?"

"Your reproof is just, Palmer. I am rather a blunderer, I admit. I see you are traveling under a false name."

"What do you mean?"

Wellington pointed to a small card attached to the valise. It bore the name of Edmund Lawrence.

When Palmer's glance fell on this card, a quick glance of dismay swept over his face.

"That isn't my valise!" he said.

"Not your valise!"

"No. The clerk has made a mistake. I must see him at once!" continued Palmer, in an agitated voice. "He may have given my valise to this man Lawrence, and in that case I am ruined. Stay here till I return."

Palmer seized the satchel, opened the door, and descended to the office in breathless haste. As he dashed up to the desk the clerk eyed him in mild surprise.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Matter enough! You have given me the wrong valise."

"Is it possible?"

"See here; this belongs to a party named Lawrence—Edmund Lawrence. Give me mine at once."

The clerk looked troubled.

"I am afraid I can't," he faltered apologetically. "I gave Mr. Lawrence your valise—you will observe that they are very much alike—and he carried it away two hours since."

Palmer felt ready to drop. To think that after all his careful planning everything should be jeopardized by a

hotel clerk's error.

"Do you know what you have done?" he said, in a hollow voice. "My valise contained two thousand dollars' worth of securities."

"I am terribly sorry, Mr. Palmer, but I don't think you will suffer any loss. This Mr. Lawrence looks like a high-toned gentleman. You can see him within an hour. He went from here to the International Hotel on the American side of the Falls. I advise you to go over at once, take his bag with you, and exchange."

CHAPTER XIV. — THE MISSING VALISE.

That he was imprudent in trusting himself on the American side Mr. Grant Palmer was well aware, but he felt that he was in danger of losing the entire proceeds of his skilful burglary, and to this he could not make up his mind. Besides the danger was not very great. Why should any one suppose that an ordinary valise contained stolen property? There was nothing remarkable about the appearance of his hand-bag. Hundreds of them are carried every day. If it were opened by a dishonest person, of course it would be doubtful if he ever got it back, but the clerk at the Clifton had said that this Mr. Lawrence seemed like a high-toned gentleman, who would of course scorn to avail himself of property not his own.

"Risk or no risk!" decided Palmer, "I must go over and reclaim my property."

Leaving him to cross to the American side, we will follow Mr. Lawrence, who, not at all suspecting that the valise he had received from the clerk was not his own, repaired to the International Hotel and engaged one of the best rooms in the house, for he was a man of ample means. He laid his valise on the bed and went downstairs. Later in the day he went out to take his customary walk.

Meanwhile Fred and his two companions walked about in a leisurely manner, surveying the Falls from different points, and finally went to Goat Island. Here they sat down on a bench and surrendered themselves to the fascinations of the scene.

"Well, what do you think of Niagara, Fred?" asked Frank.

"It is even finer than I had supposed," replied the train boy.

"Some people are disappointed," said Mr. Ferguson, "because they expect too much. The Falls of Montmorency are considerably higher but not nearly as wide. There are some cascades in the Yosemite Valley of over a thousand feet descent, but they are only a few feet wide. For grandeur Niagara excels them all."

"I shouldn't like to be swept over the Falls," said Fred.

"It must be terrible!" said Frank, with a shudder.

"The reality is worse than any picture drawn by the imagination. Ten years since it happened to me to see a poor wretch drawn down to destruction over the cataract."

The boys looked eager for the story, and he proceeded.

"I may state," continued the detective, "that I was indirectly the cause of the tragedy. A defaulting bank cashier had got as far as this point on his way to Canada, which as now was a haven of refuge to gentlemen of his character. I was close upon his track, and he was in imminent danger of capture. There seemed to be only one way of escape—crossing the river above the Falls. By some means he obtained a row-boat, and being a fair rower set out on his dangerous trip, exulting in having outwitted me and made his escape. I remember very well how he stood up in the boat, and with a smile on his face waved me a mock adieu, as he impelled the little craft out toward the middle of the river.

"He was a strong, sturdy rower, but he had no conception of the strength and rapidity of the current. He battled manfully, but the boat immediately began to tend towards the cataract with continually increasing rapidity. At length he came to realize the fate that certainly awaited him. His smile was succeeded by a look of despair. I can see even now the expression of terror and desperation, formed upon the poor fellow's face when he saw that, struggle as he might, there was no help or deliverance, I am sure at that time he would have welcomed me as a friend and savior, and gone with me willingly to prison, if only he could have been rescued from the impending doom. Still, however, he plied the oars with desperate vigor and would not resign himself to his fate. I was painfully excited, and in the poor fellow's peril quite forgot that he was a criminal of whom I was in pursuit. The end came speedily. When six feet from the edge of the cataract, he dropped his oars, threw up his hands, and an instant later boat and man were swept down into the gulf below."

"Was his body ever found?" asked Fred.

"Yes, but it was so mangled as to be almost beyond recognition. Many a time when looking at the Falls I have pictured to myself the unhappy victim of that day's tragedy."

"I suppose," said Frank, "it is impossible to go over the cataract and live."

"Not if all stories are to be believed. There is a boy in the village here who is said to have gone over the Falls, and yet he does not seem to have suffered any injury. The same story is told of a cat, but cats are noted for having nine lives, and therefore the story is not so surprising."

After a little more chat the three left the island and returned to the mainland. They had hardly reached it when a telegraph boy approached Mr. Ferguson and handed him a despatch.

He opened it and read as follows:

ELMIRA, SUNDAY.

My nephew, Edmund Lawrence, is at Niagara. Communicate with him.

PHILO CARVER.

"This is your business," said the detective, handing the telegram to Fred.

"Let us try to find Mr. Lawrence," said Fred, after reading it.

"It will be the best way. Mr. Carver does not mention at what hotel his nephew is staying."

"Probably he does not know."

"Undoubtedly you are right."

"What will you do?"

"There is only one thing to do to call at the principal hotels, and look over the registers. We will go first to the International."

"Very well, sir."

Ferguson scanned Fred with a smile.

"You certainly don't act like one under suspicion," he said.

Fred smiled in return. "I find it hard to realize that I am a suspected burglar," he responded.

"So do I. Let us hope that you will very soon be cleared from suspicion."

The detective and the two boys turned their steps towards the spacious and attractive International.

"It seems a little ahead of the Lynch House," said Fred, "but probably the prices at the latter suit my pocketbook better."

They stepped on the piazza, and went into the office.

Mr. Ferguson opened the hotel register, and among the recent entries found the name of Edmund Lawrence.

"Is Mr. Lawrence in?" he asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir; he came in from a walk five minutes since."

"I will send up my card."

The detective wrote on a blank card:

OSCAR FERGUSON,

DETECTIVE.

Important.

This was handed to a hall boy, who took it up to Mr. Lawrence's room, and returned with a message that the gentleman was to come up at once.

"I think you will have to go with me," said Ferguson to Fred. "It won't do for me to give you a chance to escape."

"That is the last thing I have in mind," said the train-boy; "but I shall be glad to see Mr. Lawrence."

Edmund Lawrence, a pleasant-looking man of middle age, looked somewhat surprised when turning his eyes toward the door, he saw Ferguson enter, followed by two boys.

"You wish to see me on important business?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are a detective?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hope that I have not fallen under any suspicion."

"Not at all. Have you heard that your uncle—Philo Carver, of Elmira—has been the victim of a burglary?"

"No! Tell me about it."

The detective told the story, and Mr. Lawrence listened with great interest.

"Is any one suspected?" he asked.

"A party has been arrested on suspicion," answered the detective.

"Indeed! who is it?"

"This boy!" answered Ferguson, pointing to Fred.

"Impossible!" ejaculated Lawrence, eying Fred with incredulous amazement.

CHAPTER XV. — MR. PALMER WALKS INTO A TRAP.

"Nevertheless it is true. I arrested him at the Lynch House this morning," affirmed the detective.

"Do you believe him guilty?" asked Mr. Lawrence, noting with perplexity Fred's open countenance and tranquil manner.

"No. Still, circumstances are against him."

"Please explain."

"I found your uncle's gold watch and chain in his bundle?"

"Is it possible?"

"It is quite true, Mr. Lawrence," said Fred calmly. "Mr. Ferguson will allow me to say that I was as much surprised as he to find them. The bundle was a small one and only contained a shirt and collar which I bought at Jersey City yesterday morning. I can only say that the watch was not in the bundle then."

"Perhaps," said Lawrence, who was favorably impressed by Fred's openness, "you have some theory as to the manner in which the watch got into your bag."

"Yes, sir, I have. I had for a room-mate a stranger—a man whom I only met last evening after the train arrived. We fell in with each other the way to the hotel. We were obliged to room together on account of there being but one room vacant at the hotel."

"What was the man's appearance?"

"He was rather tall, thin, and dark complexioned. Though it was late he did not go to bed at once, but sat up for a while finishing a book in which he was interested. When I awoke in the morning he was gone."

"You think he was the real burglar?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your reason?"

"Because it must have been he that put the watch and chain in my bundle."

"With a view of diverting suspicion from himself?"

"Yes, sir."

"One question more. When were you in Elmira, last?"

"I was never in Elmira at all," said Fred promptly. "I have never been so far West before."

"What was your object in making your present journey?"

"I came to make money," answered Fred, smiling.

"That answer may go against you," said the detective.

"Not when I explain that I am the train boy. I have usually made short runs, but yesterday morning the superintendent told me I was to go to Niagara, and gave me permission to stay over Sunday to have a chance to see the Falls. I began to think I would not see them, after all, but Mr. Ferguson was kind enough to walk out with me, and let me have a view of them."

"Is this boy also a train boy?" asked Lawrence, indicating Frank Hamblin.

"No; he is related to the clerk of the Lynch House, and was kind enough to come up to my room and keep me company."

"Who has the watch?" asked Lawrence, after a pause. "I have," answered the detective, producing it. Lawrence took it from his hand.

"It is my uncle's watch, sure enough," he said. "I remember it a dozen years since. He sent to Europe for it."

"His name is in it," said Ferguson. "But for that I might not have recognized it as one of the articles lost."

"Do you know what was taken besides?"

"Money and securities, I am informed, but to what value I have not learned."

"You think the boy's room-mate has them in his possession?"

"There seems to be little doubt of it."

"Where do you think he is?"

"On the Canada side, no doubt."

"He went there this morning?"

"Yes."

"I was myself at the Clifton House this morning, and I now remember the arrival of a man presenting the appearance of this young fellow's room-mate. He is probably still at the Clifton House."

"Then he is beyond my jurisdiction," said Ferguson.

"Do you remember what luggage he had?" asked Lawrence, turning to Fred.

"He had a small valise, about the size of this," said Fred, his eyes resting on the satchel which Lawrence had brought from the Clifton, and thrown down carelessly. "Why," continued Fred, in excitement, "this is his valise. I recognize it by a dark spot on the side."

"What do you mean?" said Lawrence sharply. "This is my valise."

He took it in his hand, and uttered an ejaculation.

"The boy is right! This is not my valise."

"Do you mean to say this valise belongs to the man who roomed with you last night?" demanded the detective.

"Yes, I feel sure of it."

"Then—good Heavens!—it no doubt contains the property stolen from my uncle. Mr. Ferguson, shall we be justified in opening it?"

"I will take the responsibility," said the detective.

He took from his pocket a bent wire, and dexterously inserting it in the lock opened the valise.

All gathered eagerly about it, anxious to ascertain whether their suspicions were correct.

There were a few articles of underwear, which the detective took out hastily and laid upon the bed.

"Ha, here we have it!" he exclaimed triumphantly as he drew out two long envelopes, such as are employed for bonds and securities. "I will take the liberty to open them."

One envelope proved to contain two one thousand dollar railroad bonds. The other contained two U. S. Government bonds of five hundred dollars each, and miscellaneous securities all together amounting to three thousand dollars more.

"A very clever capture on my word!" said Ferguson. "Really, Mr. Lawrence, you have beaten me in my own line."

"I am entitled to no credit. It belongs to the boy who identified the valise. I assure you the wrong bag was given me at the Clifton most fortunately. I am content to lose the few articles which my own contained for the sake of recovering my uncle's property. It really seems like an interposition of Providence."

"I suspect the thief will feel very ill-satisfied with the exchange. I wonder what he will do about it."

There was little chance for speculation on this point. There was a knock at the door, and a hall boy put in his head.

"There is a gentleman below who wishes to see you, Mr. Lawrence," he said. "Here is his card."

Mr. Lawrence took from his hand a card on which had been written the name

F. GRANT PALMER.

"That is the man, Mr. Lawrence," exclaimed Fred in excitement. "He has come for his valise."

"Bring Mr. Palmer up in about five minutes," said Lawrence; "not sooner."

"All right, sir!"

"Now let us repack the valise," said the detective. "I always carry a large bunch of keys with me, and shall probably find one that will relock it."

The shirts, socks, and other articles which had been taken from the bag were carefully replaced, and Ferguson, as he had thought probable, found a key which fitted the lock. Then the valise was laid carefully on the sofa.

"Mr. Palmer must not see us, and particularly the train-boy," said the detective, "or he will think something is up. Where can you conceal us?"

"There is a bedroom attached to the apartment," said Lawrence. "Go in there, all of you, and remain till I call you. You can leave the door ajar, as you will probably be curious to hear what goes on between us."

"Capital! Couldn't be better!"

Ferguson, followed by the two boys, entered the smaller room, and waited impatiently for the entrance of Palmer.

A knock was heard.

"Come in!" Lawrence called out lazily.

The door opened, and F. Grant Palmer entered, carrying in his hand a valise which seemed to be a facsimile of the one lying on the sofa. Palmer's quick eye caught sight of it as he entered the room.

"Pardon me for my intrusion!" he said suavely, "but I believe we exchanged valises—at the Clifton—this morning."

CHAPTER XVI. — PALMER'S MALICE.

"Indeed!" said Lawrence, in assumed surprise.

"Yes, mine was left with the clerk."

"And mine also."

"And he doubtless made a mistake in delivering them. Upon my word I am not surprised, as they certainly are very much alike."

"So they are!" said Lawrence, taking the valise from Palmer's hand. "And here is your name too."

"It is quite a joke, ha, ha!" laughed Palmer, his spirits rising as he saw that there would be no difficulty in effecting the exchange. "I suppose I may take mine?"

"You are quite sure it is yours? Pardon my asking, but you are a stranger to me."

"Oh, it's all right! You see this spot on my valise. Outside of that, there is really no difference."

"You are willing to swear that valise I brought over from the Clifton is yours?"

"Why, of course!" returned Palmer in surprise. "How can there be a doubt after what I have said?"

"You will pardon my caution. It certainly does seem like it, but I don't want to run any risk of giving it to the wrong party."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Palmer impatiently, setting down Lawrence in his own mind as a crank.

"Probably you have the key that opens it."

"Certainly."

"Then do you mind opening it, and satisfying yourself and me that it really belongs to you?"

"Surely not," said Palmer, really glad of an opportunity of satisfying himself that the bonds were safe.

He drew from his pocket a bunch of keys, and carefully selecting one inserted it in the lock of the valise. It opened at once, and Palmer eagerly scanned the contents. The under-clothing had been carefully replaced, and he did not discover that it had been disturbed, but when he lifted it to look for the envelopes containing the bonds, his face underwent a change.

"What is the matter?" inquired Lawrence, calmly.

"That valise has been opened," said Palmer, angrily.

"What makes you think so?"

"The most valuable contents have been removed. I hold you accountable for this, Mr. Lawrence," continued Palmer, fiercely.

"Please be a little more explicit. What is it that you miss?"

"Two envelopes, containing valuable bonds."

"This is a serious charge. Are you sure they were in the valise?"

"Of course I am. I put them there myself, and when I opened the valise this morning they were there."

"Wasn't it rash in you to leave articles of such value in your valise? Can you name any of the bonds?"

"Yes; there were two Erie mortgage bonds of a thousand dollars each, two government bonds of five hundred dollars each, some bank bills, and miscellaneous securities."

"You don't mean it? And you placed them there?"

"I did, and I am willing to swear to the statement. I demand of you, sir, where they are."

Mr. Lawrence rose from his seat, and on pretense of examining the contents of the open valise, managed to get in between Palmer and the door.

"A man in my employ had charge of the valise for a short time," he said. "He may have opened it."

"Where is he? He must be arrested before he can get away," said Palmer in excitement.

"Ferguson!" called Mr. Lawrence.

The detective, who had of course heard all that had passed, stepped out from the inner room. He assumed the tone of a servant.

"Did you call, sir?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I am at your service."

"This gentleman here claims the valise as his property. He says that some bonds have been abstracted from it. Am I right?"

"Yes," assented Palmer, with a fierce glance at the detective.

"He charges me with having opened the valise, and taken them."

"What does he say to that?" demanded Palmer in excitement.

"It is true," said Ferguson, calmly.

"You hear?" said Palmer. "Give me back those bonds, you scoundrel, and I may let you go free. Otherwise I will have you arrested, and you can guess what will follow. Don't let the fellow escape!" he added quickly, as the detective edged towards the door.

Lawrence upon this went to the door and locked it.

"What have you to say for yourself?" he demanded, turning to Ferguson.

"Only that I am a detective, and that I am specially deputed to search for and recover the bonds stolen from Philo Carver of Elmira, yesterday afternoon. I have reason to think I have found them."

"Duped!" exclaimed Palmer, sinking into a chair in dismay.

"Yes, Mr. Palmer, it looks like it. There is one article missing, a gold watch and chain."

"I don't know anything about them."

"We may find some one who does. Fred!"

At the summons the train boy stepped out from the inner room, followed by Frank Hamblin.

At sight of his late room-mate Palmer first showed surprise, and then anger.

"Did you put up this job on me?" he asked fiercely.

"It seems that you put up a job on me," said Fred, quietly. "The watch was found in my bundle."

"Yes, that was to be your share," answered Palmer maliciously. "Gentlemen, I suppose I shall have to surrender at discretion, but I am not the only guilty party. That boy is my confederate!"

"It is an outrageous falsehood!" burst out Fred indignantly.

"It is of no use your denying it. I am convinced that you have betrayed me, and I will have no mercy on you. Gentlemen, arrest me if you think best, but arrest him too. He is just as guilty as I am."

"You assert that he is your confederate?" said Lawrence.

"Yes."

"How long have you known him?"

"Ever since he was born. His mother was a cousin of mine," Palmer asserted unblushingly.

"Do you believe this, Mr. Ferguson?" asked Fred, quite overwhelmed. "I never saw this man till last evening."

"If he is your cousin, what is his name?" asked the detective, not answering Fred's appeal.

"Fred Fenton," said Palmer coolly.

"He has got my name right, but he saw it in the hotel register," said Fred.

"I presume you are right," said Ferguson.

"You seem interested in my young cousin," said Palmer with a malicious sneer.

"Do you mean to say that he was with you in Elmira?" asked Lawrence.

"Yes; he stood outside to warn me if any one came along, who was likely to interfere with me."

"And you both took the train for Niagara after the burglary was effected?"

"Exactly."

Lawrence was staggered by the positive assertions of the culprit. It must be considered that he was not acquainted with Fred, who, so far as he knew, might be an artful young adventurer.

"Why didn't you take the boy over to the Canada side with you?"

"It was understood that he was to come over later in the day. We passed for strangers at the Lynch House, and I thought it might excite suspicion if we both went away together at so early an hour in the morning."

"Mr. Palmer," said Fred warmly, "you know perfectly well that all these statements are false, and that I never met you or had anything to do with you till last evening."

"It won't do, Fred!" said the burglar. "You and I are in the same boat. You are a boy, and will probably get a lighter sentence than I. But you shouldn't go back on your old pal like this."

"Do you believe that man, Mr. Ferguson?" asked Fred with a troubled look.

"No, but I shall be obliged to hold you till I produce him in court to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVII. — TWO YOUNG LADY PASSENGERS AT ODDS.

Ferguson produced a pair of handcuffs and pinioned the wrists of his captive. Palmer protested against the humiliation, but Ferguson said quietly: "You are too important a prisoner for me to run any risk."

"Are you going to handcuff *him*?" asked the burglar, indicating Fred.

"No."

"Why not? Why should you treat him better than me?"

"I don't think he is guilty; but even if he is I am not afraid of his running away."

"You are deceived in him. He looks innocent enough, but he has been concerned in a dozen burglaries."

"I hear considerable news about myself," said Fred, "but the truth will come out at last."

As the party passed through the streets they naturally attracted considerable attention. Though a criminal, Palmer had for years evaded arrest, and he felt mortified at the position in which he was placed. He reflected bitterly that but for the mistake of the hotel clerk, he might be at ease with his booty on the Canada side. As it was, things seemed to have worked steadily against him, notwithstanding his clever schemes. A long term of imprisonment stared him in the face, instead of a couple of years of luxury on which he had counted. If he could only involve Fred in his own misfortune it would be partial satisfaction. To effect this he was prepared to swear to anything and everything.

Fred, though only nominally a prisoner, felt very uncomfortable. He was saved from the disgrace of being handcuffed, and was consoled by knowing that not even the detective believed him guilty of any connection with the burglary. Still he was not his own master, to come and go as he pleased, and it was not certain that he would be able to go back to New York the next day as he had planned. Circumstances thus far had worked against him, but there was to be a turn in the tide. As they walked through the streets on the way to the station house, where Palmer was to be locked up for safekeeping, they met a man whose dress showed him to be an employee of the Erie road.

"Mr. Ferguson," said Fred eagerly, "that is the conductor of one of my trains. He will tell you that I am the train-boy."

The conductor had just discovered and recognized Fred.

"You are staying over, like me," he said.

"Yes, I have permission."

"And so have I. I have a brother living here, and got two days off. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Lynch House. Will you tell this gentleman that I am an Erie train boy?"

"Certainly; but why is that necessary?" asked the conductor in surprise.

"I will tell you later. Mr. Ferguson, have you any questions to ask?"

"Was this boy on your train yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Did he get on at Elmira?"

"Certainly not. He came all the way from New York."

"It is false!" said Palmer.

"What does he mean, Fred?" asked the conductor.

"He committed a burglary at Elmira yesterday afternoon, and is trying to make out that I was connected with it."

"There he tells a falsehood," said the conductor bluntly. "I saw you on the train through the entire journey."

"A very good alibi, Fred," said the detective. "Mr. Lawrence, after this testimony it is hardly necessary for me to hold the boy. Are you satisfied that I should let him go free?"

"Entirely so. I felt from the first that he was innocent."

"Then, Fred, you may consider yourself at liberty to go where you please. I am as glad as you are that you are freed from suspicion."

"Thank you, sir. I will go with you as far as the lock-up."

Palmer scowled at him, but saw that it was useless to persist in his charges against the boy, and walked on with head bent, reflecting bitterly that he had not only lost the proceeds of the burglary, but his freedom besides. He could see now that but for his secreting the stolen watch and chain in Fred's bundle, he would probably have escaped scot free. As for the present, at least, we shall have nothing more to do with F. Grant Palmer, it may be briefly set down that after a speedy trial he was found guilty by the jury without leaving their seats. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, and is now serving out his term at Auburn.

Daring the remainder of his stay at Niagara, Fred used his time to advantage, and it was with a thankful heart that he took his place on the through train to New York the next morning. Just before starting, Mr. Lawrence appeared on the platform, and handed him a small package covered with brown paper.

"Have you a pocket where this will be safe?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then put it away, and open it when you arrive home."

"Thank you, sir."

Fred's attention was taken up by his duties as train boy, and he gave no thought to the package, though he wondered at the moment what it contained.

The train left at 8:43, and was not due in Jersey City till 10:10 P.M. At Port Jervis a young lady came on board dressed in a very plain and quiet manner. In his rounds through the train Fred stopped at her seat with a pile of recent novels under his arm and asked her to buy.

"No, thank you," she answered courteously, and Fred observed that her face was very sad. If she had been dressed in mourning, he would have supposed that she had lost a near relative, but there was nothing in her dress to justify such a supposition. Being naturally sympathetic, Fred from time to time glanced at the young lady passenger, wishing it were in his power to lighten her sorrow, whatever it might be.

Sitting next to her was a young lady, handsomely dressed, who was evidently annoyed at the near neighborhood of one whom she considered her social inferior. It chanced to be the only seat unoccupied when the train reached Port Jervis, and the young lady was compelled to avail herself of it. But when she reached the seat she found it occupied by a fat poodle of uncertain temper, belonging to the fashionable young lady.

"May I take this seat?" asked the new arrival.

"Don't you see that it is occupied?" snapped the dog's owner.

"There is no other seat vacant," said the new passenger deprecatingly.

"Then you had better go into the next car." As the young girl stood in the aisle, undecided, Fred, who had

heard the entire colloquy, and was naturally indignant, made up his mind to interfere.

"These seats were meant for passengers—not for dogs," he said.

"Boy, you are impertinent!" said the fashionable young lady haughtily.

"Where is the impertinence?" asked Fred composedly. "Do you wish this young lady to stand up in order that your dog may have a seat?"

"I will report you to the railroad company for insolence."

"Just as you like, but I will remove the dog in order to give this young lady a seat."

"Oh, I don't want to make any trouble," said the new arrival.

"Touch my dog if you dare, boy," said the young lady with a flush of anger on her face.

Just then the conductor entered the car, and Fred called him.

"Mr. Collins," he said, "this young lady refuses to remove her dog from the seat to make room for a passenger."

"Is this true, madam?" asked the conductor.

"She can go into the next car."

"Are you paying for two seats?"

"No," snapped the lady.

"I must take your dog into the baggage car. It is against our rules to have them in the regular cars, and they certainly cannot be allowed to keep our passengers from occupying seats."

"Don't you dare to touch my dog!"

"Do you go to Jersey City?"

"Yes."

"Then you can call for the dog there," and in spite of the remonstrance of the dog's owner, and the growling of the poodle, the conductor removed the animal to the baggage car, much to the secret satisfaction of the passengers, who had observed with disgust the selfishness of its owner.

"I am indebted to you for this," said the young lady, with a furious glance at the train boy.

Fred did not think himself called upon to make any answer. The young lady scornfully drew aside her dress to avoid contact with her unwelcome companion, saying audibly, "It is only in America that servant girls are allowed to thrust themselves in the company of their betters."

"I am not a servant girl," said the new passenger, "but even if I were I have paid my fare, and am entitled to a seat."

"Do not address me, girl!" said her seat-mate haughtily.

"I thought your remark was addressed to me."

"I am forced to sit beside you, but I don't care to converse with you."

The other took the hint, and left her undemocratic neighbor to herself.

Fred was naturally a little curious to ascertain the name of the young lady who had made herself so disagreeable. The mystery was solved in a way to surprise him.

On reaching the depot at Jersey City all the passengers left the cars.

The young lady looked about her evidently in search of some one whom she expected to meet her.

Greatly to Fred's surprise, his Cousin Raymond Ferguson turned out to be the party expected.

"Here you are, sis," he said. "Come right along. It is late."

"I can't go yet. My poor little Fido is in the baggage car. They wouldn't let me have him in the car with me. Go and get him, and I will stay here."

"Gracious!" thought Fred, "that must be Cousin Ferguson's daughter Luella. Well, I can't say I am proud of the relationship."

RELATIONS.

Miss Ferguson waited till her brother returned with the dog, who seemed to be in a bad humor.

"My precious Fido!" exclaimed the young lady, as she embraced the little animal. "Did they put him in the dirty baggage car?" Then, turning to Fred, who stood by, she said spitefully: "It was all your work, you impertinent boy. I have a great mind to report you to the president of the road."

Raymond's attention was directed to Fred by his sister's attack.

"Fred Fenton!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes," answered Fred, amused. "I was not aware that it was your sister and a relative of mine when I took sides against her."

"What does the boy mean?" demanded Miss Ferguson haughtily.

"It is Fred Fenton," explained Raymond deprecatingly.

"Does he claim relationship with me?" asked the young lady, looking disgusted.

"No, Miss Ferguson, I don't claim it, though I believe it exists," said Fred.

"A common train boy!" ejaculated the young lady. "This is altogether too much. Raymond, let us go!"

As they left the station the other young lady passenger who had listened eagerly to the conversation asked in a tone of almost painful excitement, "Is that the daughter of Robert Ferguson?"

"Yes, do you know him?" asked Fred in surprise.

"To my sorrow. When my poor father died Mr. Ferguson was appointed executor and trustee of his estate. It was not large, but we supposed it would amount to ten thousand dollars, and perhaps more. Last week my mother received a letter from him stating that he had satisfied all claims against the estate, and that only seventy-five dollars was left. This leaves us well-nigh penniless."

"Is it possible? Do you suspect that any fraud has been practised upon you?"

"My mother feels sure of it, but what can we do? We are poor, and the poor are always friendless," continued the girl bitterly.

"Have you come to New York to see Mr. Ferguson?"

"Yes; my mother wishes me to ask full particulars, and to appeal to him to do us justice. I fear it will be of no avail, but it is the only thing that we can do."

"Pardon me," said Fred, "but we had better be getting on board the ferry-boat, or we shall have to wait till the next."

"Thank you! I hardly know what I am doing."

Fred accompanied the young lady to the ladies' cabin and sat down beside her.

"Can I be of any service to you?" asked the train boy. "It is late for a young lady to arrive in New York."

"I supposed we should reach the city at nine. That is what a neighbor told me. I hardly know where to go," she added timidly. "Can you recommend a cheap hotel or boarding-house?"

"There would be a difficulty about obtaining admission to either this evening."

"Then what shall I do?" asked the girl, looking distressed.

"I think you had better come home with me for to-night. Our home is a very humble one but mother will take good care of you. To-morrow you can make other arrangements if you desire."

"Oh, how kind you are! I should like nothing better, if you really think your mother would not be annoyed."

Fred smiled.

"She is too kind-hearted for that," he said. "Just wait till you see her, and you won't feel any doubt."

"How fortunate I am to fall in with such a friend! I now see how unwise it was for me to take such a late train."

They walked to the Cortlandt Street station of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Road, and ascended the steps. In spite of her anxieties the young lady felt interested in the novel means of locomotion, and asked a variety of questions of the train boy. At Thirty-Third Street they descended, and walking a short distance up Broadway turned down a side street, and were soon at the door of Fred's modest home.

Mrs. Fenton was sitting up, and had come to feel anxious.

"How long you have been away, Fred!" she said.

"Not quite three days, mother."

"But you were never away before. Bertie and I have missed you very much."

"Mother," said Fred, "you don't see that I have company."

Then, for the first time, the widow observed the young lady.

"Who is it, Fred?" she asked, as a wild and improbable suspicion entered her mind. Could it be that Fred, who was only a boy in years, had contracted a marriage and brought his wife home?

"I shall have to ask the young lady to introduce herself," said Fred.

"My name is Ruth Patton," said the girl timidly. "I hope you will not be angry with your son for bringing me here. I am a stranger in the city, and indeed I did not know that the train arrived so late. Your son told me that it would be difficult to get into any hotel or boarding-house at this hour, and I have ventured to throw myself on your hospitality for to-night."

"You are heartily welcome," said Mrs. Fenton, ready to smile at her first wild suspicion. "Remove your wraps, and in ten minutes I can offer you a cup of tea and some eggs and toast. You will sleep the better for a little supper."

"You are a wise woman, mother," said Fred. "You have guessed what I was longing for."

"Let me help you, Mrs. Fenton," said Ruth, already looking more cheerful.

"Then you may toast the bread," said Mrs. Fenton. "I don't dare to trust Fred. I did once to my sorrow, and the toast turned out to be as black as my shoe."

"I can promise to do better than that. I have plenty of experience."

She set herself to the task, as if she felt quite at home, and soon they were able to sit down to a plain but welcome supper.

"Do you know, mother," said Fred, between mouthfuls, "Luella Ferguson was on the train."

"How did you recognize her? Did she speak to you?"

Fred smiled roguishly.

"She did. Shall I tell you what she said?"

"I should be glad to hear it."

"She said: 'Boy, I will report you to the railroad company for insolence.' She's a sweet girl, Cousin Luella!"

"But you were not really insolent?"

Thereupon Fred told the whole story, and his mother agreed with him that Miss Ferguson's conduct was very selfish and unladylike.

"What's more, mother, Miss Patton tells me that Cousin Ferguson has cheated her mother and herself out of ten thousand dollars. I'll tell you about it to-morrow. It is just striking twelve, and I can hardly keep my eyes open."

CHAPTER XIX. — RUTH PATTON CALLS ON MR. FERGUSON.

The next day Ruth Patton confided her story to Mrs. Fenton.

"My mother and I," she said, "in our grief for father's death, never dreamed that it would bring us destitution. Though he never furnished us particulars of his pecuniary condition, he gave us to understand that he would be comfortably provided for. Robert Ferguson we knew to have been a life-long friend, or perhaps I should rather say acquaintance, and we felt that as a trustee he would consider our interests. We were thunderstruck when a letter was received from him last week, stating that, in place of the ten thousand dollars on which we fully counted, a pitiful balance of seventy-five dollars alone remained to us."

"It was shameful!" said Mrs. Fenton indignantly.

"Nearly all of this sum will be swallowed up by small debts due in Port Jervis. You will understand now why I have come to lay our case before Mr. Ferguson, and see if he cannot give us more, or at any rate find me employment, for on me now rests the duty of providing for my poor mother."

"I wish I could encourage you, Miss Patton——"

"Don't call me Miss Patton. I look upon you as a kind friend, and hope you will call me Ruth."

"So indeed I will, for I feel a strong interest in you, Ruth."

"And I will look to you for advice."

"Then I advise you to call this evening on Mr. Ferguson, and find out the worst."

"Meanwhile perhaps you can direct me to a cheap boarding-house."

"You will stay here till you have had time to form your plans."

"I will gladly do so if you will let me pay you."

"All in good time, Ruth. To-day you can help me if you will, and it will be time to pay board when you are earning something."

It was not till he sat down to an early breakfast that Fred thought of the package handed him by Mr. Lawrence at the Niagara Falls station. He opened it in some curiosity, and to his surprise discovered a roll of bills, accompanied by this note:

To FRED FENTON,

MY YOUNG FRIEND:—Though I have not yet had a chance to communicate with my uncle in Elmira, I feel authorized to act as his representative, and in his name ask you to accept the inclosed sum as an acknowledgment of your valuable assistance in bringing about the recovery of the securities stolen from his house, and incidentally as a recompense for the annoyance you experienced in being yourself suspected. Your conduct has been very creditable, and I feel that to you we are largely indebted for the recovery of the property and the conviction of the burglar. I infer that you are mainly dependent, on your earnings, which are probably limited, and I therefore take pleasure in handing you a substantial reward which I hope will be of service to you.

Yours sincerely,

EDMUND LAWRENCE.

Fred counted the bills, and alike to his surprise and gratification found that they amounted to two hundred dollars.

"Where did you get so much money, Fred?" asked his mother, entering the room as he completed his count.

"That letter will explain, mother," answered Fred radiant with delight.

"We are indeed rich!" said Mrs. Fenton joyfully. "This removes all anxiety for a long time to come."

"Yes, we can afford to snap our fingers at the landlord."

"I hope you are not going to carry all this money round with you, Fred. You might get robbed."

"I shall deposit it in the Dime Savings Bank this forenoon."

"But you will leave before the bank opens."

"No, I am to take a midday train."

At ten o'clock Fred went to the Union Dime Savings Bank fronting on Thirty-Second Street, and deposited the hundred dollars in gold left him by his mining friend, and one hundred and seventy-five dollars besides from his recent gift. The other twenty-five he handed to his mother.

"Mother," he said, "you need a new dress, and Albert needs a new suit. Take this money, and buy what you think best."

"I can go a little longer without a dress, Fred."

"But I don't want you to. We can spare the money well enough, and there is no better way to spend it."

Mrs. Fenton made no further opposition, but during the day asked Ruth Patton to accompany her to one of the large stores on Sixth Avenue, where the necessary purchases were made.

In the evening Ruth set out for her call upon Mr. Robert Ferguson.

She ascended the steps in a state of nervous agitation, for she felt that the interview was of momentous importance to her, and in a low voice asked the servant who answered the bell if she could see Mr. Ferguson.

"I will ask, miss," said the servant, surveying her plain dress with some disdain.

"A young lady to see me?" said Robert Ferguson in surprise. "Are you sure it is not my daughter she wishes to see?"

"No, sir; she expressly asked to see you."

Mr. Ferguson was a widower, and rather vain of his personal attractions. Perhaps the young lady might have been struck by his appearance.

"You can show her up," he said amiably, and turned to catch a further glance in a mirror just opposite. He straightened his necktie, and passed his hand softly over his hair to make sure that it was smooth, and then turned to the door to catch the first glimpse of his visitor.

Nothing thus far has been said of the outward appearance of Ruth Patton. Notwithstanding her anxious face she was unusually pretty, and her manners were refined and ladylike.

"Mr. Ferguson?" she said inquiringly, pausing at the door.

"Come in, my dear young lady!" said Robert Ferguson graciously. "I am pleased to see you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Pray sit down."

"He is much kinder than I supposed," thought Ruth. "I must have misjudged him."

"I wrote to you a few days since," she began.

"Indeed! I don't think I can have received your letter."

"But you answered it, sir."

"I answered a letter from you? What then is your name?"

"Ruth Patton."

"Oh!" returned Ferguson, his face darkening. He no longer felt inclined to be gracious, for he had a premonition that the interview would not be agreeable to him.

"My mother and I were quite overwhelmed by the news you sent us. We had no idea that my father left so little, and she wished me to come on and ask for some particulars."

"I have very little to tell you beyond what I wrote," said Mr. Ferguson coldly.

"My father led us to think that we should be comfortably provided for."

"Many men have very vague ideas of how they stand. Your father did wrong in not insuring his life."

"He did not think it would be necessary. He thought we should be sufficiently provided for without that."

"He had no right to think so," said Ferguson irritably. "You see how things have turned out."

"But what can have become of all the money?"

"I hope, Miss Patton, you don't think I have spirited it away?"

"No, sir. Don't be offended, but it seems so strange," faltered Ruth.

"The money was unwisely invested. A large part of it was in wild-cat mining stocks, which were not worth the paper they were written on."

"Father never spoke to us about any such investments."

"I presume not. Most men keep such matters to themselves. Well, the upshot is that but seventy-five dollars are left. I presume your mother received my check for this amount."

"Yes, sir."

"Then that is all I can do for you. I will in time forward a bill of particulars. A present I am busy."

At this moment Luella Ferguson entered the room. She recognized Ruth at once.

"You here?" she said in haughty surprise.

"Yes, I came on business."

"We do not want any servants. Papa, this girl was very insolent to me on the train yesterday. I hope you will send her away."

"I am going, Miss Ferguson," said Ruth with spirit. "Your father was the trustee of my poor father's property, and it was to ask about it that I came here. Good evening."

She left the house with faltering steps, for her last hope had been destroyed, and she felt keenly the cruel slight of Luella Ferguson. As she set foot on the sidewalk her brain reeled, and she would have fallen had not a young man who was about to ascend the steps sprung forward and supported her.

CHAPTER XX. — A FRIEND IN NEED.

Ruth Patton recovered herself by a great effort. "I won't trouble you any longer, sir," she faltered. "I think I can do without further assistance."

"Excuse me for doubting it. You look very weak. Take my arm. There is a drug store not far away where I can procure you a strengthening draught."

"I am sorry to trouble you so much," she murmured apologetically.

"It is no trouble, I assure you. I count myself fortunate in being on hand so opportunely."

Ruth for the first time, encouraged by his kind words, stole a glance at the stranger. He was a well made and unusually handsome young man of perhaps twenty-seven. His careful dress and something in his manner seemed to indicate high social position. The indication corresponded with the fact. Alfred Lindsay belonged to an old and distinguished New York family. Though his means were ample he was not content to be an idler, but after careful preparation at Columbia College and Law School, he had opened a law office in the Mills Building, and was already beginning to be known as a young man with a future.

His wealth and high social standing led him to be considered a "catch," in the matrimonial market. It is safe to say that at least half a dozen young ladies had set their caps for him. Among these was Luella Ferguson, and there were those who considered her chance of landing the prize the best. At any rate Mr. Lindsay, who had been employed by the elder Ferguson in some legal matter, became a frequent caller, to the great satisfaction of Luella Ferguson. It may not be considered a mark of taste on the part of the young man to have fallen a victim to the young lady's arts, but in his presence she was all that was amiable. She was not without a certain attractiveness of face, which, had it been joined to an equally agreeable disposition, might have proved a good excuse to any young man for succumbing to her fascinations. Never for a moment had he cause to suspect that she was otherwise than she seemed. Kind and sympathetic himself, the absence of these qualities, if known to him, would have rendered her repulsive to him.

He conducted Ruth to a drug store, and the druggist administered restoratives that soon brought back her strength and color, but not her cheerfulness.

"I am strong enough now to go on my way," she said rising. "How can I thank you, sir, for your kindness?"

"By allowing me to see you to your own door," and this he insisted on despite Ruth's protest.

"Would it be indiscreet," he asked, when they had set out on their way, "to ask if you can account for your sudden illness?"

"I had a shock," she answered.

"Of what sort? Are you willing to make me your confidant? I do not ask out of curiosity, but because it may be in my power to serve you."

"I have so few friends that I will not decline your kind offer."

"You were coming from the house of Mr. Robert Ferguson?"

"Yes, sir; do you know him?"

"Quite well. I was myself going there."

"Is he considered—an honorable man?"

"Why, surely. What can lead you to doubt it?"

In answer Ruth told her story. The young lawyer listened in pained surprise. Strictly honorable himself, he found it hard to believe that a man whom he knew so well could be guilty of the meanness of defrauding two women whose interests had been confided to him. Yet the story seemed probable. Moreover, even had matters been as Mr. Ferguson represented, his want of feeling seemed almost as bad as absolute dishonesty. He asked Ruth several questions in order that he might become fully possessed of all particulars.

"This, then, was the cause of your agitation?" he said at length.

"Not wholly. It was the treatment I received from Miss Ferguson that affected me most."

"Miss Ferguson! Do you know Miss Ferguson?" Lindsay asked quickly.

"I met her for the first time yesterday afternoon."

"Where—may I ask?"

"In the Erie train. I entered the cars at Port Jervis. She was already on board, but I do not know from what point she had come."

"I think I know. She had been visiting a school friend at Binghamton."

"You know her, then?"

"Yes. I met her at a party about a year since."

"If she is a friend of yours I will not say anything to her disadvantage."

"But I want you to tell me all there is to tell. I have a special reason for learning all I can about her. You say she treated you ill?"

"She treated me cruelly. She took offense in the cars because the conductor removed her dog from a seat in order to make room for me."

"Was there no other seat in the car?"

"None, or I would not have disturbed her. I did not like to stand all the way from Port Jervis to New York."

"Of course not. Please favor me with the particulars."

The young man listened attentively while Ruth in simple language—not exaggerating in any respect—told her story. Young Lindsay's brow contracted, for he felt indignant at the cold selfishness shown by the young

lady who had hitherto attracted him. He felt that, if it were all true, he could never again look upon her even with ordinary friendship.

"She feigned to look upon me as a servant," Ruth concluded, "and sharply rebuked me for thrusting myself upon her. I would gladly have taken another seat had any been unoccupied, but the car was full. I heard from the train boy that it was on account of an excursion to Shohola Glen."

"I confess, Miss Patton" (Ruth had told her name), "I am surprised and pained by what you have told me. I never knew that Luella—Miss Ferguson—had such unlovely traits. To me she has always seemed kind and considerate."

Looking in the young man's expressive face, Ruth Patton felt that she understood better than he why Miss Ferguson had assumed to be what she was not. She was not surprised that Luella should desire to make a favorable impression upon one who seemed to her the most attractive young man she had ever met. But of course she could not give utterance to the thought that was in her mind, and remained silent.

"To change the subject," said Lindsay, after a pause, "may I ask what are your plans if you have any?"

"I must try to earn some money. If—if you would advise me."

"With pleasure. Let me ask, first, what you can do."

"I used to do some copying for a lawyer at Port Jervis."

"You are used, then, to copying legal documents?"

"I have done considerable of it."

"You do not use the typewriter?"

"No, I have never learned."

Alfred Lindsay paused, and his expressive face showed that he was busy thinking.

"I am a lawyer," he said at length, "and I have copying to do, of course. Would you mind calling upon me at my office to-morrow morning?"

"I shall be very glad to do so," answered Ruth, her eyes lighting up with new-born hopes.

"I think I can promise you something to do."

"Oh, sir, you don't know how your words cheer me. This is where I live. Thank you very much for your kind escort."

"Don't mention it. I will expect you to-morrow," and the young man took off his hat as respectfully as if Ruth, instead of being a poor girl in search of work, were a lady in his own set.

CHAPTER XXI. — LUELLE'S PAINFUL DISCOVERY.

"What business had that girl with you, papa?" asked Luella Ferguson, when, stung by her insolence, Ruth had left the house.

"She told you," answered the father evasively.

"Is it true that you were trustee of any property belonging to her?"

"Well, there is some truth in it. Her father was an old schoolmate of mine, though we were never intimate, and when he died, considerably to my surprise, he asked me to settle his estate."

"How much did it amount to?"

"After paying all bills, including funeral expenses, there was seventy-five dollars left."

"A fine estate, upon my word!" said Luella with a scornful laugh. "Really, the girl is a great heiress."

"She thought she ought to have been. What do you think she and her mother expected?"

"Something amusing, no doubt."

"They thought that they would realize ten thousand dollars, and be completely provided for."

"They must be fools!"

"We won't use so harsh an expression. Women know very little about business."

"Some women, papa. You will please make an exception in my case."

"Well, I admit, Luella," said her father complacently, "you do seem to have a sharp eye to your own interests."

"Why shouldn't I? I come honestly by it, papa, don't I?"

"Well, perhaps——"

"You have been pretty sharp yourself, eh, papa? I fancy you have a pretty good sum of money salted down—that's the term, isn't it?"

"Well, I have something, but I don't care to make a boast of it. There would be plenty who would want a share—for instance, Mrs. Fenton."

"That reminds me; her son is a train-boy on the Erie road."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, he made himself very obnoxious by his impertinent intermeddling. He insisted upon my removing my poor Fido, in order to give that girl a seat."

"What concern was it of his?"

"None at all, but he made such a fuss that I had to do it."

"You need not have done so. The train boy has no authority in such matters."

"He called the conductor, and he took my poor darling into the baggage car. Papa, can't you get him discharged?"

"I have no influence with the Erie officials, my dear. Besides, if I deprive him of his chance to make a living, he and his mother will be importuning me for money. Better leave well enough alone!"

This was the sort of argument that weighed with Luella Ferguson. She was meanness personified, and would rather save money than be revenged upon Fred.

"Do you think you will have any more trouble with this girl who called to-night?"

"I should not be surprised if she called again to ask me to help her to employment."

"If she does, advise her to go out to service. She could get a position as chambermaid without difficulty."

"Remember, Luella, that in her own town she has held a good social position. She may have too much pride."

"Then let her starve!" said Luella, harshly. "It is preposterous for a pauper to be proud."

"She is not exactly a pauper," said Mr. Ferguson, who was not quite so venomous in his hatred as his daughter.

"I forgot—she has a fortune of seventy-five dollars. Will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"If the girl comes again, turn her over to me."

"Very well, my dear. I shall be glad to do so. It will relieve me from embarrassment."

"I shall feel no embarrassment. I shall rather enjoy it."

"By the way, Luella, how are you getting on with young Lindsay?"

Luella flushed a little, and a softer light shone in her eyes. She had very little heart, but such as she had was given to Alfred Lindsay. At first attracted by his wealth and social position—for on his mother's side he belonged to one of the Knickerbocker families—she had ended by really falling in love with him. In his company she appeared at her best. Her amiable and attractive manners were not wholly assumed, for the potent spell of love softened her and transformed her from a hard, cynical, selfish girl to a woman seeking to charm one who had touched her heart.

"He comes to see me very often, papa," she answered, coyly.

"And he seems impressed?"

"I think so," said Luella, lowering her eyes, while a gratified smile lighted up her face.

"He has never actually proposed?" asked Ferguson eagerly.

"Well, not exactly, but from his manner I think he will soon."

"I hope so, Luella. There is no one whom I would more prefer for a son-in-law."

"I shall not say him nay, papa."

"Of course not. He is rich and of distinguished family. He will make a very suitable mate for you."

"Yes, papa, I appreciate that, but you too are rich and of high social position."

"Well, daughter, I stand fairly, but as to family, I can't boast much. My father—your grandfather—was a village blacksmith. I have never told you that before."

"Horrors, papa!" exclaimed Luella. "You cannot mean this?"

"It is a sober fact. I have never told you, for I knew it would shock you."

"Does any one know it in our circle?"

"No. Indeed, the only one who is likely to have any knowledge of it is Mrs. Fenton and her son."

"The train boy!"

"Yes."

"If it should get out I should die of mortification."

"Neither you nor I are likely to mention it. I only referred to it to show the advantages of marrying a man of high lineage like Alfred Lindsay. I have money, but I have never been able to get into the inner circle to which the Lindsays belong. Money will buy much, but it won't buy that. I hope you will do your best to bring the young man to the point."

"I will manage it, papa," said Luella complacently. "Do you know I have made up my mind to go to Europe on a wedding trip?"

"If Lindsay consents."

"He will do whatever I wish. I expect him to call this evening."

"Do you?"

"Yes, and—papa, something might happen," added Luella playfully.

"I hope so sincerely, my dear."

"Mind, if he comes to you, not a word about the blacksmith! I wish you hadn't told me."

"Forget it then, Luella. We will keep it a profound secret."

Luella left her father's presence with a smile upon her face. It was already eight o'clock. Half an hour passed, and she became anxious. Fifteen minutes more clipped by, and still the welcome ring at the bell was not heard. She was ready to cry with vexation, for she had made up her mind to lead the young man to a declaration that very evening if it were a possible thing.

She summoned a servant.

"Jane," she said, "Mr. Lindsay has not called this evening, has he?"

"No miss. If he had of course I would tell you."

"I thought perhaps there might have been some mistake. If he should come—and it isn't very late yet—let me know at once."

"Surely I will, Miss Luella."

"She's dead gone on that man," said Jane to herself. "Well, I don't wonder, for he is awfully handsome, that's a fact. But my! if he could only see her in some of her tantrums, he'd open his eyes. He thinks she's an angel, but I know her better."

Several days passed and still Alfred Lindsay did not call. Luella became alarmed. Was she losing her hold upon him? She was considering whether it would be proper to write a letter to the young lawyer at his office, when she chanced to make a very painful discovery.

About five o'clock on Saturday afternoon she was coming out of Lord & Taylor's up-town store when in a plainly dressed girl who was just passing she recognized Ruth Patton. Curiosity led her to address Ruth.

"So you are still in the city?" she said abruptly.

"Yes, Miss Ferguson," answered Ruth calmly.

"Of course you are very poor. I think I can get you a place as chambermaid in the family of one of my friends."

"Thank you, but I have a position I like better."

"What sort of a position?"

"I am in a lawyer's office, copying legal papers."

"Indeed! I suppose you are poorly paid."

"I receive ten dollars a week."

"That is ridiculously high pay. Of course you don't earn it."

"Mr. Lindsay fixed the salary—I did not."

"Lindsay!" gasped Luella, "what Lindsay?"

"Alfred Lindsay. He has his office in the Mills Building."

Ruth Patton passed on, having unconsciously given poignant anguish to the haughty Miss Ferguson.

"Where could she have met Alfred?" Luella asked herself with contracted brow. "I must get him to discharge her. I had no idea she was such an artful minx."

CHAPTER XXII. — MISS FERGUSON WRITES A NOTE.

It was indeed true that Ruth Patton had found employment at ten dollars a week. Her services were scarcely worth that sum to her employer, but Alfred Lindsay was not only rich but generous, and was glad to believe Ruth's anxiety by insuring her a comfortable income. She was still at Mrs. Fenton's rooms, being now able to contribute her share of the expense incurred. The widow was willing to accept only three dollars per week, so that Ruth had the satisfaction of sending a weekly remittance to her mother. She was very grateful for the change in her circumstances, and, notwithstanding the disappointment about her father's estate, felt that there was reason to hope.

Two days later Alfred Lindsay found a letter upon his desk addressed in a delicate female hand which he did not recognize.

"A lady client!" he thought. "What does she want—a divorce?"

When he opened the envelope he read the following note, written on a highly perfumed sheet:

MY DEAR MR. LINDSAY: Pray don't be shocked at my boldness in writing you, but it *is so long* since you have called that papa suggests sickness as a possible cause. I do hope that this is not what has kept you away. I confess that I have missed you very much. I have so enjoyed our conversations. You are not like the fashionable butterflies of whom we meet so many in society. One must tolerate them, of course but it is a comfort to meet a man who can talk intelligently about books and art. Apropos, I have a new collection of etchings that I want to show you. Won't you name an evening when you will call, as I want to be certain to be at home when you really do come. I should be desolated, as the French say, to be absent.

Now don't fail to answer this screed. Otherwise I shall certainly manage to have some law business that will give me an excuse for calling at your office.

Very sincerely yours,

LUELLA FERGUSON.

Alfred Lindsay read this note slowly, and there was a smile upon his face, for he fully appreciated Luella's motive in writing it. A fortnight since he would have been charmed, but his feelings with respect to Miss Ferguson had undergone a change. The revelation of her real character had shocked him, and served effectually to kill his growing attachment. Beauty of face could not make up for deformity of character. On the other hand, he was beginning to be attracted by Ruth. She lacked Luella's regular features and cold, classic beauty, but her sweet face revealed a disposition warm, kindly, and sympathetic; and when her deep, serious eyes rested upon him, he felt that she was far more attractive than her showy rival.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself as his eyes fell upon the note. He must of course answer it, but should he accept the invitation? Upon the whole he decided to do so. There was no reason which he could allege for declining, and, though it would be to sacrifice an evening, he would go armed against Luella's fascinations by the knowledge he had acquired. He drew out a sheet of paper from a drawer in his desk, and wrote as follows:

MY DEAR MISS FERGUSON: As I am writing in my office, you will understand and excuse the unfashionable business paper which I am using. I am flattered to find that you miss me, and still more at the reason you assign for preferring my company to that of the gilded young men who worship at your shrine. I am but "a plain, blunt man," as Shakspeare has it, and cannot vie with them in compliment. I shall no doubt find pleasure in examining the etchings which you hold out as an inducement to call. I will name Thursday evening, but should you have a previous engagement, don't scruple to notify me, as I can easily postpone my visit to another date.

Yours sincerely,

ALFRED LINDSAY.

Luella Ferguson read this note with mingled pleasure and disappointment.

"It is very cold," she murmured, "almost as if I were an ordinary acquaintance. I suppose men feel hampered when they try to express themselves upon paper. I will not believe that he is less friendly, or admires me less than he used to do. At any rate he is coming, and I must make myself as fascinating as possible. I have a chance to win him, and I mean to do it."

"Papa," said Luella on Thursday morning, "Mr. Lindsay will call here this evening."

"I am glad to hear it, Luella. I hope he is coming—on business."

"I don't know," she answered demurely.

"You know my wishes on the subject?"

"They accord with mine, papa."

When Alfred Lindsay was announced, he found Luella resplendent in a new dress, and bedecked with jewels. She intentionally made herself as attractive as possible.

"Really. Miss Ferguson, you are radiant tonight," he said.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"There is no doubt of it. Are you expecting other company?"

"Only yourself."

"Then I am to consider it a special compliment to me."

"If you like."

"Then I must express my acknowledgments."

Yet as he spoke, his thoughts reverted to Ruth Patton, with her lack of ornament and severe simplicity, and he felt that her image was to him the more attractive of the two. It was fortunate for Miss Ferguson's peace of mind that she could not read his thoughts.

"Now, you bad boy," she said playfully, "you must tell me why you have stayed away so long."

"Perhaps to see if you would miss me."

"I have missed you so much."

"That is certainly a compliment to me as a conversationalist. As you wrote in your note you appreciate my sensible conversation I am afraid you overestimate me. I have a friend who is really brilliant, and can converse eloquently upon any subject. May I bring him with me?"

"Who is he?" asked Luella hesitatingly.

"Professor Grimes."

"What, the lecturer?"

"Yes."

"Why. he is grotesque in appearance. I heard him lecture once, and thought he wore a mask, so ugly was his face."

"You admit his eloquence, however?"

"Yes; but from such a mouth even pearls cease to attract. Pray don't bring him! He positively makes me shudder, I assure you."

Luella did not like the turn the conversation had taken. There seemed no chance for sentiment, and she wanted to bring all her fascinations to bear.

"You have some etchings to show me; Miss Ferguson?" said Lindsay, after a pause.

"Yes; but I want to show them to you myself. You will have to come and sit beside me."

"Willingly," answered Alfred, but his tone was conventional, and lacked the warmth it had formerly shown.

Together they looked over the collection. Luella saw, however, to her mortification, that Lindsay was calm and cold. It seemed clear that she had lost her power over him. What could be the reason?

"Can it be that girl, Ruth Patton?" she asked herself. "Is it she who is drawing Alfred Lindsay away from me? I must warn him against her."

"By the way, haven't you a copyist in your office named Ruth Patton?"

"How did you know?" asked Lindsay.

"I met her the other day on Broadway. Perhaps you don't know, but she is an humble protegee of my father's."

"A protegee?"

"Yes; papa has been very kind to the family. He took charge of their affairs on the death of her father, and, though there was not enough property to pay the debts, he paid them all, and sent a check to Mrs. Patton besides."

"That was certainly considerate!" said Lindsay; but from his tone it could not be discovered if he were speaking in earnest or ironically.

"As you say, it was considerate, but this Ruth is very ungrateful. She was actually ridiculous enough to think they ought to have had a fortune, and I believe blames papa for the way things have come out."

Alfred Lindsay listened politely, but did not express an opinion.

"She is a very good copyist," he said.

"I am glad she is earning a living, though I think it would have been better for her to remain in the country, don't you?"

"Really, I can't judge for others, not knowing all the circumstances."

"The girl is ill bred, I am sorry to say. She treated me rudely in the cars."

"She gives me no cause of complaint," said Lindsay shortly. He understood and despised Luella's attempts to prejudice him against the copyist.

When he rose to go, Luella was disappointed. She felt that she had brought him no nearer, and had not strengthened her hold upon him.

As the young lawyer descended the steps he met a man coming up whom he recognized as a dealer in worthless mining stock, who was looked upon by reputable business men with doubt and suspicion.

"What business can Orlando Jenkins have with Mr. Ferguson?" he asked himself.

CHAPTER XXIII. — ANOTHER RAILROAD ADVENTURE.

Six months have passed and brought with them some changes. At the end of two months Ruth Patton sent for her mother, who was feeling very lonely at Port Jervis, and engaged a suite of three rooms over those occupied by Mrs. Fenton and Fred. Though she was away during the day, the two ladies, living so near together, were company for each other. Ruth had now become advanced to twelve dollars a week, not out of charity, but because Alfred Lindsay's business had considerably increased and gave his copyist more to do.

Fred was still on the Erie road, but it was now winter, and the travel had so much diminished that where he had formerly earned seven or eight dollars a week he now averaged no more than four. He began to be dissatisfied, for his income now was inadequate to meet his expenses, and he had been obliged to spend twenty dollars out of the two hundred which he had received from Mr. Lawrence at Niagara Falls. He was now seventeen, and he felt that it was high time he had entered upon some business in which he could advance by successive steps. On the road, if he remained till he was thirty years of age, he could earn no more than at present. He answered several advertisements, but secured nothing likely to be an improvement upon his present place.

One evening toward the end of December he was about to leave the cars, when his attention was drawn to an old gentleman with hair nearly white, who did not rise with the rest of the passengers, but remained in his seat with his head leaned back and his eyes closed.

The train boy, concluding that he had fallen asleep, went up to him and touched him gently.

"We have reached Jersey City," he said.

The old man opened his eyes slightly and gazed at him bewildered.

"I—I don't know where I am," he murmured vaguely.

"You are in Jersey City, sir."

"I want to go to New York."

"You have only to cross the ferry."

"Excuse me; I am a stranger here. I am from Ohio. Where is the ferry?"

"Let me lead you to the boat, sir."

The old man rose feebly and put his hand to his head.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," he said. "I feel sick."

"Perhaps you are upset by your journey. Come with me, and I will take care of you."

"You are a very good boy, and I will accept your offer."

He rose and left the car, leaning heavily on Fred's arm.

"How long have you felt unwell?" asked the train boy sympathetically.

"Ever since we left Elmira. My head troubles me."

"It is the motion of the cars, no doubt. Here we are!"

They were just in time to reach the boat. They entered the ladies' cabin, as Fred thought the tobacco smoke which always pervaded the cabin devoted to men would increase the old gentleman's head trouble.

"Where do you wish to go when we have reached the New York side?" asked Fred, when they were nearly across the river.

"I have a nephew living on Madison Avenue. Do you know that street?"

"Oh, yes, sir, very well. I will go up with you if you will let me know your nephew's name."

The name was mentioned, and to Fred's surprise was that of a wealthy and influential Wall Street broker. It was clear that the old gentleman, though plainly dressed, would not need to economize.

"I think, sir," said Fred, noticing that the old man seemed to be getting more and more feeble, "that it will be well for you to take a cab, in order to avoid any walking. You seem very much fatigued."

"You are right. Will you call one? I don't feel able."

"With pleasure, sir."

Fred passed through the gate and beckoned a hackman, who drove up with alacrity.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

Fred gave the number on Madison Avenue.

"Mr. John Wainwright lives there," said the hackman. "I sometimes drive him up from Wall Street."

"That is the place. This is his uncle."

The hackman touched his hat respectfully to the old gentleman, whom he had at first mentally styled a rusty old codger. His relationship to the wealthy broker gave him dignity in the eyes of the driver.

"Won't you get in too?" asked the old gentleman who had come to rely upon Fred as his guardian.

"Certainly, sir."

"I shall feel safer. I am a perfect stranger to the city."

He leaned back in the seat and partially closed his eyes.

The hack rattled through the streets and in due time reached its destination.

The hackman opened the door of the cab and Fred assisted the old gentleman to alight.

"Take my pocketbook and pay him," said the old man.

The hackman did not venture to ask more than his rightful fare, as it would have come to the knowledge of the broker, whom he did not care to offend.

The driver paid, Fred ascended the steps and rang the bell.

A man servant opened the door.

"Is Mr. Wainwright at home?" asked Fred.

The servant, seeing an old man in rather a rusty dress, was inclined to think that he was an applicant for charity, and answered rather superciliously:

"Yes, he's at 'ome, but I ain't sure as he'll see you."

"Tell him," said Fred sharply, "that his uncle has arrived."

"His uncle!" repeated the astounded flunkey. "O yes, sir, certainly, sir. I think he *is* at 'ome. Won't you step in, sir?"

Fred would have gone away, but the old gentleman still seemed to require his assistance, and he stepped in with him and led him into the drawing-room.

The servant promptly reported the arrival to Mr. Wainwright, who descended the staircase quickly and greeted his uncle.

"You are heartily welcome, Uncle Silas," he said. "I did not expect you till to-morrow, or I would have sent the carriage for you."

"I changed my mind, John, and decided to push through."

"Who is this young man with you?"

"He is a kind friend, John. I was taken sick—the effect of the journey, I think—and I shouldn't have been able to get up here but for him."

The broker smiled pleasantly and held out his hand to Fred.

"You are the train boy, are you not?" he asked, glancing at Fred's cap.

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you find it pays you well."

"Not at this season, sir."

"How long have you been in service?"

"Over a year."

"Thank you for your kindness to my uncle. He seems ill and requires my attention now. Can you make it convenient to call here to-morrow evening at eight o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I will call with pleasure."

"Good night, then, and don't forget to call."

The broker shook hands with Fred again, and the train-boy left the house quite won by the pleasant and affable manner of the great broker.

"I never expected to know such a man as that," thought Fred. "I wish he would give me a position in his office. That would be much better worth having than my present place."

"Why are you so late, Fred?" asked his mother, when he reached home.

"I had to make a call on Mr. Wainwright, the broker," answered Fred.

"I guess you are only funning," said Albert.

"No, I am not. I am invited to call again to-morrow evening."

"What for?"

"Perhaps he's going to take me into partnership," said Fred in joke.

CHAPTER XXIV. — FRED'S GOOD LUCK.

Fred made a short trip the next day, and returned home at four o'clock. He was glad to be back so early, as it gave him time to prepare for his evening visit. Naturally his mind had dwelt upon it more or less during the day, and he looked forward to the occasion with pleasant anticipations. The broker's gracious manners led Fred to think of him as a friend.

"I would like to be in the employ of such a man," he reflected.

He started from home in good season, and found himself on the broker's steps on the stroke of eight.

The door was opened by the same servant as on the evening previous, but he treated Fred more respectfully, having overheard Mr. Wainwright speak of him cordially.

So when Fred asked, "Is Mr. Wainwright at home?" he answered "Yes, sir; come right in. I believe as you are expected."

The old man was descending the stairs as Fred entered, and immediately recognized him.

"Ha, my young friend!" he said. "I am glad to see you," and he held out his hand.

"I hope you are feeling better, sir," said Fred respectfully.

"Oh, yes, thank you. I feel quite myself to-day. It was the length of the journey that upset and fatigued me. I couldn't travel every day, as you do."

"No, sir, I suppose not now; but when you were of my age it would have been different."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"And I am seventy-one, the same figures, but reversed. That makes a great difference. Come in here; my nephew will be down at once."

The train boy followed the old gentleman into the handsome drawing-room, and sat down on a sofa feeling, it must be owned, not quite as much at home as he would have done in a plainer house.

"Did you make much to-day?" asked Silas Corwin (that was his name) in a tone of interest.

"No, sir, it was a poor day. I only sold three dollars' worth."

"And how much did that yield you?"

"Sixty cents. I have a commission of twenty per cent."

"What was the most you ever made in a day?"

"I took in thirteen dollars once—it was on a holiday."

"That would give you two dollars and sixty cents."

"Yes, sir."

"Very good indeed!"

"If I could keep that up I should feel like a millionaire."

"Perhaps happier than a millionaire. I have known millionaires who were weighed down by cares, and were far from happy."

Fred listened respectfully, but like most boys of his age found it impossible to understand how a very rich man could be otherwise than happy.

At this point Mr. John Wainwright entered the room.

"Good evening, my boy!" he said cordially. "I won't apologize for being late, as my uncle has no doubt entertained you."

"Yes, sir; he was just telling me that millionaires are sometimes unhappy."

"And you did not believe him?"

"I think I should be happy if I were worth a million."

"You might feel poorer than you do now. I knew a millionaire once—a bachelor—who did not venture to drink but one cup of coffee at his breakfast (he took it at a cheap restaurant) because it would involve an added expenditure of five cents."

"Was he in his right mind, sir?"

"I don't wonder you ask. I don't think a man who carries economy so far is quite in his right mind. However, he was shrewd enough in his business transactions. But now tell me something about yourself. Are you alone in the world?"

"No, sir; I have a mother and little brother."

"Are they partly dependent upon you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you make enough to support them comfortably?"

"I can in the summer, sir, but in the winter my earnings are small."

"How small?"

"Not over four dollars a week."

"That is certainly small. Do you like your present employment?"

"I am getting tired of it," answered Fred. "I should be glad to find a place where I can have a chance to rise, even if the pay is small."

"What do you think of going into a broker's office?"

Fred's heart gave a bound.

"I should like it very much," he said.

"Then I think I can offer you a place in mine. Come down on Saturday, and I will introduce you to the office employees, and on Monday you can begin work."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Wainwright."

"Before you know how much pay you are to receive?" asked the broker, smiling.

"I can safely trust that to you, sir."

"Then we will say eight dollars to begin with."

"My mother will be pleased with my good luck. I hope I shall prove satisfactory."

"We generally ask references from those about to enter our employment, but my uncle here insists that it is unnecessary in your case."

"I'll go security for the boy, John," said Silas Corwin.

"Thank you, sir," said Fred. "I will see that you don't run any risk."

At this moment a young girl of fourteen entered the room. She was the picture of rosy health, and Fred looked at her admiringly. She, too, glanced at him curiously.

"Fred, this is my daughter, Rose," said Mr. Wainwright.

"Is this the boy who came home with Uncle Silas?" asked the young lady.

"Yes, Rose."

"He looks like a nice boy."

Fred blushed at the compliment, but coming from such lips he found it very agreeable.

"Thank you," he said.

"How old are you?" continued Rose. "I'm fourteen."

"I am three years older."

"When I am three years older I shall be a young lady."

"I don't think I shall ever be a young lady," said Fred demurely.

"Why, of course you won't, you foolish boy," said Rose, with a merry laugh. "Papa, may I invite Fred to my New Year's party?"

"Yes, if you like."

"You'll come, won't you?" asked Rose.

"If your father approves," answered Fred, hesitating.

"Of course he does. Didn't he say so? If you'll tell me where you live, I'll send you a card. Do you dance?"

"Not much; but I will practise beforehand."

"That's right. You must dance with me, you know."

"Rose," said her father gravely, "are you under the impression that this is Leap Year? You seem to be very attentive to this young man."

Rose was the pride of her father's heart, as she might well be, for she was an unusually attractive child, and had been a good deal indulged, but by no means spoiled. Mr. Wainwright had no foolish ideas about exclusiveness, and was not disturbed by his daughter's cordiality to Fred.

"Do you play backgammon, Fred?" asked Rose, after some further conversation.

"Yes, a little."

"Then I'll get the backgammon board, and we'll have a game."

Fred was not a skilful player, and the young lady beat him three games in succession, which put her in high spirits. Her favorable opinion of Fred was confirmed, and when he rose to go she pressed him to come again.

"Thank you," said Fred, "I shall be very glad indeed to come."

"Rose," said her father, after Fred's departure, "it seems to me you have been flirting with Fred."

"He's a nice boy, don't you think so, papa?"

"I hope he will prove so, for I am going to take him into my office."

"That's good. Then I shall see him often."

"Really, Rose, I was a little alarmed lest you should make him an offer this evening."

"You needn't be afraid, papa. I will wait till I am a little bit older."

"And then shall you offer yourself to Fred?"

"Perhaps I shall if I don't see any one I like better."

"You must remember he is poor."

"That doesn't make any difference. You can give us all the money we want."

"A very satisfactory arrangement, upon my word! I am glad you don't insist upon getting married at once, but give me a few hours to get reconciled to the thought."

CHAPTER XXV. — ROSE WAINWRIGHT'S PARTY.

As Fred would make his debut in fashionable society at Rose Wainwright's party, he was naturally solicitous

to make a favorable impression. He had for some time been intending to procure a new suit, but hesitated on account of the expense. Now with a new position in prospect, and a liberal salary he no longer delayed, but purchased a neat black suit—a misfit—for seventeen dollars, and a few small articles of which he stood in need.

The next thing required was to obtain some knowledge of dancing. Fortunately he was acquainted with a gentleman who gave private as well as class lessons, and was a very successful teacher. He called upon Professor Saville, and asked him if he could qualify him to make a creditable appearance at the party.

"How much time have you?" asked the professor.

"Ten days."

"Then come to me every evening, and I will guarantee to make you more than an average dancer in that time."

"And your terms?"

"To you will be half price. I know very well, Fred, that you are not a millionaire, and will adapt my terms to your circumstances."

Professor Saville kept his word, and when the eventful day arrived Fred felt a degree of confidence in his newly-acquired skill. When he was dressed for the party in his new suit, with a white silk tie and a pair of patent leather shoes, it would have been hard to recognize him as a poor train boy.

"You look nice, Fred," said Albert.

"Do I? I must give you a dime for that compliment. Now don't go and spend it for whisky."

"I never drink whisky," said Albert, indignantly.

"I was only joking, Bertie. Well, mother, I will bid you good-evening."

"I wish you a pleasant time, Fred. Shall you be out late?"

"I can't tell, mother. It is so long since I have been to a fashionable party that I have forgotten when they do close."

Some of the boys who attended Miss Wainwright's party engaged cabs, but Fred would have thought this a foolish expenditure. It was a dry crisp day, with no snow on the ground, and he felt that it would do him no harm to walk. He did not expect to meet any one he knew, but on turning into Madison Avenue, he nearly ran into Raymond Ferguson.

Raymond did not at first recognize him. When he did, he surveyed him in his party dress in unconcealed amazement.

"Where did you get that rig?" he inquired, with more abruptness than ceremony.

Fred was glad to meet Raymond, and enjoyed his surprise.

"I bought it," he answered briefly.

"But why did you buy it? I don't see where you found the money. You'd better have saved it for food and rent."

"I'll think over your advice, Cousin Raymond," said Fred with a twinkle of fun in his eyes.

"Were you going to call at our house?" asked Raymond.

"Not this evening."

"I don't care to have you call me Cousin Raymond."

"I won't, then. I am just as much ashamed of the relationship as you are."

"If that's a joke it's a very poor one," said Raymond, provoked.

"It's no joke, I assure you."

Fred seemed so cool and composed that his cousin was nonplussed. He started as if to go on, but curiosity got the better of him.

"You haven't told me where you were going in that absurd dress," he said.

"I don't see anything absurd in it. I am going to a party."

"To a party? what party?"

"Miss Rose Wainwright's."

"What, the daughter of Mr. Wainwright, the broker?" asked Raymond, incredulously.

"Yes."

Now it happened that Raymond had been particularly anxious to get an invitation to this party. Some of his friends at the Columbia Grammar School were going and he had intrigued, but unsuccessfully, to get a card of invitation. The idea that his cousin—an obscure train boy—had succeeded where he had failed seemed

absurd and preposterous. It intensified his disappointment, and made him foolishly jealous of Fred.

"There must be some mistake about this," he said harshly. "You only imagine that you are invited."

"I am not quite a fool, Cousin Raymond—excuse me, Mr. Ferguson. What do you say to this?"

He drew from his pocket a note of invitation requesting the favor of Mr. Fred Fenton's company at Miss Rose Wainwright's New Year's party.

"How did she happen to send you this card?" asked Raymond, his surprise increasing. "You don't mean to say you know Rose Wainwright?"

"Yes, I know her. I spent an evening at the house nearly two weeks ago, and played backgammon with her."

"I never heard the like. Have any bootblacks been invited?"

"I don't know. The young lady didn't tell me who were coming."

"Take my advice and don't go."

"Why not?"

"You will be about as much at home at a fashionable party as a cat would be at the opera."

"But I have accepted the invitation."

"That won't matter. You can write a note tomorrow saying that you thought it wiser to stay away."

"Besides there is another objection."

"What is that?"

"Rose expects me to dance with her."

"You dance!"

"Certainly, why not?"

"I begin to think you are crazy, Fred Fenton."

"I don't see why."

"Of course you can't dance."

"Of course I can. I am a pupil of Professor Saville. But I must bid you good evening, as it is time I was at the party."

Raymond gazed after Fred as he walked toward the scene of the evening's enjoyment with corrugated brows.

"I never heard of anything more ridiculous," he muttered. "It's like a beggar on horseback. Think of a poor boy like Fred figuring at Rose Wainwright's party. It is disgusting."

Fred would not have had his share of human nature if he had not enjoyed the discomfiture of his haughty cousin.

"He thinks this world was made for him," he said to himself. "There would be no place for me in it if he had his will."

The broker's house was blazing with light, and already many of the young guests had arrived. Plants and flowers were to be seen in profusion, and the mansion wore a holiday look. Fred was dazzled, but did not allow himself to appear ill at ease.

"Second floor back," said the servant who admitted him.

Fred went up-stairs and arranged his toilet in the room appropriated to gentlemen. Three or four other boys were present, but he knew no one. With one of these, an attractive boy of his own age, Fred stumbled into acquaintance, and they went downstairs together.

"Come with me." said the other boy, "we will pay our respects to Rose together."

Fred was glad to have some one take him in tow, and said so, adding, "Won't you tell me your name?"

"My name is George Swain. I am a Columbia schoolboy."

"And mine, Fred Fenton. I am in Mr. Wainwright's office."

Rose greeted both boys cordially. She glanced approvingly at Fred's dress. She had been a little uncertain whether he would be able to appear in suitable costume.

"You won't forget our dance?" she said, smiling.

"Oh, no; I am counting upon it."

"Then put down your name here," and she presented a card containing the order of dances.

"May I put down my name, too?" asked George

"Certainly. I shall be pleased to dance with you."

When his turn came Fred acquitted himself very creditably, thanks to his skilful instructor, Professor Saville.

At ten o'clock a series of tableaux was announced. At one end of the dining-room a miniature stage had been erected, and there was a circular row of footlights. In the third tableau, Rose took part. She incautiously drew too near the footlights, and in an instant her dress caught fire.

There was a wild scene of excitement. All seemed to have lost their presence of mind except Fred. Occupying a front seat, he jumped to his feet in an instant, stripped off his coat, and jumping on the stage wrapped it round the terrified Rose.

CHAPTER XXVI. — FRED BECOMES A NEWSPAPER HERO.

"Lie down instantly! Don't be alarmed! I will save you," said Fred rapidly, as he reached the girl.

He spoke in a tone of authority required by the emergency, and Rose obeyed without question. Her terror gave place to confidence in Fred. Her prompt obedience saved her life. A minute's delay, and it would have been too late.

There was a wild rush to the stage. First among those to reach Fred and the little girl was Mr. Wainwright. He had seen his daughter's peril, and for a moment he had been spellbound, his limbs refusing to act. Had Fred been affected in the same way, the life of Rose would have been sacrificed.

"Are you much hurt, my darling?" he asked, sick with apprehension.

"Just a little, papa," answered Rose, cheerfully. "If it hadn't been for Fred, I don't know what would have happened."

The coat was carefully removed, and it was found that the chief damage had been to the white dress. The little girl's injuries were of small account.

Fortunately there was a physician present, who took Rose in hand, and did what was needed to relieve her.

"It is a miracle that she was saved, Mr. Wainwright," he said. "But for this brave boy——"

"Hush, doctor, I cannot bear to think of it," said Mr. Wainwright with a shudder. "I can never forget what you have done for me and mine," he added, turning to Fred, and wringing his hand. "I won't speak of it now, but I shall always remember it."

Fred blushed and tried to escape notice, but the guests surrounded him and overwhelmed him with congratulations. One little girl, the intimate friend of Rose, even threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, which caused Fred to blush more furiously than ever. But upon the whole he bore himself so modestly that he won golden opinions from all.

The incident put an end to the party. As soon as it was understood that Rose was in no danger, the guests began to take their leave.

George Swain and Fred went out together.

"Fred, you have shown yourself a hero," said his friend warmly.

"You would have done the same thing," said Fred.

"Perhaps I should, but I should not have acted so promptly. That was the important point. You had your wits about you. I was sitting beside you, but before I had time to collect my thoughts you had saved Rose."

"I acted on the impulse of the moment."

"How did you know just what to do—making her lie down, you know?"

"I read an account of a similar case some months since. It came to me in a moment, and I acted upon it."

"If I ever catch fire, I hope you'll be on hand to put me out."

"Oh, yes," laughed Fred. "I'll stand you on your head directly."

"Thank you! It's a good thing to have a considerate friend."

"Did you have a pleasant evening, Fred?" asked Mrs. Fenton. "Are you not home earlier than you expected?"

"Yes, mother. There was as an accident that broke up the party."

He described the affair, but said nothing of his own part in it.

The next morning, after Fred had taken breakfast and gone to business, a neighbor came in.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Fenton," she said. "You have a right to be proud of Fred."

"Thank you," said the widow, puzzled. "I'm glad you think well of him."

"There's few boys that would have done what he did."

"What has he done?" asked Mrs. Fenton, stopping short on her way to the pantry.

"You don't mean to say you don't know? Why, it's in all the papers."

"I am sure I don't know what you are talking about."

"Didn't I tell you how he saved the little girl from burning to death?"

"Was it Fred who saved her? He didn't tell me that."

"Of course it was. Read that, now!"

She put in the hand of the widow a copy of the *Sun* in which the whole scene was vividly described.

"What do you say now, Mrs. Fenton?"

"That I am all the more proud of Fred because he did not boast of what he did," and a look of pride shone in the widow's eyes.

That morning, when Raymond Ferguson entered the breakfast-room rather later than usual, he found his father reading a paragraph in the *Sun* with every appearance of surprise.

"What is it, papa?" asked Raymond.

"Read that!"

Raymond took the paper, and his eye was drawn to some conspicuous headlines.

A NARROW ESCAPE FROM A TERRIBLE DEATH!

A BROKER'S DAUGHTER IN FLAMES!

SAVED BY A BOY'S HEROISM!

A TRAGIC SCENE AT A NEW YEAR'S PARTY!

"Why, it's Rose Wainwright!" said Raymond excitedly. "Whom do you think I saw on his way to the party last evening?"

"Fred Fenton."

"How did you hear it?" asked Raymond in surprise.

"Read the account and you will understand."

This is what Raymond read:

Last evening a terrible tragedy came near being enacted at the house of the well-known broker, John Wainwright. The occasion was a juvenile party given by his little daughter Rose, eleven years of age. One part of the entertainment provided was a series of tableaux upon a miniature stage at one end of the dining-room. All went well till the third tableau, in which the young hostess took part. She incautiously approached too near the footlights, when her white dress caught fire and instantly blazed up. All present were spellbound, and it seemed as if the little girl's fate was sealed. Luckily one of the young guests, Fred Fenton, retained his coolness and presence of mind. Without an instant's delay he sprang upon the stage, directed the little girl to lie down, and wrapped his coat around her. Thanks to his promptitude, she escaped with slight injuries. By the time the rest of those present recovered from the spell of terror, Rose was saved.

We understand that the brave boy who displayed such heroic qualities was formerly a train boy on the Erie Railroad, but is now employed in the office of Mr. Wainwright.

Raymond read this account with lowering brow. He felt sick with jealousy. Why had he not been lucky enough to receive an invitation to the party, and enact the part of a deliverer? He did not ask himself whether, if the opportunity had been afforded, he would have availed himself of it. It is fortunate for Rose that she had Fred to depend upon in her terrible emergency, and not Raymond Ferguson. There was little that was heroic about him. A hero must be unselfish, and Raymond was the incarnation of selfishness.

"Your cousin seems to have become quite a hero," said Mr. Ferguson, as Raymond looked up from the paper.

"Don't call him my cousin! I don't care to own him."

"I don't know," said his father, who was quite as selfish, but not as malicious as Raymond. "I am not sure but it will be considered a credit to us to have such a relative."

"Anybody could have done as much as he did," said Raymond in a tone of discontent. "Here's some news of your train-boy, Luella," he continued, as his sister entered the room.

"Has he been arrested?" asked Luella listlessly.

"Not at all! He turns out to be a hero," said her father.

"I suppose that is a joke."

"Read the paper and see."

The young lady read the account with as little pleasure as Raymond.

"How on earth came a boy like that at the Wainwrights' house?" she said with a curl of the lip. "Really, society is getting very much mixed."

"Perhaps," said her father, "it was his relationship to the future Countess Cattelli."

Luella smiled complacently. She had fallen in with an Italian count, an insignificant looking man, very dark and with jet black hair and mustache, of whom she knew very little except that he claimed to be a count. She felt that he would propose soon, and she had decided to accept him. She did not pretend to love him, but it would be such a triumph to be addressed as the Countess Cattelli. She would let Alfred Lindsay see that she could do without him.

CHAPTER XXVII. — A CONFIDENTIAL MISSION.

When Fred met Mr. Wainwright at the office the next morning his employer greeted him with a pleasant smile, but did not stop to speak. Fred felt relieved, for it embarrassed him to be thanked, and since the evening previous no one had met him without speaking of his heroism. Now Fred was inclined to be modest, and he could not possibly feel that he had done anything heroic, though he was quite aware that he had saved the life of Rose Wainwright. He looked upon it rather as a fortunate opportunity for rendering his employer a valuable service.

At one o'clock Fred took his hat, intending to go to lunch. He lunched at a quiet place in Nassau Street, and never spent over twenty-five cents for this meal, feeling that he must give the bulk of his salary to his mother.

He was just going out when he heard his name called.

Looking back, he saw that it was the broker himself who was speaking to him. Mr. Wainwright had his hat on, and seemed about going out, too.

"You must go to lunch with me to-day, Fred."

"Thank you, sir," answered Fred respectfully.

They walked through Wall Street together, the broker chatting pleasantly. On the way Fred met Raymond, who stared in surprise and disgust as he saw the intimate terms on which Fred appeared to be with his wealthy employer. Mr. Wainwright led the way into an expensive restaurant of a very select character, and motioned Fred to sit down at a table with him.

After the orders were given, he said: "I have invited you to lunch with me, as I could not speak at the office without being overheard. Of course the great service which you rendered me and mine last evening, I can never forget. I do not propose to pay you for it."

"I am glad of that, sir," said Fred earnestly.

"I feel that money is entirely inadequate to express my gratitude, but I shall lose no opportunity of advancing your interests and pushing you on in business."

"Thank you, sir."

"Indeed, it so happens that I have an opportunity even now of showing my confidence in you."

Fred listened with increased attention.

"Some months since," continued the broker, "a confidential clerk who had been employed in my office for years suddenly disappeared, and with him about fifteen thousand dollars in money and securities. As they were my property, and no one else was involved, I did not make the loss public, thinking that I might stand a better chance of getting them back."

"But, sir, I should think the securities would be sold, and the amount realized spent."

"Well thought of, but there was one hindrance. They were not negotiable without the indorsement of the owner in whose name they stood."

"Yes, sir, I see."

"Sooner or later, I expected to hear from them, and I have done so. Yesterday this letter came to me from my defaulting clerk."

He placed a letter, with a Canadian postmark in Fred's hand.

"Shall I read it?" asked Fred.

"Yes, do so."

This was the letter:

MR. WAINWRIGHT,

DEAR SIR—I am ashamed to address you after the manner in which I have betrayed your confidence and robbed you, but I do it in the hope of repairing to some extent the wrong I have committed, and of restoring to you a large part of the stolen bonds. If it depended on myself alone I should have little difficulty, but I had a partner in my crime. I may say indeed that I never should have robbed you had I not been instigated to it by another, This man, who calls himself Paul Bowman, I made acquaintance with at a billiard saloon in New York. He insinuated himself into my confidence, inquired my salary, denounced it as inadequate, and finally induced me to take advantage of the confidence reposed in me to abstract the securities which you lost. He had made all arrangements for my safe flight, accompanying me, of course. We went to Montreal first, but this is so apt to be the refuge of defaulters that we finally came to the small village from which I address these lines.

There was a considerable sum of money which we spent, also five hundred dollars in government bonds on which we realized. The other securities we have not as yet been able to negotiate. I have proposed to Bowman to restore them to you by express, and trust to your kindness to spare us a criminal prosecution, and enable us to return to the States, for which I have a homesick longing. But he laughs the idea to scorn, and has managed to spirit away the bonds and conceal them in some place unknown to me. Of course this makes me entirely dependent upon him. To make matters worse, I have fallen sick with rheumatism, and am physically helpless.

If you could send here a confidential messenger who could ascertain the hiding-place of the bonds, I would thankfully consent to his taking them back to you, and I would make no conditions with you. If you felt that you could repose confidence in me once more. I would willingly return to your employment, and make arrangements to pay you by degrees the value of the money thus far expended by Bowman and myself. There are still thirteen thousand five hundred dollars' worth of securities left untouched in their original packages.

We are living in a small village called St. Victor, thirty miles from the American line. We occupy a small cottage rather out of the village, and go by our own names. Do not write to me, for the letter would be seen by Paul Bowman, and defeat my plans, but instruct your messenger to seek a private interview with me. I am detained at home by sickness at present, but Bowman is away most of the day. He is fond of hunting, and spends considerable of the day in the woods, while his evenings are spent at the inn, where there is a pool table. I have managed to send this to the post office by a small girl who comes here in the morning to make the bed and sweep. Hoping earnestly that this communication may reach you, I sign myself

Your repentant clerk,

JAMES SINCLAIR.

Fred read this letter with great interest. "He seems to write in good faith," he said, as he handed it back.

"Yes; Sinclair is not so wicked as weak. I quite believe him when he says that it was Bowman who instigated him to the deed."

"Do you think there is any chance of recovering the securities?" asked Fred.

"That depends upon whether I can secure a discreet and trustworthy messenger."

"Yes, sir; I suppose that is important."

"Perhaps you can suggest some one?" said the broker, eying Fred attentively.

Fred shook his head.

"I have too few acquaintances to think of anyone who would be fit," he answered.

"Would you undertake it yourself?" asked Mr. Wainwright.

"I?" stammered Fred in genuine surprise.

"Yes."

"But don't you think I am too young?"

"Perhaps your youth may be a recommendation."

"I don't see how, sir."

"By drawing away suspicion from you. Should I send a man, the appearance of a stranger in a small place like St. Victor—I think it has little more than a thousand inhabitants—would very likely excite the suspicions of this Bowman, and so defeat the chances of success."

"Yes, sir, I see that."

"Of course your youth presents this objection—that you may not have the requisite judgment and knowledge of the world for so delicate a mission."

"That is what I am afraid of, sir."

"Still, I have observed you closely, and have found you prompt, self-reliant, and possessed of unusual good sense. So, upon the whole, having no other person in my mind, I have decided to send you to St. Victor if you will consent to go."

"I will certainly go, sir, if you desire it, and will do my best to succeed."

"That is all that any one could do, whatever might be his age and experience. When will you be ready?"

"To-morrow, if you wish it, sir."

"The sooner the better. I shall provide you with ample funds to defray your expenses. As to instructions, I have none to give. You must be guided by circumstances, and fall back in times of perplexity upon your natural shrewdness. Now let us address ourselves to the dinner."

CHAPTER XXVIII. — ST. VICTOR.

"So this is St. Victor," said Fred, as he got out of the train on the Grand Trunk Railroad, and looked about him curiously.

It was a small, unpretending village, composed entirely of frame houses, of modest size, and a few small stores kept, as the signs indicated, by Frenchmen. On a little elevation stood a wooden Catholic church, surmounted by a cross.

"It seems a quiet place," thought Fred. "I shall find it dull enough, but if I accomplish my purpose I won't complain of that."

He scarcely needed to inquire for the village inn, for it was in plain sight, not a hundred yards from the station. As the town seemed to be peopled chiefly by French residents it would have been natural to conclude that the hotel also would be French. This, however, was not the case, for the Lion Inn (there was a swinging signboard adorned by the figure of a lion, the work of a fourth-rate sign painter) was kept by a short, stout, red-faced Englishman, who stood in the doorway as Fred came up, valise in hand.

"Is this the hotel?" asked Fred.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"I should like to stay with you for a while."

"All right, sir. Come right in, and we'll accommodate you with a room. Have you had supper?"

"No. I should like some, for I am very hungry."

"It shall be ready for you, sir, in a jiffy. Will 'am and heggs suit you, sir?"

"Yes, I shall relish them."

"James, take the young gentleman's bag up to No. 5."

"I should like water and towels, as I have had a long and dusty ride."

Fred was ushered into a small bedroom on the second floor, very plainly furnished, but the train boy was not accustomed to luxurious accommodations, and found it satisfactory. He indulged himself in a thorough ablution, then sat down at the window, which was in the front of the house.

Soon there was a knock at the door, and the boy James made his appearance.

"Please, sir, your supper's ready," he said.

"And so am I," returned Fred with alacrity.

He descended to a small dining-room, adjoining the bar. It was not more than twelve feet square, and from its size it might be inferred that the Lion Inn was seldom overrun with guests.

Fred sat down at the table alone, but presently a man of thirty-five or thereabouts entered and took a seat opposite him.

"Good evening, young man," he said. "Where do you come from?"

"Good evening," answered Fred, civilly. "I come from New York."

The other arched his brows.

"So do I," he said. "What sent you here to this out-of-the-way place?"

"There's good hunting hereabouts, isn't there?"

"Yes, are you fond of hunting?"

"I like it pretty well. I've just had a present of a handsome rifle."

It should be mentioned here that before Fred left New York Mr. Wainwright had given him a gun which would serve him as an excuse for his journey.

"We'll go out together to-morrow. My name's Bowman."

Fred heard the name with a thrill of excitement. Why, this must be the man referred to in Sinclair's letter as having instigated him to the crime. He surveyed Bowman with attention, taking stock of him, so to speak. He found him to be a man of middle height, rather spare than stout, with dark, shifty eyes and a sallow complexion. He wore a mustache, but no whiskers.

"I may find it worth while to get well acquainted with him," thought Fred. "I shall be glad to go out with you," he said aloud.

"That's all right! But how does a boy like you happen to be traveling so far from home?"

"I have a vacation," said Fred. "I have never been in Canada, and thought it would be something new to come here."

"I'm pretty tired of it, I can tell you."

"Then why do you stay?" asked Fred innocently.

"My partner's taken down with rheumatism, and I can't leave him," answered Bowman in a tone of hesitation. "When he gets well I may go back to New York."

"I doubt if you will," thought Fred.

"Were you in a business position in New York?" asked Bowman.

"I have been for some time train boy on the Erie Railroad," answered Fred, feeling that it would never do to mention his connection with Mr. Wainwright.

"Train boys don't usually have money to spend on vacation trips," said Bowman shrewdly.

"That's true," laughed Fred. "If I had depended on my savings, I shouldn't have been able to go farther than Hoboken, or Coney Island, but a rich friend supplied me with a moderate sum for expenses."

"Then you were in luck."

Fred was a little afraid that Bowman would inquire the name of the rich friend, and made up his mind that he would evade answering. However, his companion showed no curiosity on the subject.

"Will you take a glass of ale with me?" asked Bowman, as he filled his own glass from a bottle beside his plate.

"No, thank you. I have no taste for it."

"I didn't like it myself at first but I've come to like it."

"Does your partner board with you at the hotel?" asked Fred.

"No," was the careless reply. "We have a small cottage just out of the village."

"I wonder how he gets along for meals," thought Fred.

However that might be, Paul Bowman didn't permit anxiety to interfere with his own appetite. He did ample justice to the supper, and so indeed did Fred. Fortunately the ham and eggs were well cooked, and the loaf of bread was fresh. In place of ale Fred contented himself with tea.

At length they rose from the table.

"This is a beastly hole—St. Victor, I mean," said Bowman, as he led the way to the reading-room, "but the eating is fair. An Englishman keeps the inn, and though he has no French kickshaws on his table, he gives you solid food and enough of it. Do you smoke? I believe I have a cigar somewhere, but I smoke a pipe myself."

"Thank you," answered Fred, "but I don't smoke. I used to smoke cigarettes, but a young man—an acquaintance of mine—died of cigarette-smoking, so the doctor said, and I gave it up."

"Smoking never hurt me that I know of," said Bowman. "Even if it did, what's a man to do in this dull hole? Shall you stay here long?"

"I don't know how long. It's a cheap place to stay in, isn't it?"

"Yes, it has that recommendation."

"Then I may stay a week possibly," said Fred in an off-hand way.

"I've been here six weeks," said Bowman.

"Then you have had a chance to get well acquainted with St. Victor."

"A good deal better than I want to be. I was just getting ready to leave, when my partner had a sharp attack of rheumatism."

"Is he from New York too?"

"No, from Philadelphia," answered Bowman cautiously, though he had no suspicion that Fred was other than he represented himself.

"I have never been in Philadelphia," said Fred indifferently. "What is your partner's name?"

"James Sinclair," answered Bowman after a moment's hesitation. "Have you ever heard that name before?"

"Yes."

"Where?" I asked Bowman quickly.

"I had a schoolmate of that name."

"Oh! Yes, I suppose the name is not an uncommon one. Do you play billiards?"

"I have seen it played."

"There is a poor table in the house. Such as it is, it may afford us a little recreation. Will you try a game?"

"Yes, if you will teach me."

Fred felt that it was his policy to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Bowman, as it might afford him an opportunity to obtain the information he desired. He had never played a game of billiards, but he was willing to try it.

"Come in, then," said Bowman.

He led the way into a room opposite the office, where stood a venerable-looking billiard table, probably twenty years old. It had been given to the landlord some years before by a gentleman, and it had seen hard service since then.

They played one game, and were about to commence another when a small girl with black hair cut short entered the room.

"Monsieur Bowman," she said, "your friend would like to see you. He feels quite bad."

"Plague take it!" said Bowman pettishly. "I can do him no good, but I suppose I shall have to go."

"Is it your partner?" asked Fred.

"Yes."

"If you don't mind I will walk over with you."

"Glad of your company. Claudine, tell Mr. Sinclair that I will be with him directly."

"*Oui, monsieur*," and the little girl vanished.

"I wish Sinclair would get well or something," grumbled Bowman, as they walked to the lower end of the main street of the village. "It's hard luck for me to be tied to a sick man."

"Still he has the worst of it," suggested Fred, who was not altogether pleased with the cold selfishness of his companion.

"Yes, I suppose so; but it isn't right that I should suffer for his misfortune."

"Do you employ a doctor?"

"Yes; I called in a doctor once—a Frenchman—Dr. St. Hilaire. He left some medicines, and Sinclair takes them."

"He doesn't seem to get better, then?"

"At any rate he is very slow about it," said Bowman, who spoke as if his unfortunate friend were in fault.

At last they reached the cottage. It was very small, containing three rooms and an attic. Bowman opened the door, and entered what might perhaps be designated as the sitting-room, though it contained a bed, on which, propped up by pillows, lay James Sinclair.

"What's amiss with you, Sinclair?" grumbled Bowman.

"Everything is amiss. You have left me alone all day."

"What good could I do you if I were here? It would only mope me to death."

"I have had nothing to eat since morning, except a boiled egg."

"Why not? Couldn't you send Claudine after food?"

"Of what use would that be, when I had no money to give her? I warrant you have had your regular meals."

"I took my meals at the hotel—it was more convenient."

"I warrant me you took care to provide for yourself. At least give me some money so that I may not quite starve."

"Money, money, all the time! Do you know, Sinclair, our stock is running very low?"

"I demand my share of it as long as it lasts. You take advantage of my helplessness——"

"There's a dollar! Mind you make it last as long as possible," said Bowman. "It will be well to put off your complaints till another time, for I have brought company."

He signaled to Fred, who had remained outside, to enter, and the boy did so. He regarded the sick man with interest and sympathy, not alone because he seemed in sorry plight, and ill treated by his companion in crime, but also because he was clearly the less guilty of the two, and seemed disposed to make amends to the man whom he had wronged.

James Sinclair, unprepared for the advent of a boy, regarded him with surprise.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"My name is Fred Fenton," answered the train boy, remembering that Bowman was as yet ignorant of his name.

"He is a guest at the inn," explained Bowman carelessly. "He arrived to-night. He will be some company for me in this dull hole. We were playing a game of billiards when Claudine broke in and told me you wanted to see me. I expected to find you at the point of death," he finished impatiently.

"That may come sooner than you think," said Sinclair. "May I ask where you come from, young man?" he added, in a tone of suppressed eagerness which Fred well understood.

"I come from New York," answered the boy, trying to throw a degree of significance into this brief answer.

"From New York!" said Sinclair, in some excitement, and trying to read in Fred's face whether he was the expected messenger. "You have come for your health, I suppose?"

"Not exactly for that, for my health is always good, but I thought it might be a pleasant place to spend an unexpected holiday that has been granted me."

"Pleasant!" repeated Bowman scornfully. "If you can find anything pleasant at St. Victor, you will have greater luck than I."

"Is Claudine in the kitchen?" asked the sick man. "Claudine!" he called, raising his voice.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the little handmaid, appearing at the door.

"Go to the baker's and buy a loaf of bread. Here is money. Is there any tea left?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then buy a cupful of milk and half a pound of sugar. I am almost famished. A cup of tea and some toast will put new life into me."

Claudine departed on her errand, and Sinclair once more fixed his eyes on Fred. There was a question he very much wished to ask, but in Bowman's presence he could not do it safely.

CHAPTER XXIX. — FRED TAKES THE FIRST STEP.

"And so you come from New York?" Sinclair repeated, for the want of something better to say.

"When did you leave the city, may I ask?"

"On Tuesday."

"Then you came directly here?"

"Yes, I came directly here."

"You must then have heard of St. Victor before starting."

"Yes."

"Yet I fancy it is so obscure that its existence can be known to very few in the great city."

"I presume you are right. I was recommended to come here by a friend."

"Ah!" commented James Sinclair, beginning to think he was right, though it seemed to him very strange

that Mr. Wainwright should have selected so young a messenger. "I should like to see New York once more."

"Who wouldn't?" interposed Bowman impatiently. "In New York you can *live*. Here in St. Victor one can only vegetate."

"Don't you expect to go back to New York some day, Mr. Sinclair?" asked Fred.

"I don't know; I hope so."

"When our business in Canada is completed," said Bowman, "we shall probably both go back."

"Are you going to sleep here to-night, Bowman?" asked Sinclair.

"No, I think not. I have taken a room in the hotel."

"You must do as you like, of course, but it is lonely for me. Besides I might need assistance."

"Let the girl stay here, then. I should make a miserable sick nurse. I will ask young Fenton, here, if it is reasonable to expect me to bury myself in such a cheerless place when it will do no good."

Fred was disgusted with the man's selfishness. "If I had a friend sick," he said, "I think I would be quite willing to keep him company."

"You say so now, but wait till the time comes."

"Your words, Mr. Fenton," said Sinclair, "embolden me to ask you a favor."

"Name it," said Fred, in a tone of kindly encouragement.

"I spend all my time alone, except when Claudine is ministering to my wants. Your time is hardly likely to be very much occupied in this dull place. Can't you spare me an hour or two at your convenience during the day?"

"You have promised to go hunting with me tomorrow," interrupted Bowman.

"That is true. I will go with you in the forenoon, and in the afternoon I will call on Mr. Sinclair."

Bowman shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a rash promise. You will be sorry for having made it."

"I will risk that," answered Fred.

Sinclair gave him a grateful glance. The promise cheered him, and kindled hopes in his breast. Now he would have a chance of learning, when alone with Fred, whether he came as a messenger from Mr. Wainwright. If so, and through his means he could make restitution and regain his place and lost character, he would still have something to live for. He execrated his folly in weakly submitting to the guidance of Paul Bowman, and for having taken that first step in crime, which is so difficult to retrace.

"Don't forget your promise," he said earnestly as Fred rose to go.

"I won't fail you," replied Fred quietly.

"You're in for it now," remarked Bowman, as they started to walk home. "You might as well turn sick nurse at once as give up your time to Sinclair."

"I might be sick sometime myself," said Fred, "and in that case I should be sorry to be left alone."

"Oh, well, suit yourself," said Bowman carelessly. "I'd rather it would be you than me, for that matter. I shall expect you to go out to the woods with me in the forenoon."

"All right!"

"Well," thought Fred, as he slipped into bed at ten o'clock, "I've made a beginning. I have formed the acquaintance of both parties to the robbery. The next step will be more difficult."

CHAPTER XXX. — A HUNTING EXCURSION.

Fred did not rise till eight o'clock the next morning. He was fatigued by his long journey, and slept late. When he descended, he found Bowman seated at the breakfast-table.

"I got ahead of you," said Bowman.

"How long have you been down-stairs?"

"About ten minutes."

"Are we likely to have a good day for hunting?"

"Good enough," answered Bowman, indifferently. "I am not an enthusiastic sportsman. I only take to it to fill up a part of my time. It is about the only thing I can do in this dull hole."

"You might read. I brought two or three novels in my valise, and will lend you one if you care for it."

"I don't care for reading. Stories tire me. I used to read the daily papers in New York, but can't get hold of any here New York dailies, I mean. I don't care for Canadian papers unless they contain news from New York."

"I have with me the *Tribune*, *World*, and *Sun*, of day before yesterday."

"I should like to see them," said Bowman, eagerly. "If you will bring them down, I will look over them in the woods."

"All right! I am glad I saved them. I had a mind to throw them away, or leave them in the car."

The breakfast was plain, but Fred and Bowman, who were the only guests, were not difficult to suit.

Ten minutes later they were on their way to the woods. They went across the fields, taking a footpath trodden in the snow, which materially shortened the distance. But even tramping this far tired Bowman, and when they reached a small rock that cropped out from the expanse of white, he declared that he must rest awhile.

He took a seat on the boulder and began to read one of the papers he had brought with him.

Five minutes later he uttered an exclamation of surprise. Fred looked at him inquiringly.

"Do you find news of any of your friends?" he asked.

"Yes, Teddy Donovan has escaped from Sing Sing."

"That's the bank burglar, isn't it?"

"Yes, and one of the smartest men in the profession."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes," answered Bowman. "I got acquainted with him some years ago. Of course," he added, feeling some explanation necessary, "I didn't know that he was a burglar till later. Poor fellow, it is his only fault."

Fred was privately of opinion that it was rather a serious fault.

"He's a smart fellow," Bowman continued, "and he led the police a long chase before they nabbed him. I've often urged him to turn over a new leaf and lead an honest life or he'd fetch up in prison, but he only laughed, and that was all the good it did. I wish Teddy would find his way up here."

"Do you think he will be able to elude recapture?"

"Well, he's sharp enough for almost anything."

"I suppose there are a good many men of his kind in Canada," said Fred innocently.

"Yes," replied Bowman, adding in a jocular tone. "I didn't know but that might have brought you here."

"Oh, no!" laughed Fred. "I'm as straight and honorable as you are."

"Good joke!" exclaimed Bowman, slapping his thigh. "Shake!"

Bowman extended his hand, and Fred shook it, though it was not clear to him what the joke was or why he should shake hands with his companion because they both happened to be straight and honorable.

The hunt was now begun, for Fred caught sight of a jack rabbit skimming across the snow. He lifted his gun, and was fortunate enough to bring his game down. This fired Bowman with the spirit of emulation, and putting the papers back in his pocket, he started off in search of a companion trophy to that of his young friend.

He did not find it until the ex-train boy had knocked over two more "bunnies" and as Fred continued to keep ahead of him in the amount of game bagged, Mr. Paul Bowman soon became disgusted and proposed a return to the hotel, where he would have an opportunity to finish his perusal of the New York papers by the reading-room stove.

As Fred's nose was being nipped by the frost, and he felt that he had wrought sufficient destruction among the rabbit tribe, he readily fell in with the suggestion.

Half an hour later he was thawing himself out when Bowman suddenly looked up from the *World* and asked abruptly:

"Did you ever hear of John Wainwright, the broker and banker?"

Fred was on his guard and answered cautiously:

"Yes, I believe I have heard of him. He has an office on Broadway, hasn't he?"

"No, on Wall Street."

"Did you ever work for him?"

"No; but an acquaintance of mine did," said Bowman carelessly. "He's got a pile of money, I expect."

"Very likely. Most bankers have, haven't they?"

"I suppose so, but they're not in my line. I used to be a dry goods clerk."

"In New York?"

"No, in Baltimore."

"I don't know anything about Baltimore."

If Bowman at any time entertained any suspicions about Fred they were dissipated by his next remark.

"I might like to go to Baltimore to work. Would you recommend me to the firm you used to work for?"

"I believe they have gone out of business, but you'd better stick to New York, youngster. There's better chances there than in Baltimore."

The gong for dinner now sounded, and as their tramp through the snow had given them both good appetites, they lost no time in answering its summons.

When dinner was over Bowman asked:

"What are you going to do with yourself this afternoon?"

"I promised to call on your friend in the cottage. Will you go with me?"

"Not I. I can fill up my time more agreeably. You will find it awfully stupid."

"Very likely; but I like to keep my promises."

"The landlord's going to ride to Hyacinth, about ten miles away, on business. He's invited me to ride with him. I wish there were room in the sleigh for you."

"I can put that off till another time. I hope you will have a pleasant ride."

"It will fill up the time, anyway."

"Have you any message to your partner?" asked Fred, as he stood ready to start on his walk.

"No. Tell him to get well as fast as he can, so that we can get away from this beastly place. That's all."

James Sinclair was lying on the bed with a look of weariness on his face when Fred pushed open the outer door and entered.

Sinclair's face brightened up.

"You didn't forget your promise, Mr. Fenton?" lie said.

"No, I always keep my promises when I can."

"You are very kind to a poor sick man. You have no idea how long the hours seem in this quiet cottage with no one to look at or speak to but Claudine."

"I can imagine it."

"And Claudine understands very little English. Most of the people in St. Victor, as I suppose you know, are French."

"I judged this from the signs over the shops."

"Very few English-speaking people find their way here. It is for this reason that I was somewhat surprised to see you here."

"I should not have come here," returned Fred pointedly, "if you had not been here."

"You came here to see me?" ejaculated Sinclair in excitement.

"Yes."

"Then you must come from Mr. Wainwright."

"Yes, I come from him in response to the letter which he received from you."

"Thank God!" said Sinclair, fervently.

CHAPTER XXXI. — FRED HAS AN UNDERSTANDING WITH SINCLAIR.

"Mr. Wainwright showed me the letter you wrote to him," went on Fred.

"Excuse me," said Sinclair, looking puzzled, "but you seem very young to be taken into Mr. Wainwright's confidence."

"I am only seventeen."

"I don't understand it."

"Nor do I," answered Fred, smiling, "but Mr. Wainwright is right in supposing that I will do my best for him."

"Does he give you full powers in this matter?"

"Read this letter and you can judge for yourself."

The sick man eagerly held out his hand, and read carefully the letter which Fred placed in it. It ran thus:

JAMES SINCLAIR: The bearer of this letter has full powers to treat with you. I am glad you realize the wrong you have done me, and am prepared to consider your case in a generous spirit. The theft is known only to those who committed it, my young messenger and myself. On the return of the bonds I will take you back into my employment.

JOHN WAINWRIGHT.

Tears came to the eyes of Sinclair.

"How kind and considerate Mr. Wainwright is!" he said in a tone of emotion. "Read this letter."

"You are right, but I would do the same."

Sinclair extended his hand which Fred shook cordially.

"I am not as bad as you may suppose. It was Bowman who, by his artful hints and allurements, induced me to rob my employer. I have never ceased to repent it."

"Are you prepared to restore the bonds? That will set you right."

"When I wrote the letter I was prepared, but now I must depend on you to find them."

"You don't know where they are?" asked Fred in dismay.

"No. You see that trunk at the other end of the room?"

"Yes."

"They were there until three days ago. Then Bowman, who kept the key, opened the trunk in my presence, and took out the package of bonds, locking the trunk after him."

"What are you doing?' I asked.

"Going to put these bonds into a place of security,' he answered.

"Are they not safe in the trunk?' I asked.

"No;' he replied, 'suppose, during my absence, a thief should enter the house? You are confined to the bed by rheumatism. What resistance could you make?'

"But that is very improbable,' I persisted.

"I don't know about that. This is a lonely cottage, and might be entered at any time,' he rejoined.

"Where are you going to put the bonds?' I asked uneasily,

"He evaded a reply, but promised to tell me when I recovered my health. I protested, for we were jointly concerned in the robbery, and half the proceeds belonged to me. At any rate, I had as much title to them as he. But the contest was not an equal one. Had I been a well man I would have forcibly prevented his carrying out his purpose, but what could I do, racked with pain as I was, and unable to sit up in bed? I was worse off then than I am now."

"So he carried off the bonds?"

"Yes, and I don't know where he carried them. You see, that complicates matters."

"I do see," answered Fred, perplexed, "and I don't see the way out of the difficulty. Have you any idea where he can have concealed the securities?"

"No."

"Do you think he would keep them in his room at the hotel? It is just across the hall from mine, on the second floor."

"No, I don't. A hotel room would be a much less secure place than this cottage, and Bowman is a shrewd man."

"That is true."

"He has probably found some outside place of concealment. Where, of course, I can give you no hint. But I

would advise you to follow him, watch his movements, and learn what you can. He will be sure to visit the place where the bonds are hidden from time to time, if only to make sure that they are still safe."

"Then I shall have to do some detective work?"

"Precisely."

"I have read a good many detective stories, but I don't know that any of them will help me in this matter. There is one thing I am afraid of."

"What is that?"

"You say Bowman is a shrewd man. He will be likely to find out that I am following him and become suspicious."

"He would if you were a man, but as you are a boy he won't be likely to think that you are interested in the matter."

"Mr. Wainwright was of opinion that I should be less likely to excite suspicion than a grown man."

"The old man is smarter than I gave him credit for."

"I see no other way than to follow your directions. Are you in much pain to-day?"

"No, less than for some time. I think it is my mental trouble that aggravates my physical malady. Now that you are here, and something is to be done to right the wrong I have committed. I am sure I shall rapidly recover. Were you with Bowman this morning?"

"Yes, we went out in the woods together. I had a few New York papers which he read with interest."

"Have you them with you?" asked Sinclair eagerly. "You don't know how I hunger for home news."

"Yes, I brought them along, as I thought you might like to read them."

"I will read them after you are gone. Now we will converse."

"Have you a family?" asked Fred.

"I am not a married man but I have a mother," answered Sinclair, his eyes filling.

"Does she know——"

"Of my disgrace? No, I was obliged to tell a falsehood and represent that I was going to Canada on business. I have been in constant dread that my crime would get into the papers and she would hear it. Poor mother! I believe that it would kill her!"

"You didn't think of that when you took the bonds?"

"I thought of nothing. Bowman gave me no time to think. What I did was done on the impulse of the moment without consideration. Oh, if I had only stopped to think!" he concluded with a sigh.

For Fred it was a great moral lesson. He was honest by nature, but there is no one who cannot be strengthened against temptation. The sum taken by Sinclair was large, but it had not made him happy. Probably he had never been more miserable than in the interval that had elapsed since his theft. Judging between him and Bowman. Fred felt sure that it was Sinclair who had been weak, and Bowman who had been wicked. Now his only hope was to recover his lost position, to get back to where he stood when he yielded to temptation and robbed a kind and considerate employer.

"Where is Bowman this afternoon?" asked Sinclair.

"He told me he was going to ride to Hyacinth with the landlord. He seems to find time hanging heavy on his hands."

"He is much better off than I am. It is bad enough to be sick but when to this is added a burden of remorse, you can imagine that my position is not enviable."

At five o'clock Fred rose from his chair and took his hat.

"I must be going," he said. "We have supper at the hotel at six, and I may as well be punctual."

"Will you call again?" asked Sinclair, eagerly.

"Yes, but perhaps I had better not spend too much time with you. It may give rise to suspicions on the part of your partner."

"Don't call him my partner! I don't want to admit any connection between us. There has been a connection, it is true, but as soon as I can bring it about it will be closed, and then I hope never to see or hear of Paul Bowman as long as I live."

"I shall get to work to-morrow," said Fred. "I think it will be best for me not to call here till the day after. We must not appear to be too intimate."

When Fred returned to the hotel he found Bowman just arrived.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" asked Bowman.

"Part of the time I spent with your friend, Mr. Sinclair."

"What did he find to talk about?" asked Bowman, eying Fred sharply.

"Chiefly about New York and his health. He doesn't seem contented here."

"No wonder. It's the dullest hole I was ever in. Is he any better?"

"He thinks so."

"I wish he'd get well quick. I want to go to some larger place."

"I suppose Montreal is a more interesting town."

"Yes, there is something going on there. We were fools to leave it."

After supper Fred played a few games of billiards with Bowman. Evidently he was not suspected as yet.

CHAPTER XXXII. — FINDING A CLEW.

The object which Fred had in view now, was to ascertain where Bowman had hidden the securities taken from the trunk in Sinclair's cottage. Precisely how to set about it he did not know. He had never had any experience in detective work, and had only his native shrewdness to depend upon.

It occurred to him, however, that Bowman would be likely from time to time to visit the place where he had secreted the bonds in order to make sure that they were safe. This he was hardly likely to do when in Fred's company, but only when alone. When, therefore, he should see Bowman starting off on a solitary expedition he decided if possible to follow him.

"Do you feel like going out on the river this morning?" asked Bowman, as they rose from breakfast.

"I don't mind. It will help to fill up the time."

For many years such an open winter had not been known. The unusual warmth had left the lake as free from ice as in the early fall. But for a slight covering of snow there would have been nothing to indicate that it was winter.

"Your vacation is likely to be a slow one here," suggested Bowman.

"Yes; St. Victor isn't a very lively place."

"I wonder you are willing to stay here," said Bowman, with momentary suspicion.

"I have so much excitement in New York and in my daily rides on the Erie road, that I don't mind the dulness as much as many would. Still if you and Mr. Sinclair were not here, I should cut short my visit at once."

Bowman did not understand the hidden meaning of this speech, and naturally interpreted it in a sense complimentary to himself.

"Sinclair isn't much company," he said. "He is down in the dumps on account of his rheumatism. I suppose he thinks I ought to stay in the cottage with him, but I couldn't stand it."

"I suppose you are in business together," observed Fred, innocently.

"Did he say so?"

"Not exactly, but I inferred from what he did say that you had some business connection."

"Yes," answered Bowman, hesitatingly. "We have a joint investment. I don't think, however, that we shall remain connected long. He doesn't suit me. He is too slow and cautious."

Fred did not think it necessary to comment on this statement.

They went down to the lake, and were soon rowing to the middle of it. Here they tried fishing, but did not meet with much success. They gave it up and rowed across to the opposite side.

"Will you take charge of the boat for half an hour?" asked Bowman, turning to Fred. "I am going on shore."

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I have a fancy for exploring these woods. I would invite you to go with me, but the boat might be taken, and that would subject us to some inconvenience."

"I would just as soon stay here," said Fred carelessly.

"Then it's all right."

Fred watched Bowman as he made his way in among the trees, and it struck him at once that he had

secreted the bonds somewhere in the neighborhood and was about to visit the hiding-place.

"If I could only leave the boat and follow him," he said to himself eagerly. But he decided at once that this would never do. It would inevitably excite Bowman's suspicion, and then his chance of success would be wholly gone. He must be cautious at all hazards.

He did not return to the middle of the lake, but rowed lazily along the shore, from time to time directing a glance toward the woods.

"To-morrow I will make an excuse for not going with Bowman, and will come out here and do a little exploring myself," he resolved.

At one point his attention was drawn to a boy who was sitting under a tree near the edge of the water.

"May I get into your boat?" he asked.

"For a short time. A gentleman is with me who has gone on shore for a little while."

"I know. I've seen him here often."

"Have you?" asked Fred with interest. "So he comes here a good deal, does he?"

"Yes, he comes here mostly alone, and goes into the woods. Once me and another boy got into the boat and rowed while he was gone."

"I suppose he enjoys walking in the woods."

"It ain't that," said the boy significantly.

"What is it, then?" asked Fred, trying to repress his excitement.

"I think he's got business in the woods."

"What business can he have there?"

"I think he's got something hidden there."

"What makes you think so?"

"You won't tell him what I say, will you?"

"I saw him when he first came here. He had a bundle done up in paper. He left the boat and went into the woods, and when he came back he didn't have the paper."

"He may have had it in his pocket."

"No, he didn't. It was a big package, and if it had been in his pocket it would have made it bulge out."

"I see you are quite an observing boy. I dare say you are right. What do you think there was in the package?"

"I guess it was money. If I had a lot of money I wouldn't hide it in the woods."

"Nor I," answered Fred, laughing.

"I'd buy a trunk and keep it inside."

"Somebody might open the trunk."

"Any way it would be safer than hiding it in the woods."

"I don't know but you are right. I hope the time will come when you and I will have a lot of money to conceal."

"Is the man a friend of yours?" asked the boy.

"We are boarding at the same hotel. I have only known Mr. Bowman two days."

"Is he from the States?"

"Yes. I believe he came from New York."

"Where do you come from?"

"I live in New York too."

"I'd like to see New York. I'd go there if my father would let me."

"I am not sure but you are better off here. Some boys have a hard time making a living in New York."

"I thought everybody in New York was rich."

"If you ever come to New York you'll find out your mistake," rejoined Fred, laughing.

"If you ain't a friend of Mr. Bowman, as you call him," said the boy, lowering his voice, "I'll tell you something."

"I wish you would. Mr. Bowman is not a friend of mine, but there is no one else to keep company with, so I go round with him."

"I know where he has hidden his money."

"Is this true?" asked Fred in excitement.

"Yes."

"But how did you find out?"

"One day I followed him. I dodged behind trees and kept out of sight. Once he came near seeing me when he looked back, but I was just in time. By and by he came to the place."

"What sort of a place?"

"Did I say I would tell you?" asked the boy shrewdly.

"No, but I will make it worth your while."

The boy eyed Fred with suspicion, and his manner became cold.

"Do you want to rob him?" he asked.

"No."

"Then why do you want to know where he has hid his money?"

Fred deliberated hurriedly. There was no way except to take the boy into his confidence.

"I see you are an honest boy," he said, "and I like you better for it."

"That's all right, but why do you want me to tell you where Mr. Bowman has hidden his money?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Is there a secret?"

"Yes; the package which this man has hidden contains bonds which he stole from a New York banker."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I am sent to get them back, if possible. That is why I have come to St. Victor, and that is why I have formed the acquaintance of Mr. Bowman."

"Is this true?" asked the boy, not wholly without suspicion.

"Listen and I will tell you the story. I must be quick, for Mr. Bowman may be back any minute."

"There he is now."

"Meet me to-morrow at ten in the morning just back of the place where you were sitting when I took you on board the boat, and I will tell you all. In the name of Mr. Wainwright I will agree to pay you a hundred dollars, if by your help I recover the bonds."

"It's a bargain!" said the boy, his eyes sparkling.

CHAPTER XXXIII. — SUCCESS!

"Who is that boy?" asked Bowman carelessly, as he re-entered the boat.

"I don't know. He asked me to take him for a little row, and I was glad to have him for company."

"I have been taking a stroll through the woods. In fact, I was brought up in the woods," said Bowman with a laugh.

Fred understood that he was trying to give a plausible explanation of his absence.

"I like the woods myself," he rejoined. "Do they extend far?"

"Not very far. I enjoyed my stroll in among the trees, even barren as they are now of leaves, very much. It brought back to my mind my schoolboy days."

Bowman seemed in quite good spirits. Evidently he had found that his secret hiding-place had not been discovered.

"How much longer are you going to stay in St. Victor?" he asked after a pause.

"I don't know," answered Fred slowly. "I may take a fancy to go away any day."

"I wish I could go too. I am tired of this place."

"I suppose you are waiting for Mr. Sinclair to recover."

"Yes," answered Bowman, but there was hesitation in his tone.

A sudden suspicion entered Fred's mind. Was Bowman meditating giving his confederate the slip, and deserting him, taking the bonds with him? Had he perhaps taken the package from its hiding-place and got it concealed about his person? A careful scrutiny satisfied Fred that this was not the case. But it was quite possible that he would make another visit the next day, and remove the bonds then.

"I must lose no time," he thought, "or I shall lose my opportunity."

They reached the hotel in time for dinner.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" asked Bowman.

"I haven't thought particularly," answered Fred indifferently.

"Suppose we play poker? The landlord has a pack of cards."

"I don't know the game."

"It won't take long to learn. I will show you how it is played."

"I don't care for cards. I may call on Mr. Sinclair."

Bowman shrugged his shoulders.

"You must enjoy his society," he said.

"I don't go there for enjoyment. My visit may cheer the poor man."

"All right! I'll see if the landlord isn't going to drive somewhere."

"I hope he is," thought Fred. "It will get Bowman out of the way."

About half-past two Bowman entered the public room where Fred was reading.

"I'm going for a drive," he announced. "I'll see you at supper."

"Very well!"

Fred waited till Bowman drove out of the yard, and then, taking his gun, went off himself. But he did not turn his steps in the direction of Sinclair's cottage. He had ascertained that there was a way of going by land to that part of the woods where he had met his young companion of the morning. He had made up his mind to repair to the spot now on the chance of finding the boy, and securing the bonds that very afternoon. He felt that there was no time to be lost.

It would have been easier and shorter to take the boat, and the landlord would have made no objection. But some one might see him out on the lake, and this would excite Bowman's suspicions, especially when he discovered that the bonds were missing. So Fred chose the land route as the wiser one to take under the circumstances.

The distance was quite two miles, but Fred did not mind that. The prize for which he was striving was too great for him to shrink from such a trifle as that.

He reached the other side of the pond, but no one was in sight. He walked about anxiously looking here and there.

"I hope I shall not have my walk for nothing," he said to himself.

But luck was in his favor. Walking at random he all at once heard a boy's whistle. He quickened his steps, and almost directly, to his great delight, he recognized, sauntering along, the very lad he had taken out in the boat in the morning.

"Hallo, there!" he cried.

The boy turned quickly.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were to meet me to-morrow morning."

"So I was, but I did not dare to wait. I think Bowman will get the bonds to-morrow, and make a bolt of it."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"I want you to get the package for me to-day."

"Do you think I will get into any trouble?" asked the boy cautiously. "It won't be stealing, will it?"

"It would be if the bonds were Bowman's, but they are not. They belong to a rich banker in New York, as I have already told you, and in showing me where they are you are aiding justice."

"Will I get the hundred dollars, sure?"

"Yes, I will guarantee that. What is your name?"

"John Parton."

"I will take it down. As soon as I get back to New York I will see that the money is sent you."

"I'll chance it," said the boy. "You look honest, and I believe you."

"Go on, then, and I will follow you."

John led the way into the thickest part of the wood. He paused in front of a large tree, partly gone to decay. The trunk was hollow, containing a large cavity.

"The package is there," he said.

"Get it for me," returned Fred, "and there your task will end. I will undertake the rest."

In less than five minutes the package was placed in Fred's hands.

He opened his vest and placed it inside, carefully pinning it to the waistcoat, so that it might not slip down.

"It will be awkward to carry," he said, "on account of its size. I wish it were safe in Mr. Wainwright's possession."

Then a new idea came to him.

"Is there any express office near here?" he asked.

"The nearest is at Hyacinth, five or six miles away."

"I should like to go there. Do you know where I can hire a team?"

"We are not using ours to-day," said John.

"Then," said Fred promptly, "I will hire it, paying any price your father considers satisfactory, and I will engage you to drive me over. You know the way?"

"I've been there hundreds of times."

"Then it is all right. Do you think we can have the team? I'll pay two dollars for that, and a dollar for your services as driver."

"It's a go! Come right along! Our house is less than half a mile away."

Then the two boys emerged from the woods, and made their way to a comfortable farmhouse, situated in the midst of fertile fields. John went into the house, and presently came out with his mother.

"Are you the young man that wants to go to Hyacinth?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I don't know of any objection. Don't stay too long."

"I'll be back in time for supper, mother."

"Did your mother ask you what I was going for?" asked Fred.

"No; I told her you wanted to take a ride."

"That will answer. I wish there was enough snow left for sleighing."

The horse was quickly harnessed to an open buggy, and the two boys got in. John took the reins, and turned out of the yard. Soon they were speeding over the road that led to Hyacinth. It was a pleasant drive, but Fred was too much occupied by thoughts of what he carried to pay much attention to the scenery.

At length they turned into the principal street of Hyacinth.

The express office was just across the way from the railway depot.

Fred entered and inquired, "How soon will a package start for New York?"

"In about an hour."

"As it is valuable, I will get you to put it up securely, and seal it."

"Very well."

The agent wrapped it up in some thick brown paper, gave it to Fred to direct, and then laid it carefully away.

"Do you wish to insure it?" he asked. "What is the value?"

"I will insure it for five hundred dollars."

Fred knew that this would secure extra care, and he did not care to name the real worth lest it might tempt some employee to dishonesty.

"Now," he said, as they left the office, "I feel easy in my mind."

But when the boys were half way home, they overtook another buggy, containing two occupants. One of them was the landlord of the Lion Inn, the other was Paul Bowman.

CHAPTER XXXIV. — BOWMAN'S PANIC.

Paul Bowman, who was driving, the landlord having given up the reins to him, checked the horse and hailed Fred in evident surprise.

"Where have you been?" he inquired abruptly.

"I have been to ride," answered Fred, with an appearance of unconcern.

"I thought you were going to call on Sinclair."

"So I was, but after you left I decided to take a walk in another direction. I met John, and engaged him to take me to drive."

"Are you going home now?"

"Yes, I think so. Can you take me to the hotel, John?"

"Yes," answered his companion readily.

"Then we will follow along behind Mr. Bowman."

Of course there could be no private conversation, so John and he spoke on indifferent topics. When they reached the hotel Fred jumped from the buggy.

"Good-by, John," he said. "You will hear from me soon," he added in a significant tone.

Then he joined Bowman, who was wholly unsuspecting of the disaster that had befallen him.

"I should like to go over to Sinclair's," thought Fred, "but I suppose Bowman will expect me to keep him company."

But in this he was agreeably disappointed.

At seven o'clock the landlord drove round, and Bowman sprang into the buggy.

"Sorry to leave you, Fred," he said, "but we are going to Vaudry on a little business. Hope you won't be lonely."

"Never mind me, Mr. Bowman. I think I will go over to see Mr. Sinclair. He will probably expect me. Have you any message?"

Bowman looked significantly at the landlord.

"Tell him I will call to-morrow or next day," he said. "At present I am very busy."

The two drove away, leaving Fred and a stable boy named Jack looking after them.

"He's going to skip to-morrow," said Jack confidentially.

"Who?"

"Mr. Bowman."

"How do you know?" asked Fred in excitement.

"I heard him say so to the boss. He doesn't want you to know it."

"Why not?"

"He is afraid you will tell his partner, the sick man."

Fred whistled.

"That is news," he said. "I suspected it might be so, but didn't know for sure."

"Shall you tell Mr. Sinclair?"

"Yes, I think I ought to do so."

"That's so! He's a nicer man than old Bowman."

Fred, immersed in thought, walked over to the cottage. James Sinclair received him with evident joy.

"I expected you this afternoon," he said. "The hours seemed very long."

"I was employed on very important business," said Fred significantly.

"You don't mean——"

"I mean," said Fred, bending over and whispering in the sick man's ear, "that I have found the bonds."

"Where are they?"

"On the way to New York, by express."

"What a burden off my heart!" ejaculated Sinclair fervently. "Tell me about it," he added, after a pause.

Fred did so.

"Now," he added, "there will be nothing to prevent your coming to New York and taking your old place."

"I think I shall recover now," responded Sinclair. "Your news makes me feel fifty per cent. better."

"I have more news for you."

"What is it?"

"Bowman is planning to leave St. Victor to-morrow, without a word to you. He means to leave you in the lurch."

"He can go now. I shall be glad to part with him—and forever."

"That is his intention, but when he finds the bonds have disappeared, I don't know what he may decide to do."

"When do you mean to start for New York?"

"I would start to-night if I could."

"You can. There is a train which passes through St. Victor at ten o'clock this evening. But, no, on second thought it goes to Ottawa."

"I don't care where it goes. I don't wish to remain in St. Victor any longer than is absolutely necessary. Besides, if Bowman suspects and follows me he will be likely to think I have gone in a different direction."

"I am sorry to have you go, Mr. Fenton."

"We shall meet again soon, I hope in New York."

Fred reached the inn at nine o'clock, left the amount of his bill in an envelope with the boy Jack, and walked over to the station, where he purchased a ticket for Ottawa. While he was in the depot building Bowman and the landlord drove by. Before they had reached the inn the train came up and Fred entered the rear car.

He breathed a sigh of relief as the cars quickened their speed and St. Victor faded in the distance.

Meanwhile Bowman and the landlord reached the hotel. Jack, the stable-boy, came forward and took charge of the team.

"Here is a letter for you, Mr. Bluff," he said.

"A letter!" repeated the landlord, with a look of wonder. He opened it and uttered a cry of surprise.

"The boy's gone!" he ejaculated.

"What boy?" asked Bowman, not suspecting the truth.

"Young Fenton."

"Gone away! What do you mean?"

"Read that."

He passed the note to Bowman, who read as follows:

DEAR SIR:—I am called away on business. I enclose the amount due you. If it is not right I will communicate with you as soon as I have reached New York. Remember me to Mr. Bowman.

FRED FENTON.

"Called away on business!" repeated Bowman suspiciously. "That is queer. What did the boy say?" he asked of Jack. "When did he first speak of going away?"

"I think he made up his mind sudden, sir."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He said he was goin' back to New York."

"Received a summons from his employer, I suppose."

"Very likely, sir."

"Do you know if he went to see Mr. Sinclair?"

"Yes, sir. He went fust part of the evenin'."

"Then Sinclair can tell me about it."

"Very likely, sir."

Not daring to take Jack too deeply into his confidence, Fred had told him that he was going to New York, which was true, or would be very shortly.

"If he had waited till to-morrow we might have gone together," thought Bowman, "at least a part of the way. It will be some time before I shall dare to set foot in New York."

Bowman went to bed with a vague feeling of uneasiness for which he could not account. He felt that it would be impossible for him to remain in the dull little village any longer. Should he, or should he not, go to see Sinclair before he went away? On the whole he resolved to secure the bonds first, and then decide.

The next day after breakfast he strolled down to the lake, got out the boat, and rowed rapidly toward the farther shore. There was no time to waste now. He tied the boat to a sapling growing close to the bank, and struck into the woods.

He made his way at once to the tree which he had used as a safe deposit vault, and with perfect confidence thrust in his hand. But the package which his fingers sought for seemed to have slipped out of reach. He continued his search anxiously, with increasing alarm, but in vain.

A terrible fear assailed him. He peered in through the cavity, but neither sight nor touch availed. Gradually the terrible thought was confirmed—the parcel had been stolen! Thirteen thousand five hundred dollars, nearly the entire proceeds of his crime, had vanished—but where?

He staggered to a stump close by, and sitting down, buried his face in his hands. What was he to do? He had but twenty-five dollars left.

"Who can have taken it?" he asked himself with feverish agitation.

He rose and made his way mechanically back to the boat.

An hour later he staggered into the little cottage occupied by his sick partner. His hair was disheveled, his manner wild.

"What is the matter, Bowman?" asked Sinclair.

"We are ruined!" said Bowman in a hollow voice. "The bonds are gone!"

"When did you miss them?" asked Sinclair quickly.

"To-day. They were safe yesterday. Do you think it was the boy?"

"What could he know of the bonds? Did you ever speak to him about them?"

"Of course not. What shall I do?"

"Inquire whether any one has been seen near the place where you hid them. Do your best to recover them."

This advice struck Bowman favorably. He devoted the remainder of the day to the inquiry, but learned nothing. There was no further occasion to remain in St. Victor. He left the inn in the evening, forgetting to pay his reckoning.

CHAPTER XXXV. — FRED'S REWARD.

John Wainwright, the wealthy banker, sat in his office looking over the letters that had come by the morning mail. Some of them he turned over to his confidential clerk to answer. Others, more important, he reserved to reply to with his own hand.

"Busy, Wainwright?" asked a gentleman, Arthur Henderson, entering without ceremony.

"I always have something in hand, but I have time enough for an old friend."

"By the way, have you heard anything of the bonds you lost some time since?"

"I know where they are."

"You do?"

"Yes, they are in Canada."

Henderson laughed.

"That means that you will never get them back."

"I don't know. I have sent a messenger to recover them."

"Who is it?"

"My office boy."

Henderson stared.

"I suppose that is a joke."

"By no means."

"What is the age of your office boy?"

"I should judge from his appearance that he is sixteen."

"Do you mean to say that you have intrusted a boy of sixteen with so important a commission?"

"I do."

"Really, Wainwright, I don't like to criticise, but it appears to me that you have taken leave of your senses."

The banker laughed good-humoredly.

"Perhaps I ought not to be surprised at that."

"Then you acknowledge your lack of wisdom?"

"By no means. What I have done I would do again."

"Couldn't you find a more suitable messenger?"

"Not readily."

"It would have been worth while to go yourself, as the amount is considerable."

"That would never have answered. I should be recognized, and excite suspicion."

"Do you really expect that boy to recover the bonds?"

"I think it possible, at any rate."

"Suppose he does, what is to hinder his keeping them himself?"

"His honesty."

"Pardon me, Wainwright, but I have had a pretty extensive experience, and I would be willing to wager ten to one that you will never see your bonds again."

"I never bet, and hold that betting is no argument. But I too have had some experience of men and consider my chance of recovering the stolen property fairly good."

"How long since your messenger started on his expedition?"

"About two weeks."

"Have you heard from him?"

"Yes, once. There are reasons why it is imprudent for him to write too often."

Henderson smiled significantly.

"I dare say he is having a good time at your expense. What was the amount of your loss?"

"About fifteen thousand dollars."

"Since you won't bet, I will make you a proposal. If the boy recovers your bonds and restores them to you I will offer him a place in my own counting-room at twenty dollars a week."

"I don't think in that case I should be willing to lose his services. I would pay him as much as he could get elsewhere."

"There is very little chance of my being called upon to redeem my promise."

At that moment an express messenger entered the office.

"Here is a parcel for you, sir," he said.

It was a small package wrapped in brown paper, carefully tied and sealed.

John Wainwright paid the express charges, receipted for the package, and then eagerly opened it.

It was the same package which Fred had expressed from Hyacinth.

The banker's eyes were full of triumph.

"What do you say to that, my friend?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"The missing bonds. Nothing could have happened more apropos."

"You don't mean to say—"

"Listen. Let me read you this letter from the messenger you thought me foolish in sending to Canada."

Here is a copy of Fred's letter.

JOHN WAINWRIGHT, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR: I have at length recovered the bonds which were stolen from you, and send them by express herewith. I have not time to go into details, but will only say that I found them in a hollow tree. I secured them in the nick of time, for I have reason to think that to-morrow they would have been removed by Bowman, who has got tired of St. Victor, and will probably leave the neighborhood to-morrow. I do not dare to keep the bonds in my possession, as I may be followed, but consider it safer to express them to you at once. I shall go back to New York by a roundabout way, but shall probably arrive very nearly as soon as the package.

Yours respectfully,

FRED FENTON.

P. S. The money and U. S. bonds have been used, but you will find \$13,500 in other securities in this package. They would have been spent too, but the holder found it impossible to negotiate them.

"There, Henderson, what do you think of that?" asked Mr. Wainwright, in a quiet tone of triumph. "I was a fool, was I, to trust this boy?"

"I don't know what to say, but my offer holds good. If you will release the boy I will take him into my employment at twenty dollars a week."

"I will give him as much as he can get elsewhere," repeated the banker.

There was a quick step heard outside, and Fred Fenton entered the office.

"Good morning, Mr. Wainwright," he said. "Did you receive the package?"

"It just reached me, Fred. Shake hands, my boy. You have justified my confidence in you."

"I did my best, sir."

"Tell me all about it. My curiosity is excited."

Fred gave a rapid account of his adventures in search of the missing bonds. It was listened to with equal interest by the banker and his friend.

"Wainwright, introduce me," said Henderson abruptly.

"Fred," said the banker smiling, "let me make you acquainted with my friend, Arthur Henderson. He is a commission merchant. He may have a proposal to make to you."

"Young man, if you will enter my employment I will pay you twenty dollars a week," said merchant.

Fred looked amazed.

"That is a great deal more than I am worth," said.

"Then you accept?"

Fred looked wistfully at Mr. Wainwright.

"I should not like to leave Mr. Wainwright," he said.

"Especially as he has raised your pay to twenty-five dollars a week," said the banker smiling.

"You can't be in earnest, sir?"

"When you get your first week's salary on Saturday, you will see that I am in earnest."

"I see, then, that I must do without you," said the merchant. "Wainwright, I take back all I said. I advise you to keep Fred by all means as long as he will stay with you."

The banker had opened his check book and was writing out a check. He tore it from the book and handed it to Fred. It ran thus:

No. 10,531

*PARK NATIONAL BANK.
Pay to the order of FRED FENTON
ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS.*

\$1000.

JOHN WAINWRIGHT.

"Is this for me?" asked Fred in amazement.

"Yes. I ought perhaps to make it more, for it is less than ten per cent. of the value of the bonds."

"How can I thank you, sir?" ejaculated Fred, feeling uncertain whether he was awake or dreaming. "I feel like a millionaire."

"Have you been home yet, Fred?"

"No, sir; I came here at once."

"Go home, then, and spend the rest of the day with your mother. Do you want to cash the check this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Indorse it, then, and I will hand you the money in bills to-morrow."

Fred, his face radiant with joy, left the office, and going to the nearest station on the Sixth Avenue Elevated Road bought a ticket and rode up town.

There a surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER XXXVI. — A LETTER FROM TOM SLOAN.

When Fred presented himself at home, after a fortnight's absence, his mother and little brother were overjoyed.

"It's been awfully lonely since you went away, Fred," said Albert.

"I have felt like Albert," said Mrs. Fenton. "But it was not that that worried me most. I was afraid you might meet with some accident."

"I've come home safe and sound, mother, as you see. But you don't ask me whether I succeeded in my mission."

"I don't know what your mission was."

"No; it was a secret of Mr. Wainwright's, and I was bound to keep it secret. I can tell you now. I was sent to Canada to recover over ten thousand dollars' worth of stolen bonds."

Mrs. Fenton looked amazed.

"A boy like you!" she said.

"I don't wonder you are surprised. I was surprised myself."

"But who had the bonds, and how did you recover them?"

"Two men were in the conspiracy. One of them was sorry for the theft, and ready to help me. The other meant to keep them. He had taken them away from his partner and hidden them in the forest."

"And you found them?"

"Yes; sit down and I will tell you the story."

Fred did so, and when it was finished he added: "How much do you think Mr. Wainwright paid me for my trouble?"

"He ought to pay you handsomely."

"What would you consider paying me handsomely?"

"Fifty dollars," answered his mother.

"He gave me a thousand dollars!"

"A thousand!" ejaculated Mrs. Fenton, incredulous.

"Yes."

"Where's the money?" asked Albert.

"He gave it to me in a check. I shall collect it to-morrow, and invest it in some safe way."

"I can't realize it, Fred," said Mrs. Fenton. "Why, it will make us rich."

"But that isn't all. My salary is raised to twenty-five dollars a week."

"I never heard of such wages being given to a boy like you."

"It was my second offer this morning. A merchant, a friend of Mr. Wainwright, offered me twenty dollars to go into his office."

"That is better than being a train boy, Fred."

"Yes; but I was glad to work on the trains when I had nothing better to do."

Just then the peculiar whistle of the postman was heard.

"Run down-stairs, Albert, and see if there are any letters for us," said Fred.

The little boy returned in a moment with an envelope directed to Fred Fenton, and postmarked Central City, Colorado. He opened it hastily, and exclaimed: "This is from Mr. Sloan, who visited us a few months since."

"Read it, Fred."

The letter was written in rather an illegible hand, and the spelling was rather eccentric, for Mr. Sloan was not a scholar. As corrected it ran thus:

FRIEND FRED—I suppose you haven't forgotten your old friend Tom Sloan. I have often thought of how I enjoyed myself at your home, and wished I could call in and take a cup of tea with you and your mother.

About that land you asked me to see, I've got good news for you. There's a town built around it, and the price has gone up to fancy figures. There's a party here that wants to buy it for five thousand dollars, but I think I can get a little more. If your mother will send me a power of attorney, I will sell it, and send you on the money. I'll do my best for you. No wonder that old skinflint, your uncle, wanted to buy it. He'd have made a big thing out of it. He was a fool not to take it at your own figures.

I hope you are all well, and I shouldn't wonder if I might see you pretty soon. I've been lucky myself, and made a respectable pile. Old Tom Sloan doesn't get left if he can help it.

Well, good-by. Send on the power of attorney by return of mail.

Yours till death,

TOM SLOAN.

"Five thousand dollars!" ejaculated Mrs. Fenton. "I can't believe it."

"You will, mother, when you get the money. There's no time to be lost. I'll go out at once and get the power of attorney, and we'll write at once, telling Mr. Sloan to do whatever he thinks best. Do you agree to that, mother?"

"Yes, Fred. He is a good man and I trust him entirely."

CHAPTER XXXVII. — COUSIN FERGUSON.

In a fortnight Fred received from Colorado an order on a New York banker for six thousand five hundred dollars, being the purchase money on the Colorado lands.

He at once carried it to Mr. Wainwright, and invested it in securities recommended by that gentleman.

"I congratulate you heartily, Fred," said the banker. "I didn't know that I was taking into my employ a young man of fortune."

"It has come upon me so suddenly that I can't realize it myself."

"I consider you worthy of your good luck, my boy. You ought to save up money out of your wages."

"I intend to sir, but I am going to give my mother a better home now that I can afford it, and will see that my little brother has a better education than I have had."

"It is not too late to supply the deficiency in your own case. You cannot do better than join the evening classes of the Young Men's Christian Association, and do what you can to improve yourself."

"I will follow your advice, Mr. Wainwright. Now that I am no longer anxious about money matters, I want to qualify myself for a better social position."

Only two days after the receipt of the money from Colorado, another letter, as unexpected as Mr. Sloan's, reached Mrs. Fenton. The substance of it was comprised in the closing paragraph "Send your son round to my house this evening I am prepared to make you a better offer for the Colorado land. It's of little value, but some day may be worth more than at present. As you are straitened in means I can better afford to wait than you, and I shall feel satisfaction in relieving your necessities."

Fred read this letter attentively. "I hate a hypocrite," he said. "Mr. Ferguson pretends that he wants to help us, while he is scheming to cheat us out of a large sum, relying upon our ignorance of the increased value of

the land."

"Shall I write and tell him that we have sold the land?" asked Mrs. Fenton.

"No, I will call and see him this evening, as he requests."

"But it will do no good."

"I want to find out how much he is willing to give. I shan't let him know that the land is sold till he has made an offer."

"Don't say anything to provoke Cousin Ferguson, Fred."

"Don't worry, mother. I will be perfectly respectful."

About half-past seven Fred rang the bell at the door of the house on East Thirty-Ninth Street. Evidently he was expected, for, on his inquiring for Mr. Ferguson, he was shown at once into the presence of his rich relation.

"Good evening, Frederick," said Mr. Ferguson, with unusual graciousness. "How is your mother?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"I hope you are getting along comfortably."

"Yes, sir; we have no right to complain."

"That is well," said Mr. Ferguson condescendingly. "I presume the boy is making five dollars a week or some such matter," he soliloquized. "That is very well for a boy like him."

"I made you an offer for your father's land in Colorado a few months ago," he went on carelessly.

"Yes, sir."

"You thought my offer too small."

"Yes, sir. Twenty-five dollars would be of very little value to us."

"There I disagree with you. Twenty-five dollars to a family situated as yours is, is no trifle."

A faint smile flickered over Fred's face. He wondered what Mr. Ferguson would say if he knew precisely how they were situated.

"Still," resumed the merchant, "you did right to refuse. I am inclined to think the land is a little more valuable than I supposed."

Fred was rather surprised. Was Cousin Ferguson going to act a liberal part, and offer anything like a fair price for the land? He waited curiously to hear what he would say next.

"Yes," continued Mr. Ferguson magnanimously, "I admit that I offered you too little for your land."

"So I thought at the time, sir," Fred said quietly.

"And I am now prepared to rectify my mistake. You may tell your mother that I will give her a hundred dollars for it."

"A hundred dollars?"

"Yes; that is probably more than it is worth at present, but I can afford to wait until it increases in value."

Mr. Ferguson sat back in his armchair and fixed his eyes on Fred with the air of one who has made a most generous offer.

"Did your mother authorize you to make a bargain?" he inquired.

"No, sir."

"She wished you to report to her, I suppose. This offer will hold good for twenty-four hours. You can come around to-morrow evening, and the matter can be settled at once. It may be well for your mother to come round also, as her signature will be required to the bill of sale."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Ferguson, but I don't think we will sell."

"Young man," said Ferguson severely, "if you advise your mother to reject this offer, you will take upon yourself a great responsibility."

"Mr. Ferguson," rejoined Fred, fixing his eyes on the merchant, "do you advise my mother, as a friend, to accept this offer?"

"Of course, of course. It is the best thing she can do."

"I have no right to doubt your sincerity, but I think the land is worth more than you offer."

"What can you know about it?" demanded Ferguson impatiently.

"A gentleman who had traveled in Colorado called on us a while ago. He seems to think the land is quite valuable."

"Stuff and nonsense! The man was humbugging you."

"He was a miner," continued Fred placidly. "He promised to look up the matter for us."

"You were very rash to trust a stranger. The best thing you can do is to disregard any advice he may have given you, and accept my offer."

"There is one difficulty in the way," said Fred.

"What is that?"

"*We have sold the land!*"

CHAPTER XXXVIII. — CONCLUSION.

"You have sold the land?" repeated Mr. Ferguson in dismay.

"Yes, sir."

"Then permit me to say that you and your mother have acted like fools!" said Ferguson harshly. "In a matter like this you should have consulted ME. What do you or your mother know about business?"

"I think we did pretty well," said Fred placidly.

"What did you sell for?" asked Ferguson abruptly.

"Six thousand five hundred dollars!" answered the ex-train boy.

Robert Ferguson stared at Fred in amazement and incredulity.

"Don't play any of your practical jokes on me!" he said sternly.

"I don't intend to, sir. We gave Mr. Sloan a power of attorney, and he sold it for us."

"He *says* he did!" sneered Ferguson. "You will never get the money."

"Excuse me, Mr. Ferguson. We have received the money already."

"When?" gasped the merchant.

"Two days ago."

The face of Robert Ferguson was a study. Disappointed cupidity succeeded his first incredulity. He began to consider that he must convince Fred that he had acted in good faith. With an effort he smoothed down his face and conjured up a smile.

"You quite take my breath away," he said. "I can hardly believe that the land which I thought worthless should have realized such a sum. Have any mines been discovered on them?"

"No, sir; but a village has sprung up in the immediate neighborhood."

"I am heartily glad of it. Tell your mother so. How could I have been so deceived? By the way, it will be best for you to put the money in the hands of some responsible person to take care of for you. As a near relative I shall be glad to invest the amount for you safely along with my own."

"Thank you, sir, but we have already invested it."

Mr. Ferguson frowned.

"I predict that you will lose half of it," he said.

"I don't think so. I had advice in the investment."

"Who advised you?"

"John Wainwright, the banker."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes; he is my employer."

"I believe I remember that Raymond told me so. Of course he is a good adviser. How much does he pay you?"

"Twenty-five dollars a week."

"Do you take me for a fool?" demanded Ferguson angrily.

"No, sir; and you have no right to take me for a liar," answered Fred, firmly.

"But such a salary for a boy of sixteen is ridiculous!"

"It does seem so; but Mr. Wainwright sent me to Canada to recover over ten thousand dollars' worth of stolen bonds, and I succeeded in bringing them back."

Slowly it dawned upon Mr. Ferguson that the youth before him was not only a favorite of fortune, out a remarkably smart boy. He was evidently on the rise. Would it not be politic to take notice of him?

"Fred," he said with sudden friendliness, "I am pleased to hear of your good fortune. You have done credit to the family. We ought to be more intimate. In proof of my desire for closer relations I shall send cards to you and your mother for my Daughter Luella's wedding. She is to be married next Thursday evening to an Italian count. Probably you have suitable attire, or, if not, you can easily obtain it. Give me your address."

"Thank you, sir. I am not sure whether my mother will attend, but I shall be happy to do so."

The door opened, and Raymond Ferguson entered.

"Good evening, Raymond," said Fred pleasantly.

"Good evening," answered Raymond, coldly.

"Your cousin Frederick has been very fortunate," said the elder Ferguson genially. "He and his mother have come into some thousands of dollars, and he is receiving a handsome salary from Mr. Wainwright, the banker. I shall be glad to see you two intimate."

"Is that so?" asked Raymond, thawing.

"I am glad to say it is," answered Fred.

"Would you like to invite your cousin to attend the theater, Raymond?"

"Just what I was going to ask. There is a good play on at Wallack's."

"Very well! Here is a five-dollar bill."

"Come along, Fred," said Raymond, who had made up his mind it would be wise to cultivate the acquaintance of his once despised relative.

Before they parted for the evening, Raymond borrowed five dollars of Fred, and struck up a close friendship with him. While Fred understood perfectly well what had produced this remarkable change in his cousin he was philosophical enough to take the world as he found it, and accepted Raymond's advances.

The next day wedding cards, elaborately engraved were received at Fred's modest home, requesting Mrs. Fenton and her son's presence at the marriage ceremony of Luella Ferguson and Count Vincento Cattelli. But an unexpected circumstance prevented the nuptials from being celebrated.

One evening the count and Miss Ferguson were sitting at supper at Delmonico's. At a table near by sat a gentleman, who watched the young couple with curious attention. He rose finally and approached them.

"Miss Ferguson, I believe," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't know if you remember me, but I dined at your father's house one evening in February. My name is Stanwood."

"I remember you now, Mr. Stanwood. Let me make you acquainted with Count Cattelli."

"I am honored," said Stanwood with a curious smile.

"This lady is my affianced bride," said the count,

"Indeed! I congratulate you. By the way, haven't I met you before?"

"If you have been in Italy, sare. I am Count Cattelli of Milan."

Stanwood smiled slightly, and returned to his own table.

The next day Miss Ferguson received the following note:

MY DEAR MISS FERGUSON:

What I am about to write will pain you, but I cannot permit you to be grossly deceived. The gentleman whom you introduced to me as Count Cattelli at Delmonico's last evening shaved me last March in a barber-shop in Chicago. He may be a count, but I advise you to speak to your father on the subject. Your well wisher,

CHARLES STANWOOD.

Miss Ferguson went into a fit of hysterics, but followed the advice of her correspondent. The count, on being taxed with his deception, first indulged in bravado, but finally acknowledged that he had served as a barber, but still claimed to be a count. Mr. Ferguson, intensely mortified, agreed to give him two hundred dollars if he would leave the city at once. Notices that the wedding had been indefinitely postponed were sent to all who had received cards, and Luella disappeared for a time. There were numerous reports as to the cause of the marriage being postponed, but the secret was well kept. Luella is still unmarried, and is likely to

remain so, unless some one marries her for her money.

Ruth Patton is now the wife of Alfred Lindsay. The young lawyer made a private call on Mr. Ferguson, which resulted in the latter disgorging the ten thousand dollars of which he had defrauded Ruth's mother, so that she did not come to her husband portionless.

All goes well with Fred Fenton. He is still in the employ of John Wainwright, on a largely increased salary, and is always a welcome guest at the home of the banker. Rose is as partial to him as ever, and it would not be surprising if she should some day marry the ex-Erie train-boy. Fred and his mother live in a handsome flat up town, and Albert, his younger brother, is making rapid progress as a designer. It looks as if the clouds had passed away, succeeded by the sunshine of permanent prosperity.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ERIE TRAIN BOY ***

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