

Harry Fenimore's  
PRINCIPLES

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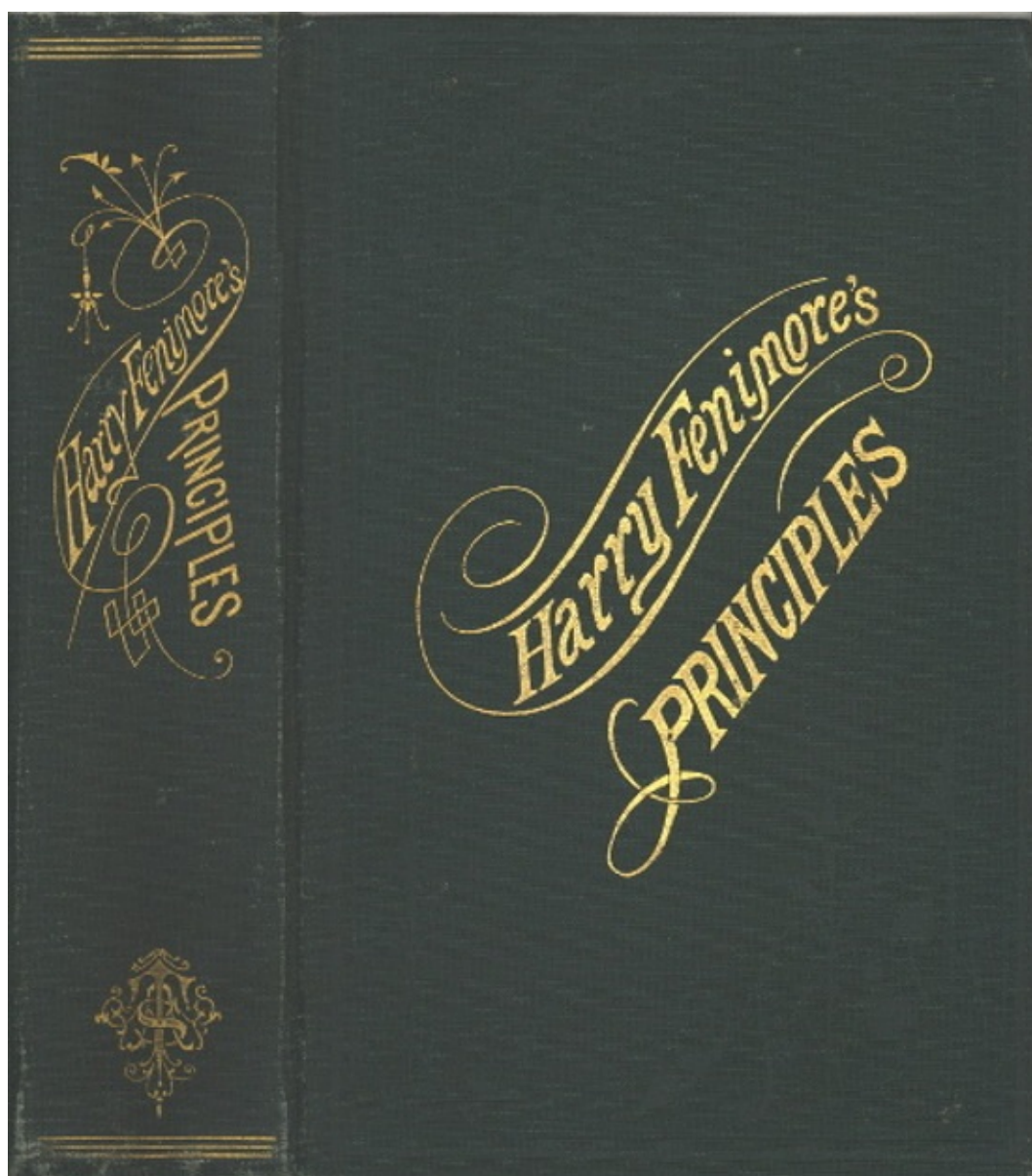
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A Table of Contents has been added.

Obvious typographic errors have been corrected.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"A SUMMER IN THE FOREST," "FLOY LINDSLEY  
AND HER FRIENDS," ETC.



*American Tract Society,*  
150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK.

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>
CHAPTER II.	<a href="#"><u>11</u></a>
CHAPTER III.	<a href="#"><u>23</u></a>
CHAPTER IV.	<a href="#"><u>34</u></a>
CHAPTER V.	<a href="#"><u>46</u></a>
CHAPTER VI.	<a href="#"><u>61</u></a>
CHAPTER VII.	<a href="#"><u>73</u></a>
CHAPTER VIII.	<a href="#"><u>88</u></a>
CHAPTER IX.	<a href="#"><u>97</u></a>
CHAPTER X.	<a href="#"><u>111</u></a>
CHAPTER XI.	<a href="#"><u>119</u></a>
CHAPTER XII.	<a href="#"><u>136</u></a>
CHAPTER XIII.	<a href="#"><u>142</u></a>
CHAPTER XIV.	<a href="#"><u>156</u></a>
CHAPTER XV.	<a href="#"><u>169</u></a>
CHAPTER XVI.	<a href="#"><u>176</u></a>
CHAPTER XVII.	<a href="#"><u>189</u></a>
CHAPTER XVIII.	<a href="#"><u>198</u></a>
CHAPTER XIX.	<a href="#"><u>206</u></a>
CHAPTER XX.	<a href="#"><u>211</u></a>
CHAPTER XXI.	<a href="#"><u>227</u></a>
CHAPTER XXII.	<a href="#"><u>236</u></a>
CHAPTER XXIII.	<a href="#"><u>243</u></a>
CHAPTER XXIV.	<a href="#"><u>250</u></a>
CHAPTER XXV.	<a href="#"><u>258</u></a>
CHAPTER XXVI.	<a href="#"><u>265</u></a>
CHAPTER XXVII.	<a href="#"><u>273</u></a>
CHAPTER XXVIII.	<a href="#"><u>278</u></a>
CHAPTER XXIX.	<a href="#"><u>283</u></a>
CHAPTER XXX.	<a href="#"><u>286</u></a>



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**HARRY FENIMORE'S  
PRINCIPLES.**

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## CHAPTER I.

Outside the city limits the country was glowing with garnet and gold, but within the boundary of walls and pavements, only here and there a solitary tree, or a vine trailing over a balcony, showed what October had been doing, and now the short autumn twilight was drawing its gray veil over even those. But nothing daunted, and as if determined to keep up for itself, the city began to sparkle here and there with an illumination of its own, and gas-lights began to gleam from one window after another, giving for the moment before the blinds were drawn, a free chance for a peep at the evening just beginning inside.

The light flashed from the windows of two houses at the same instant. One stood quite toward the outer limits of the city, and though its inmates and its furnishings were poor enough, it had a broad outlook over all the brilliant glory of the country round about, while a great old butternut-tree, knotted and gnarled by many a year, scattered its leaves in a golden shower over the roof and down the long yard leading to the road. The other fronted on one of the fashionable avenues of the city, where the square of grass before each door was only large enough for a single shrub, or a garden vase but inside, ivies twining fresh and green upon the walls, a conservatory window full of flowers, and the pleasant warmth of the crackling fire in the grate, seemed to balance the gayety of life outside, and make things very nearly equal again.

Whether the advantage was really on the side of the queer rambling old house under the butternut-tree, or belonged to himself, sitting in the ivied library of the brown stone front, Hal Fenimore was quite too busy to decide, as the servant reached his torch up to the chandelier, and with one burst after another the gas rushed to meet it, and the room flashed into a sudden burst of light.

“That’s good,” he exclaimed, as it flooded down upon the table where with elbows firmly planted, and his hands pushed through his hair, he had been impatiently waiting for his companion, Tom Haggarty, to make the next move in their game.

“I don’t know about it, though,” he added to himself, under his breath, as he discovered something to which he had been quite blind before, but which stood out so plainly now that he did not see how Tom could fail to see it for another

moment. Everything had been going on swimmingly on his side, up to that moment; but there stood his queen in the very line of march of one of Tom's bishops, and not a piece of any size to interfere! If Tom would only continue blind to his opportunity for one move more, till there should be time for a masterly retreat!

Poor little Tom! He did not look like an antagonist much to be dreaded, as he sat vis-a-vis to Hal, with not only an anxious, but a bewildered expression upon his face, first lifting a hand towards one of his pieces, and then withdrawing it, as if his uncertainty had only doubled by the movement. At last, in a sort of desperation, he made a plunge at his only remaining knight and moved it into a worse position than it occupied before. Then, still more hopelessly perplexed by Hal's chuckle of triumph at the escape of his queen, and his taunting, "A'n't you a bright fellow to play with!" he made two or three aimless moves, and Hal cried "Checkmate!" in a tone that completed his humiliation. It was very unpleasant somehow; he wondered if the player who did not checkmate always felt so. If he did, Tom certainly thought chess a very disagreeable game. So he slipped down from his chair and told Hal, who was still rejoicing in the conclusion of things, that he thought he must go.

"Don't go," said Hal, "let's play another."

"I guess I can't; I guess I *must* go," said Tom; and finding his hat, he got out of the front door, and heard it close behind him with a miserable feeling that seemed to run down to the very depths of his pockets, to the effect that Hal and himself had a clear understanding between them that he was a stupid little fellow, and that a good player was more than a match for him.

When Hal came back to the library, rubbing his hands with renewed triumph as he glanced at the chess-board, he also saw through the open door of the dining-room, that dinner had been brought in, and that his was the only vacant seat at the table.

So scrambling the pieces into their box, he made haste to take his place, apologizing for his tardiness by saying that he had been to the door with Tom.

"But, Hal," said Mrs. Fenimore, as if a sudden thought struck her, "why don't you sometimes invite one of the boys who know the game better? you seem always to have some little atom of a fellow who has not played three games in his life, and you have nothing to do but beat him."

“That’s the very fun of it,” replied Hal; “I beat Tom all out just now, and sent him home feeling meaner than the fag end of nothing. That’s the way of course if you ever come across a fellow that isn’t smart enough to defend himself.”

“Why, Hal Fenimore! Do you say such a thing as that? You certainly never learned such principles at home, and I should be very sorry to think you had gathered them up since you came to be with your uncle and me.”

“I didn’t know it was principles,” said Hal, coming down a little from his high horse of complacency; “I never thought anything about it, in any way, only a fellow always likes to make another feel a little shabby if he can, because then he feels finer himself.”

“Why, Hal!” was all the lady could exclaim, as she turned to look closely in his face to see if he was really in earnest. “I wonder how you would have liked chess-playing if your uncle had taken that way to ‘feel fine’ as you call it, when he taught you? As far as I can recollect, he found his pleasure entirely in encouraging you, and helping you on over the rough places till you were able to stand by yourself.”

“Oh, that’s different,” said Hal. “Men don’t feel like boys. I suppose when I am a man, I shall teach my small nephews and nieces, and never see a mistake they make.”

“I don’t know about that,” said his uncle; “you’ll be pretty likely to find yourself a grown-up Hal Fenimore when that day comes, and your friends Tom Haggartys still, and nothing more or less. I give you fair warning. A good deal depends upon how you strike out with your pawns, in real life as well as in chess, my boy.”

“But men try to get ahead of each other, and they fight battles and get victories,” persisted Hal.

“I beg your pardon,” said his uncle, “high-minded men don’t like to fight battles with adversaries much weaker than themselves; and as for ‘getting ahead,’ that is a very different thing from standing still and crowing over some poor little companion that you have managed to push down.”

“Well,” said Hal, who found the discussion did not seem to turn very decidedly in his favor, “I only know how boys do; but one thing they have to look sharp for is having their lessons, and I must get to mine in a great hurry now, if you will

excuse me.”

The library fire crackled and glowed in the grate until it almost seemed a pleasant thing that the evenings were getting frosty, and Hal soon forgot all questions of mutual rights, in the more pressing one of division of fractions, which took such complete possession of him that he started as if out of a dream, at the sound of his aunt’s voice saying, “I declare, Hal, I think I’ll invite Tom Haggarty here, and give him lessons every evening for a week. He’s a bright little fellow, and would be a match for you, if he didn’t beat you, in a very short time.”

Poor little Tom! If he could only have heard her say it, what a comfort it would have been! The miserable feeling that had come over him as he said Good-night to Hal, had stuck fast ever since, till he had fairly gone to bed to get rid of it, and was lying at that moment, with his little cold nose tucked away under the blankets, trying to smother the conviction that he was the stupidest and most insignificant fellow in the world, and that Hal would be sure to remind him of it at school the next day.

“Now, Aunt Melanie!” exclaimed Hal, “I can’t understand how you make so much of that game of chess. Tom will find a boy smaller than himself stumbling at his lesson to-morrow, and he’ll crow over him, as uncle calls it, and then that little one will find another pushed out at a game of ball and have his crow, and so they will all take their turns and come out even.”

“Take their turns at what?” said his uncle, looking up from his newspaper. “At putting on all manner of airs with themselves, when they have really done something contemptible, and then at being made to feel contemptible when perhaps they have done the best they could. It hurts either way, my boy, and it isn’t starting with your pieces in good range, let me tell you once more.”

“Well,” said Hal, growing a little uncomfortable again, “I wish I could get these figures into range, at all events. I believe there’s no battleground where things go quite so hard as they do on a fellow’s slate;” and plunging in again amid rules and examples, he thought little more of poor Tom or his woes, until he went to join him in the land of dreams.

---

## CHAPTER II.

The golden shower that the old butternut sent down upon the queer roof outside the city, was the nearest approach to the real thing the house ever saw, for though it had had its day with very grand people, they had all died or moved away long ago, and left it to grow shabby and old-fashioned as it might, until at last the city had bought it for a very small sum, and established within its walls the few old people and strays that the authorities were bound to support. So now it was nothing more nor less than the city almshouse, and the strip of land running back from it to the road behind, was called the poor-farm, though it seemed rather as an odd sort of compliment to the paupers, (boarders they preferred to be called,) than as a statement of fact, for there was only room to raise such vegetables as were needed for daily use in the summer, and the potatoes and great yellow pumpkins that were stored away for winter-days.

But old Ben, who had the care of the garden, such as it was, was proud enough of his charge, and would have ruffled up in a moment at any one who dared to call it small.

Ben had seen better days himself, as well as the old house, and had kept many a rich man's grounds and conservatories in hand; but after all, was not a garden a garden wherever it was, and had not the good Lord called himself a husbandman, and said that he walked in the garden of his spices?

So when Ben found himself sick and unable to stir from his little room, just as all the winter things were ready to be brought in, it fretted and troubled him terribly for a few days, but at last he grew quiet. They might wait, he said; he was waiting himself till the Husbandman should see fit to bring him in. He did not have to wait long; and when the matron saw that he was really gone, she seemed to hear the words he had repeated so many times ringing in her ears.

"Waiting! Dear, dear, and what else are we all doing? What are any of us doing here but to wait?" she had said to old Sue on the morning when they saw that harvest-time had come for Ben at last.

Sue had nodded assent, and a queer little bit of humanity, half standing, half sitting, quite unnoticed, in one of the queer old windows, had nodded too, but not for himself. He could not suppose she meant to include him.



“All but me!” he added to himself; that was what he always said, and somehow it never did seem as if anything was intended for him. The women had not noticed him, partly because he was so small, his great, dreamy eyes looking over at them from a point hardly higher than the window-sill, and partly because no one ever noticed Creepy further than to speak a kind word, or to manage some little thing that he thought might go towards his comfort. He came and went as he liked, but so noiselessly that the gaze of his great eyes, devouring everything from one corner to another, made the new-comers start, until they were used to it, and found out at last that it was only “the poor crooked thing,” as Mrs. Ganderby the matron called him—the stray child with the crooked back, whom no one had ever claimed or ever would.

No one ever asked any work of Creepy, and indeed it seemed doubtful whether anything would ever be found for those white hands, so like a baby’s in their powerless touch; and it was not always certain, after all, that one would meet him here or there about the house. There were days and weeks together when he was only able to sit where some one placed his chair; in summer oftenest under the shade of the old butternut, and in winter by some one of the queer little windows where the sun could lie the longest. Old Enoch had made the chair for him, and a most remarkable specimen of handicraft it was.

“Does credit to your head and heart, Enoch,” said the doctor when he saw it.

Enoch took off his hat and made the best bow his rheumatism would allow; but pleasant as it was to receive a compliment from the doctor, even that could not add to his pride in his work.

“Thanks,” he said. “In course I ought to know my business, for ’twas the best master-workman in the country round I was ’prenticed to, and ’twas more than forty year my work was called a match to his, far and near, and would have been yet to this day, if a fall from the big steeple hadn’t brought me down to stiff joints for the rest of my old age. Ben had a great deal to say about gardening, to be sure, but what good would people get out of potatoes to put in their mouths if they had not a shelter over their heads? I should like to ask. And Ben was always making it such a thing to remember that the blessed Lord called himself a husbandman when He was here; but was He not a carpenter first and foremost, and before he even talked a word about sowing seed?”

Ah! “blessed Lord” indeed! Who else could have made poverty and work seem sweet?

So there sat Creepy, always looking and listening, never saying anything about the pain in his crooked little back, even when it was at the worst; never saying much about anything, in fact, only nodding and smiling quietly while he listened to the rest. Except, to be sure, the one little thing that he was always saying, the same that he had said in Ben's room; but even that was almost always whispered to himself.

"All but me!"

And indeed it did not seem that many things were intended to include Creepy. The other paupers had their times of getting new clothing allowed, but it was never considered necessary for Creepy; the matron always found some portion of some cast-off garment that had resisted wear and tear sufficiently to be brought round again, by her devices, into the right size and shape for "the poor crooked thing," as she always called him; "it took such a scrap," she used to say, "though dear knows it had been a precious job to worry out a pattern for such a back and shoulders. She didn't know whose wit and patience would ever have done it but her own."

And when the census-taker came, Creepy sat in his hollow chair, and fixed his great dark eyes upon them both, while she gave the names of Enoch and Sue, and the twenty or more, older or younger, who made up the list of their companions.

"And so that's all, is it?" said the census-taker.

"That's all," replied the matron.

"That's all," repeated Creepy, nodding, "all but me."

"Now may Heaven forgive me," exclaimed the matron, as passing through the old porch she caught sight of Creepy, "if I did not speak the truth; but who would ever have thought of the poor crooked thing, and more than all, of giving such a name as that to go and be printed before all the world, which no one knows who gave it to him, more than where he came from himself, may the good Lord have pity upon him."

She bustled on in too much haste to let her conscience smite her very deeply, for there was a stir in the almshouse that morning. It was one of the glorious golden days in October, and from time immemorial it had been the custom of the house, once in the year, for every one, old and young, to get work out of the way, don

their best clothes, and set off in a triumphant march still farther out beyond the city, out to the great belt of yellow woods that lay just on the border of the bay. And there they would rustle about in the fallen leaves like children, and fill up the emptied lunch-baskets with nuts for the winter evenings, and never come back till the golden light of afternoon began to falter, and it was time to get home before twilight damp should fall on rheumatic bones. And this was the morning for them, this time. But they never had been so late getting off. The census-taker had hindered the matron until she declared at last when he was really gone she was in such a toss she hardly knew which way to turn first; and then they missed Ben who had always been such a dependence and it seemed as if something was all wrong, going without him for the first time.

But they were off at last, and Creepy watched them until the last figure disappeared under some yellow trees that stood at the corner of the road. It was Sue, and she was just taking Enoch's lunch-basket out of his hand.

"Give it to me, man," she said, "are you forgetting all about that lame shoulder? 'Twill be stiffer than a rusty hinge to-morrow."

"It's you who are forgetting," said Enoch. "You might remember that you are five years older than any one of us, and that your feet will be failing you before we reach the next turn."

"And isn't this the very day of the year for forgetting?" answered Sue. "We always forget on this day even that we are paupers, for are not the soft breeze and the blue hills and the crystal air around us the good Lord's, and has he not given all his creatures a share in them alike?"

"What a thing it must be," Creepy sat thinking to himself, "to move so light and free as they do, and to go so far. It seems as though they were all melted into gold, passing under those trees, and that's the last I see of them."

The last he saw of Sue and the rest, but what came pushing out from under the gold, and nearing the almshouse so fast that Creepy saw it plainer and plainer every moment? A jet-black horse and a light chaise—Creepy knew them in an instant. It was the city physician's chaise, Dr. Thorndyke's, and had stood at the almshouse door a few moments every day while Ben was sick.

The matron saw him too.

"Now whom can he have been visiting on that road?" she said to herself. "Dear

knows, there's no house beyond us within the city limits but the Jellerbys' and the Diffendorffers'. And now he's hurrying back for dear life to folks of more importance."

Very much mistaken was Mrs. Ganderby for once. So far from hurrying back "for dear life," the horse's pace was slackened as it drew near the almshouse, and just as it reached the gate, was drawn up with a short rein.

"Now may all that's good deliver us!" exclaimed the matron, pulling her apron-strings into a hopeless knot, in her hurry to get it off. "Who does he think is dying or ready to die in the house to-day, that he must needs come unawares upon respectable housekeepers on the one morning in the year when there's excuse if everything is not in its place as early as others. It's none but a young doctor, surely, who has time to call when he is not sent for."

It was of no use; the knot would not be untied, and the doctor could not be kept waiting, so Mrs. Ganderby proceeded to open the door, smoothing her apron and her temper as she went, until the doctor suspected nothing out of the way with either. And, indeed, it would have been hard to keep any vexation in one's soul, when fairly face to face with Dr. Thorndyke, his own was so full of friendly greeting and good cheer; and, moreover, there was something in the hearty, vigorous way he was setting out in his own life that was positively refreshing, and made one feel he must certainly be the man to attack any of the numerous ills that might beset their own.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Ganderby," said the doctor, "you won't take it amiss that I have come this time without being sent for, I hope."

"O dear, no, sir; I'm sure it's only too great a compliment that you should take a moment from all you have to think of. I'm only sorry our people have all gone off to-day for a tramp to the woods, that I dare say seems foolish enough to any one who has more range of pleasures; but however that may be, they're all gone, and there's no one at home but myself, nor no one could be more pleased to see you, sir; walk in, I beg."

"All gone," repeated the doctor, a shade coming on his face. "Thank you; but did you say they were all gone?"

"All but me," nodded Creepy, from where he sat under the big tree, sharing with wondering eyes and ears in the excitement of the doctor's visit; but no one noticed him.

“Gone for a day in the woods, sir,” said Mrs. Ganderby apologetically; “it seems childish for people of the age and infirmities of most of them; but it’s a rare day, sir, which it’s also a way of the house to get away once or twice in the year.”

“You don’t mean to say that the lame child, the little cripple I have seen here, has gone for a walk like that?”

“What, Creepy! Dear heart, the poor crooked thing couldn’t make his feet serve him out of sight down the road, which it’s a strange thing I never can seem to recollect mentioning him with the rest, although it certainly isn’t from any want of pity for the child that Heaven hasn’t seen fit to give a body like other people.”

“Then he is at home,” said the doctor, quite himself again; “and where shall I find him, Mrs. Ganderby? It is rather early in the day to detain a housekeeper, and I presume he may be quite at leisure.”

“Why certainly, sir; it’s little else than leisure the poor thing has, sitting from morning till night in his chair, which, if you have leisure enough to spare him a few moments, it may be a great blessing to him, I am sure. He’s just there, sir, under the big butternut, and if you’ll have the goodness to come in, I’ll bring him in a moment.”

“No, no,” said the doctor, discovering Creepy for the first time; “I’ll go to him,” and with a few rapid steps down the gravel walk, he was at Creepy’s side, leaving Mrs. Ganderby to declare at her leisure that “wonders never would cease, though if the doctor had the goodness in his heart, and the time on his hands to look after the poor crooked thing, there was no one who needed it more; which it was not at all probable that any one could do anything for the like of him, however.”

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## CHAPTER III.

Not so wonderful perhaps, after all. If there was a doctor in the world, besides the soulless visitor of the year before, stupid enough to praise the workmanship of a cripple's chair, and never feel himself roused at the demand made upon his own skill by the cripple, it was not Dr. Thorndyke. He had not passed half way from the door of Ben's room to the bedside before his eye caught the strange, dwarfed, little figure stationed motionless in the window, but following every movement in the room with its great, dreamy eyes.

The matron admired and wondered at the careful but swift conclusion of his study of Ben's case; and when he had—she did not know how—made her feel sure he understood it, and had shown so kind an interest in the old man, and had gone again, it was scarcely five minutes by the great clock in the hall since he came in. But she did not once imagine that in the same time he had come closer to Creepy, and seen more clearly what the poor, twisted little frame and the shrinking heart were needing, than she had in the whole three years she had taken the responsibilities of the almshouse upon herself.

"But not now," he said to himself as he passed the window with so quick a glance that Creepy had no idea he even saw him; "we want more time, that child and I. I think there's a chance there for a doctor to amount to something, for once in a way."

So here he was, for Dr. Thorndyke never lost much time when once he had determined upon a thing; and he was fairly seated beside his new patient before Creepy had recovered from the amazement of hearing himself inquired for sufficiently to draw a breath.

"So, so, young man," said the doctor, stooping for a quick look into Creepy's face, "enjoying the free air and the sunshine with the rest of the world, eh? Well," and he lifted his hat to catch the breeze, "it's a day to make the most of, and I haven't seen a more tempting place to pass an hour anywhere. How the light showers down through these yellow leaves! Is there enough for you and me both for a little while, do you think?"

Creepy could not have spoken to save his life, but the answer shone out of his eyes, and the doctor was satisfied with that.



“It’s a day to make one feel like a boy again,” he said, pulling up a handful of grass and showering the seeds through the sunlight. “And so they’ve all imagined they were children and gone off to the woods, I hear?”

“All but me,” said Creepy, nodding at the doctor, with eyes still fixed upon his face.

“All but you; you thought this was your place, and kept it, eh? Well, it’s not every one who has wisdom for that, though we all have our places in the world, if we could but find them.”

“All but me,” said Creepy, nodding again.

The doctor shot another glance into his face. “You’re very much mistaken,” he said; and then turning to pull more grasses, added suddenly, “Why didn’t you go with them?”

“I never go anywhere.”

“And why not?” asked the doctor, tossing the seeds out into the air again. “What would happen if you were to go? A pain here and there? A pain in that back, for instance?”

The eyes answered again.

“And not a new pain? A pain that comes quite often, and stays as long as it likes—is there at this very moment, perhaps?”

Creepy nodded, but he could not have spoken for his life. It seemed to him he was talking face to face with a magician. How should *he* know, when the people in the house were never told, could only guess, and he had seen none of them this morning.

“And don’t you know that’s all wrong?” went on the doctor. “Other boys of your age play in the sunshine every hour they can get out from the schoolmaster’s clutches.”

The never-failing answer came to Creepy’s lips, but he did not speak.

“Do you know what runs across the road, just beyond the turn under those yellow trees? There is a brook down there, and not far below it passes through a shady spot, and gets very deep and almost as cold as ice. That’s the very place for trout! Suppose you and I go down when the season comes round again, say

next spring, for instance. There are some great rocks there under the trees, and we could take it as lazily as we liked.”

Now the doctor knew very well that if he had proposed that Creepy should take him on his shoulders and prance away moonward, he could not have amazed and bewildered him more; and it showed plainly enough in Creepy’s face, but the doctor would not understand.

“You think it strange I could find the time, don’t you? That is true enough; it could not come very often—once in a season, perhaps, as a great treat. But for to-day it is pleasure enough to sit here in the sunshine. I wonder who made this bench? The same hand that fitted your chair, perhaps?”

“No,” said Creepy; “it was Ben. He used to make them while he was a gardener. He got roots and crooked branches in the woods and twisted them together. That was while he was waiting.”

“Waiting?” asked the doctor. “What was he waiting for?”

“Waiting to be gathered in. The matron says we’re all waiting. All but me.”

“And why not you? Are you in such haste that you cannot wait? You *must* wait for spring, before we go fishing, at least. Then you shall help me gather branches for just such a seat. I must have one on my piazza. That is to say, if you can get away from school then, eh?” and the doctor tossed out more seeds, and they floated away and showered down over the walk, to start up and make Enoch a deal of hoeing in the spring.

But nothing to compare with the thoughts he had tossed, and with seemingly a more careless hand, into Creepy’s heart in the five minutes he had been sitting on the rustic seat that had been such a pride to Ben. And there was no waiting with them. Every one had struck root already, and sprung up into some sudden, bewildering feeling, until there was a terrible confusion in the little hot-bed. Why had the doctor come to see him? No one ever came; no one ever sat down to talk with him. Every one was kind, always kind; but every one went on his own way. Go fishing! He go fishing? Had he not just told him he never went anywhere? Could not he see for himself, for did not a doctor know everything? And how should he help him cut down trees, or how should he go to school? Schools were made for every one else, that is true; but no one, except Ben, had ever helped him even so far as to read. Was the doctor mocking him? Did he not see that he was only made to sit in his shapeless chair, and feel the pain going up

and down the crooked back like a devouring thing? Why did he talk to him as he would talk to any one else?

“Shall we call it an engagement?” said the doctor, looking quickly in Creepy’s face again.

“What did you come here for?” cried Creepy, suddenly, with eyes and voice. “Why do you ask me such things? You never saw me before!”

The doctor rose up and stood before his chair, stretching himself to his full height.

“Yes I have seen you before, and you have seen me. You have seen how strong I am, how light and quick my step is, how full of life all my veins are, and how that makes it a pleasant thing for me to live. And I have seen how weak and tired you are, and how your life is only to sit here and bear pain, as no child ought to do. And that is why I came, to see what can be done about it all! Don’t you know that sick people get well, and weak people strong, and crooked limbs are made straight, sometimes?”

The burning eyes were dropped now, and Creepy only smiled and shook his head.

“Don’t you know that, my little man?”

“All but me.”

The doctor stooped and lifting the lame child gently from his chair, gathered him up in his arms and held him, looking down into his face.

“Do you know you are mistaken? I do not think we can make things altogether straight with you, that is true; but I think we can send that pain where it will never find its way back again, and put strength into those limbs, so that you shall go and come with the rest, and find out what it really is to live and move in God’s world; *that* is what I want to see about. I do not feel any doubt we shall succeed. Shall we try?”

The doctor could not see under the great drooping eyelids and the quivering lashes, but Creepy scarcely seemed to breathe. Not with the thought of what the doctor had said, for his words only seemed a sound passing out into the sunshine; their meaning did not touch him as even a possibility. But he was speaking, was here, was holding him tenderly in his arms—that by itself was

bewildering enough—he could only hold his breath and lie still.

“So you don’t say no? You are not afraid to try?”

Creepy shook his head.

“Shall we begin to-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” said the doctor, with a quick but gentle pressure of the strong arms, and then they placed Creepy carefully in the queer chair; the doctor looked closely into his face once, and said Good-by. In another moment he had passed over the walk where the scattered seeds were to make so much trouble, sprung into the chaise, and given the rein to the black horse, and the sound of its hoofs was ringing back from halfway down to the turn in the road under the yellow trees.

Great was the excitement in the almshouse when the matron, after bottling up the news of the doctor’s visit all day long, poured it out on the returning party in the evening.

“He had been there for nothing in the world but to see the poor crooked thing, though with manners enough to make a show of asking for the rest, and had sat talking under the butternut-tree for a full half hour, five times as long as he had ever stayed by Ben when he was dying; which she couldn’t get the child to repeat the half he had said; but the most she could make out was, he was coming every day, or for aught she knew three times a day, to try some plan of his own to straighten the poor thing out: which she was sure it was more like the Lord regarding the sparrows sold for a farthing than any other happening she had ever seen, if he had sent a young man of the sense and skill of that one, all unrequested, to lay himself out to mend a little life like that. And no one could be more rejoiced than she if he could do it, nor more ready to give praise for a miracle of her own times, though at the same time she knew it was only a young doctor who could afford to go about picking up cases that never sent for him, and that nobody could say were responsible to him in one way or another, if he did not choose to see it.”

The basket of nuts for the winter evenings, which had made such work with the arms of one after another of the party before they got it home, was forgotten where it stood, while they listened with open mouths and ears to the matron’s speech, and when Enoch in his haste to go and see if Creepy looked just the

same after what had happened, struck it with his foot and sent the contents rolling half across the room, no one said a word, or stirred from his place to gather them up.

“Dear, dear!” said Sue, “but the Lord remembers all in their turn, if they do but wait his time! And it’s come sooner to him than to some, but there never was patienter waiting, nor would have been for a hundred times as long, if it had been His will!”

“Well, there’ll be waiting enough yet, to see what comes of it all,” said the matron. “Sometimes doctors cure and sometimes they kill, and sometimes they do nothing at all, which it remains to be seen whether it will be one or the other with the poor crooked thing.”

“Dear, dear,” said the old woman who had taken the most care of Ben, “what are we all doing here but to wait?” and then finding there was really nothing more to be heard, she and Sue bustled off to see about supper, and then to carry their tired bones to rest, and to dream over all the events of the wonderful day.

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## CHAPTER IV.

Such a battery of eyes as was on the watch for the doctor's visit the next morning! Not one of the paupers could be persuaded to any work that would take his individual pair out of range of the street; each one had an excellent reason for choosing a station where he could shoot a glance out of the window, or down the yard, and no very long interval was allowed between the shots either. Mrs. Ganderby herself found it highly important to keep in the front part of the house and just make sure that Enoch was going on well with a bit of repair he had set himself about on the doorstep. Creepy sat under the butternut-tree, and the yellow leaves had fluttered down till they lay in a golden circle around his queer little chair; the doorstep was mended, Mrs. Ganderby could not find another spot out of order within reach of the front windows; one after another the old clock in the hall had ticked away the hours of the glistening October morning, and still no black horse came dashing up before the door. "If I hadn't seen the doctor with my own eyes yesterday," said Mrs. Ganderby, "I should say it was all a light-headed notion of the poor crooked thing that he was here at all, which he certainly was here, however; but what he had to say about coming again is another question that will take care of itself before the day is gone."





Greater and greater grew the wonder and suspense. Was the doctor coming at all, and what was he going to do if he came? That was so far beyond what they knew, that they set themselves to imagining, until if they had seen him alight, one hand holding a terrible knife, with which to remove the lame child's poor twisted spine, and the other a big anvil on which to hammer it straight again, they would not have been very much more astonished. Could they believe their eyes and ears, when at last, as the sun was getting round by the west, the ring of the horse's hoofs was heard, and almost before he was fairly reined up, the

doctor sprung out empty-handed, and was on the doorstep chatting with Mrs. Ganderby as gayly as if nothing of any solemnity had ever happened in the world, or was expected to happen while it should stand?

Sue crept round to the shadow of the jut where the old clock stood, just to get an idea of what he was saying. Praising the matron's bed of nasturtiums which she had saved from the frost, and asking her what receipt she used for pickling them! Dear, dear, but this was a strange world! What had doctors to do with pickles? and how were they to notice the taste of one thing from another, coming in to dinner as they did with pockets full of poisons, and the cries of the sick and dying in their ears? But hark! They had stopped talking about the nasturtiums.

"By the way, Mrs. Ganderby," said the doctor, "that little fellow that I was talking with yesterday, the lame child; it seems to me something might be done for him, and I propose that we should try. It's rather dull music for a boy of his age; ten or twelve is he, Mrs. Ganderby?"

"Indeed, sir, the land knows as well as any of us do, how old the poor crooked thing may be; you can judge better perhaps yourself, sir. But whether it's more or less, it seems a cruel thing and unnatural like, to see him sit in that chair and let all the summer-days go by, and know no more of what living is than some poor squirrel shut up in its cage."

"Precisely what I was going to say, Mrs. Ganderby, and though of course it would be folly to talk of bringing everything right, in a case like that, still I am sure we can do a great deal. I say 'we,' because I shall have to depend a great deal on your kindness in making things go as I wish."

"Well certainly, sir," said Mrs. Ganderby, stroking her apron and her gratified pride at the same time; "if there should be anything in my power, which I should have been the last one, however, to suppose a poor drought-stricken little life like that could be brought to look up much in this world."

"I want him to have some pleasures," said the doctor; "something for those eyes to look at besides what they have dreamed over for a year. Books, for instance. Perhaps there is not a great variety in the house?"

"Well, sir, as to that, you would hardly expect the number to be great; but such as they are, I don't at this moment remember just what the poor crooked thing's book learning may be, though I mind that I sometimes used to see Ben and himself over a page together when Ben was here. I should say he knew his letters

at least.”

The doctor snapped one of Enoch’s doorstep splinters in two, and sent it flying halfway up the horsechestnut-tree that stood a few paces off the grand walk, and in another moment Sue had to dart from her retreat in her corner, for Mrs. Ganderby was coming in, and the doctor was already making a pathway through the yellow circle around Creepy’s chair.

And in another half-hour he was gone, and what wonderful thing had been done, so far as Creepy was concerned, no one could see; but for the rest of the house, half the people in it had been set to work. Mrs. Ganderby was bustling about, declaring she only hoped she might have strength given her to carry on her mind all the ifs and ands, and things to be done and undone, the doctor had laid out for her to think of; and something had been slipped into Enoch’s hand, and thence into his pocket, nobody knew what; but he had come in with great airs of importance, and was telling every one how he was to go to the wheelwright’s and get a pair of wheels to be fitted to Creepy’s chair, and how he was to wheel him down the road every sunny day, and let him see what lay beyond the turn, under the trees, or anywhere else he might take a fancy to go. And Sue, who had once taught a district school in the village where she was born, for a whole summer term, was engaged to spend half an hour every afternoon, in leading Creepy out among the mysteries of an arithmetic, slate, and pencil, that were to be sent to him the next day.

It was well for Creepy that he did not hear all this for an hour or more after the doctor went away, for he had excitement enough in his own part of the visit, and yet they had seemed to be having the quietest talk in the world, for the most part.

“So they got a big basket of nuts yesterday, did they?” the doctor asked carelessly as he sat down. “Well, that is good sport, but nothing to compare with trouting. Now, when you and I go trouting, some day—well, you’ll see how it all is. The nuts don’t try to get away from you and the trout do—that is one difference; but the fact is, it’s such very great sport, there’s no use in trying to describe it, though there have been books written about trouting. Did you ever see one?”

“No,” said Creepy with great wondering eyes.

“Very likely, but you’ll come across them some day. In the meantime I suppose you read what you like best, or do you take up whatever comes in your way?”

“Nothing does come in my way,” said Creepy, “since Ben died. He only had two books, but they gave them away to somebody, afterwards, and that’s all there were in the house.”

“That was the whole library?” asked the doctor, with a smile Creepy did not exactly understand.

“Yes, that was all, and there were pieces gone off from both of them, but there was enough left for Ben to teach me.”

“So Ben taught you, did he?” said the doctor, having learned exactly what he wished. “Ben was a rare fellow, to make schoolmaster and gardener at once. Did he ever teach you, I wonder, how much flint there is in a stalk of grass like this?” And he pulled one up, and began to make mischief with the seeds again.

“Queer, isn’t it?” he went on, as Creepy only said “No,” with a still more wondering look. “And there is still more in a stalk of wheat; that is what makes it strong and straight, partly, and ought to make you strong and straight too, when you eat it. By the way,” turning his eyes suddenly upon the queer little jacket Mrs. Ganderby’s “wits and patience” had “worried out,” “would you mind taking that jacket off one moment, and letting me just pass my fingers up and down your back?”

Creepy’s hands trembled a little, but he got it off. He never liked to have anything touch his back, it always hurt him so.

“There,” said the doctor; “now tell me, please, do you feel any pain when I put my finger here?”

It was the gentlest and tenderest of touches, but it was hard for the lame child to bear. He hesitated, but the doctor waited for an answer.

“Yes,” he said.

“Ah! and now here, please. Do you feel this same pain now?” as he removed the touch to another point.

“Yes.”

“And here too?” moving it again.

“Yes.”

“Just as I thought. Now that’s all wrong. We must put a stop to that somehow or other. I wonder if I can’t get this jacket on again without as much trouble as it would give you?” and the doctor took up the shapeless little thing as gently as Ben ever handled the choicest hot-house plant. Creepy never could tell how it went on, only the wish ran through his mind that the doctor would always do it for him. It was so easy, and not a bit of the pain he always felt so long after he put it on himself.

“Don’t you think that is a pretty horse of mine?” began the doctor, sitting down again on Ben’s seat. “We must have a ride after him together some day. Not just now, perhaps—it is going to be cold very soon—but when the warm spring days come again, then we’ll try it. And you’ll be having a good pull at your school-books in the meantime, I suppose. Boys of your age are all busy with their arithmetics and ugly things of that kind, eh?”

Creepy shook his head.

“All but me.”

“And why not you? Don’t you know every one has to serve his time with these things, to get ready for other work by-and-by?”

“All but—”

“Tut!” said the doctor, getting up quickly and sending his last bunch of grass stalks fluttering out on the wind. “Who taught you to say that? Whoever it was made a great mistake, or wanted to cheat you out of your rights, I don’t know which. The world was made for you, just as much as for any one else, and you are to have your share, and find your place in it with the rest. Will you remember that, my little man?” and he stopped for a look in Creepy’s face.

He could not see that Creepy’s heart was throbbing his breath away with all the watching and the wonder, and the thanks that had gathered up there since morning, and with hearing such words spoken, although they didn’t seem any more real than yesterday.

But he saw how it was swelling up the veins in his forehead, and drooping the eyelids over the great eyes, and he did not wait for an answer, but walked away and paced back and forth over the yellow carpet. Then he sat down on the rustic seat again, and chatted as he had the day before, of what lay out in the world, and along the trout-stream; then he said Good-by, had his talk with Mrs.

Ganderby, found Enoch and Sue, and settled matters with them, and was off. And no one suspected that he had been up and at work all the night before, and had not been able to catch a moment from the duties of the day, until just then, and that he still saw work ahead to stretch well on into the night, before there was a chance of rest.

Hal Fenimore and Tom Haggarty had but just commenced their evening with library fires crackling and companions gay enough to atone for all the ups and downs of the day's school, when Creepy slipped off to his little bed, thankful to lie down and see if his heart would not stop that beating that was tiring him so, and if the pain in his back would let him lie still enough to straighten out all the thoughts that were making such confusion in his brain.

What had the doctor said? There was a place in the world and a share in it for him, as well as the rest? But the place must be just here, under the old butternut; it couldn't be anywhere else. And he was to grow stronger, and the pain to grow less, every month until spring, and then begin to go to school like other boys. What a strange sound that had! It was pleasant to have the doctor say so; it seemed like a dream; but one had always to wake up from dreams, and find things were not so. "All boys go to school." All but—ah, the doctor did not like to have him say that. At all events, he was to have a book and study; and he was to see with his own eyes what lay beyond the turn in the road. Enoch was to see to his going, and Sue and Mrs. Ganderby were to do other things, and the doctor was coming again. All these people thinking of him! It was of no use trying to understand it; if he could only go to sleep! And yet he feared the dream would be gone when he waked in the morning; he should find not a word of all to be true.

He shut his eyes just for a moment as he thought, but when he opened them again the sun was shining through the patched curtain at the window, and the night was gone. Had the dream taken flight with it? There was but one way to find out, so he dressed himself with trembling fingers and crept noiselessly out towards his crooked chair. Enoch was there before him. Tools lying all around on the yellow leaves, and the old carpenter so busy with his work that he did not hear Creepy's footsteps rustling over them too. The sun had not been fairly above the horizon before Enoch was off in search of those wheels, belaboring himself at every step of the way for a stupid blockhead that could make a chair for a cripple, and never have the idea of putting on a running-gear come into his head, though he had it before his eyes every day that the one it was made for never went outside the fence from one year's end to another! But where would the money have come from if he had thought of it ever so long ago? Money

makes most wheels turn in this world, and it's not strange if a five-dollar bill put into your hand should bring some of them round to a lame child's corner once in a way, as well as elsewhere. A likely young man, that doctor, and wise enough to know where to choose the right workman to do his job; that was more than could always be said of them, much as they might know about people that were laid on their beds and good for nothing!

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## CHAPTER V.

The black horse had begun his work in some of the up-town streets before Enoch had finished his, and was hurrying past a handsome brick building just as a crowd of boys were entering it.

“There’s about the place, now,” said Doctor Thorndyke, “where I’d like to see my little patient with the crooked back, after I once get him on his feet again. He’d hold his own with the best of them in his books, if he couldn’t in a foot-race, I’ll warrant, if he only had the chance; and there’s nothing that would shake him up, and put a stop to that miserable ‘all but me’ notion of his, like taking his place among his mates, as he would in a school like that. The only thing is to get him there. It takes a good deal of a back to sit at one of those desks;” upon which the doctor fell into such a fit of musing that he drove three doors beyond the house he was aiming at before he bethought himself what he was about.

Meanwhile the schoolhouse, at which he had looked with such covetous eyes for Creepy, seemed half alive with hustling, bustling boys; the five-minute bell had already rung, and all were making the best of their way to their places, some flying up to the second floor, two stairs at a time, some passing in more quietly at other doors, while here and there a lingering step ventured on a few seconds’ delay to steal a last glance at a lesson that would have no further chance after exercises were once commenced. Only one figure stood still at the foot of the stairs: poor little Tom Haggarty, who had slept off his humiliation about the chess to some extent, but felt it rushing on again with most disagreeable force at sight of Hal, and was terribly anxious to keep at a safe distance from him for the present.

“If I can just keep out of his track till recess,” thought Tom, “he’ll get warmed up with something else, and wont be apt to think of it. *I* don’t want him to be telling all the boys he can wind me round his finger in a game like that. ’Twasn’t hardly fair, either, for I hadn’t tried but two or three times, and he’s had lots of lessons, and there’s no end of pieces and moves to carry in a fellow’s head.”

But Hal was one of the lingerers, and it seemed as if he never would move on. All the other boys on his floor had passed in, and were taking their seats, while with half an eye on the clock, Hal still stood outside the partly open door mulling



over his arithmetic lesson, that he knew would be the first to come upon the floor. Tick, tick, went the clock, and pit-a-pat went Tom's heart. Could he dare another second? If that door should be shut before he reached the top of the stairs, there was a tardy mark for him, and he was making a tremendous effort about marks this term. Would Hal never move? Perhaps he could creep up softly without his noticing. He put his foot on the first stair, then on the second, keeping his eye on Hal, when suddenly he was no longer there. He had glided in and the door was shut! In a second Tom was at the top and with his hand on the door-knob. The monitor, who had not really removed his own from it to turn the key, allowed it to open. Tom who felt small enough at that moment to have gone through the keyhole, was admitted, and stealing a glance at Hal, already in his seat, met a look that told him things were worse than ever.

He would have given his new hat if he had not seen it, for let him work as he would at his lessons, that look, with what it promised for recess, hung about him like some ugly hobgoblin all the morning, and seemed to put a twist into everything. He called Eheu a noun, and said the Barbadoes were in the Arctic ocean, and finished an algebra example, on the blackboard, in long division, and altogether, when recess came, he felt so completely down that he didn't care about going out at all, and if he had cared ever so much, he would not have come across Hal for all the recesses in the quarter. So he sat at his desk, and heard the shouts of some tremendous fun coming up to his window, and when the rest came in all aglow with October sun and air, his head ached, and he couldn't see head or tail to the lesson that lay before him.

But one o'clock came at last; out poured the stream again, and luckless Tom ran on with the rest, hoping that the tide swelled high enough to hide him between the waves, but they parted just in time to let Hal get a glimpse of him.

"Hallo, Checkmaty!" he shouted, "how are bishops this morning? Don't you want to send your compliments to a fellow's queen?"

"Checkmaty?" echoed Ned Farraday, a boy in the next class to Tom's; "what's that? Did you corner him?"

"Corner him! you ought to have seen me wind him up last night! There wasn't as much left of him as would point off a fraction. If he had been as slow with his moves as he was in getting to school this morning, he might have done better. How's that tardy mark going to look on the report, my man? 'Twont help much towards your three hundred, eh?"

“I wasn’t tardy!” answered Tom defiantly, for the question of the three hundred was too tender to bear touching.

“Oh, you weren’t!” cried Hal. “Wasn’t he, boys? you saw as well as I did.”

“Didn’t he get in?” asked one of the boys. “I didn’t see.”

“Get in!” said Ned Farraday, taking up the keynote Hal had given; “I should think not much! The door was shut fair and square before it saw his shadow. If anybody don’t believe it they can look on the book and see.”

“Look on the book and see,” set up a chorus of voices on all sides.

“I tell you there’s no mark there,” declared Tom again, getting very red, and the miserable feeling that had got as far as his pockets last night, was running down to his very boots.

“I wouldn’t say much about marks if I were you, Ned Farraday,” called out a boy a little larger than he. “I heard the professor call your Latin a failure, and that marks you down to six, and you know very well if Tom *was* tardy it only marks him eight.”

Ned grew red in his turn and drew in his horns at once, but Hal went on.

“I say, Checkmaty, how long has Eheu been a noun? Ever since it meant a *lass*, hasn’t it?”

“And *I* say,” interposed a voice that had not yet spoken, “what’s the use of badgering a fellow that’s smaller than any nine out of ten of you here, and can keep up with the best of you if you only give him a chance. I heard the professor say Tom was six months ahead of his age in his classes; and as for this morning, you know well enough there’s no tardy mark when the door hasn’t been locked. Why can’t you be men enough to see there’s no fun in crowding a fellow? Come along, Tom; we’re going to have a game of base-ball this afternoon, and I want you for first pitcher. Let’s all go and get dinner, and be on the ground at four o’clock.”

It was Aleck Halliday, and Tom had felt his heart come up out of his boots with a great thump the instant he heard his voice, for he knew well enough it never spoke except to make somebody feel all right, if not positively jolly.

He slipped over to Aleck’s side and walked along feeling safe in the shadow of

his tall shoulders, and almost sunshiny once more in the light of his handsome, friendly face. Tom had often wondered what Aleck was made of; he was sure there was some material in his composition very different from what went into other boys, but he had never quite decided whether it was what usually went to make up princes, or something higher still and supposed to have wings. Any how, a boy that was being “badgered,” as he called it, might be sure Aleck would fume and chafe a few minutes, as a great, noble Newfoundland might watch a cat worrying a mouse, and then, when he couldn’t bear it any longer, plunge in and scatter the sport, and stand guard by some little nook or cranny till the victim had a chance to escape. And as for the badgerers, an indefinite suspicion that they had been doing something mean was very sure to creep over them, and the ghost of an idea that it might be nobler sport to help a fellow along, than to push him down, would glimmer faintly at them from a distance; but unfortunately this never lasted long, and they were pretty sure to be ready for the next mouse that might come in their way.

But for this time the fun was over; Tom was safe, and the mousers scattered off in search of a more substantial mouthful in the shape of dinner, and one or two lessons to be got well in hand before four o’clock, so that no demands of body or brain should interfere with the promised fun on the ball-ground.

No one was more fond of the game than Tom; and though he was the smallest boy in his set, he was considered one of the best players, for he was swift as a deer, and had a true eye and hand, and a deal of pluck at carrying out what he undertook; that is to say, so long as nobody snubbed him, but that was the one thing he could not stand, and the moment anybody did it, he felt everything that would ever make a man of him oozing out at his finger-ends, and was ready to knock under for ever. He wished he wasn’t such a little fool about it; other boys snubbed each other, and were snubbed in turn a hundred times a day, and never seemed to mind it much, but it was no use with him. If there were only more Aleck Hallidays! But never mind. He was going to play a good game this afternoon, he felt it in his bones, and perhaps Hal would think something of him again, if he made a first-rate run for his side—of course he would be on his side if he were to play with Aleck.

But to his surprise he found Hal had decided to play a match-game against Aleck; and Tom, feeling pretty strong under his captain’s shadow, ventured to prophesy a victory for his own side.

“Where are you going to get it?” asked Hal.

“We’ve got better fellows on our side than you have,” answered Tom, with an innocent idea that the truth should be spoken at all times.

“I suppose you count yourself among them,” said Hal with a sneer; “name them over, and when they play.”

“No, I don’t count myself among them,” said Tom, wishing he had sense enough to let things alone; but Aleck calling to Hal just then to choose an umpire, the mouse ran off once more.

The umpire and the scorer were soon chosen; the umpire pitched up a cent, which coming down in Aleck’s favor, gave him his choice of innings, and he of course chose the second.

As Hal was captain of his side, he struck first, and sent the ball a little beyond Tom, who was pitcher. Tom picked it up and threw it to the first-baseman, who caught it on the fly just as Hal was a single step from the base.

Tom halloed for judgment, but Hal was pronounced “not out” by the umpire.

“That isn’t fair,” said Tom.

“I say it is,” said Hal.

“It’s not. I wouldn’t play to it, Tom,” cried his left-fielder.

“Well, your side can get some one else, then,” said Hal.

“Never mind,” said the catcher on Tom’s side; “let’s draw lots for a ‘say so.’” The lot was drawn, and gave the decision in Hal’s favor.

“Three grunts for Tom,” said Hal, with the same disagreeable chuckle that had worried Tom so much the night before.

“No, no,” cried Aleck; “it was out by fair rights.”

“You’re not going to dispute the umpire, are you?” said Hal; but the umpire called time, and the game went on.

At Tom’s next pitch, Hal ran for the second base; but the catcher was too quick for him, throwing the ball to the second-baseman, who caught it, and this time Hal was fairly out.

“Judgment on that,” cried Hal and the second-baseman.

“Out on the second,” said the umpire.

“There!” cried Tom as Hal went past him; “that proves it was out on the first, anyhow. A pretty place a player like you gets into when he calls for judgment.”

Tom’s side was now in; if he could only do something that would put him for once above the range of Hal’s success! Fired with this hope and with the thought of winning laurels for such a captain as he had, he took up the bat with the determination to do something brilliant; but venturing one glance at Hal, caught sight of a sideways gesture that he knew well enough was meant to remind him of the fatal swoop of Hal’s bishops the night before, his hand faltered, and the ball, instead of taking the direction he intended, struck directly in front of him. There was no chance now but in his heels, and flying like a deer, he made the first three bases successfully, but that was all. On the home-base, he could not tell how it happened, he was put out by the catcher.

“Aha!” came up a taunting laugh from Hal’s side; “there’s a case that don’t call for judgment very much;” and Tom walked off and sat down by some of his fellows, feeling miserable enough. What was the reason all games were so disagreeable, no matter how hard a fellow tried to do his best?

“Never mind, Tom,” said Aleck’s cheery voice, “Davis will make up for it, and you got those three bases handsomely.”

Tom looked up; he hadn’t ventured to raise his eyes before, lest Aleck should show that he had disappointed him; but there he was, with just as friendly a glow in his face as if Tom had covered him with glory. Tom felt his heart warming under it again in an instant, and in another moment Carter, the catcher, had knocked the ball down beyond the centre-field, and got a home-run.

Tom felt all right again now, and began to cheer on the other men to do their best, determined that he would bring in his own honors when his turn came again. The next three runners got a score apiece, but the fourth knocked a fly to left field, and was out; the next got out on two strikes and Hal’s side was in again, with ten runs ahead when they took the field.

The game however went on pretty equally. Aleck played his best, though there were some mishaps and disappointments on each side, until the eight inning, when Tom’s side got fairly “choked,” and left Hal’s still ahead by ten runs.

“Who did you say had the best fellows on his side?” asked Hal triumphantly, as

he passed near Tom.

“Now Tom, my boy,” said Aleck, “this is our last chance; show us your best playing and help the others on, and we’ll beat them yet.”

This was enough to have spurred Tom on to meet the thunders of a real battle-field, if Aleck’s honor had demanded it, and he took his place with all the determination of a Trojan.

But Hal saw it was his last chance too, and waiting till his second baseman, who was also his second best man, was ready, told him to strike directly for Tom and “scare him.” Tom started and thought he was in time, but a cry from Hal of “There’s a queen’s head for you, Checkmaty! Catch her!” flew faster than the ball. It came too disagreeably on top of the surprise; Tom muffed the ball, and three groans were set up from the other side.

Tom never could do anything after he had been hooted. He made a failure of everything that followed. The rest seemed to catch discouragement from him, and the game ended in favor of Hal’s side, with a majority of eleven, the score being forty-one to thirty.

The boys crowded together to discuss the game, but Tom had a prodigious amount of something to do at a distance. He could hear Aleck’s catcher trying to prove that the second baseman had been all wrong somewhere, and Hal’s triumphant laugh came floating down to where he stood; he wouldn’t have gone any nearer him to hear all the discussions in the world. And as for Aleck! he was sure he’d find it hard to forgive him, this time, if never before.

He managed to slip off one side of the crowd, without much notice, and made the best of his way toward home. What was the reason things always went wrong that he had anything to do with? Other boys didn’t seem to have half the trouble, or else they didn’t mind it as much. But he was sure Carter must have felt horridly to have Davis trying to make out that he had done just the wrong thing, and the rest all seemed so eager to have it proved. He wondered why there couldn’t be some pleasure in proving a fellow had done well now and then; but there couldn’t be, for nobody ever seemed to like it.

“I say, Tom,” shouted a voice behind him, and there was Aleck, overtaking him with long strides.

“I say, Tom—hallo, old fellow, you’re not drawing such a long face as that over

a game of ball are you? It isn't worth it, my man! It's fun enough while it lasts, but nothing after it's over."

"I was afraid you'd think it all my fault," Tom managed to say, though dreading even the sound of his own words.

"All your fault! Nonsense! you made as good a score as any of them, and some of the others were out on more runs than you. I didn't play any too well myself, but 'twas the way luck would have it, I suppose, and we'll beat them all the same next time. But I was going to say, you've been helping me all the afternoon, and I thought you were bothered with those examples this morning; don't you want a lift before to-morrow?"

"Helping him!" Tom could have hugged the ground he walked on!

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## CHAPTER VI.

How the October and November days flitted away! And when one knew that December was coming, and the wheels of the queer chair could never rattle over the frozen ground and plough through the snow! It made no difference, time scurried on just the same. The only comfort was in making the most of it, and that was certainly done at the almshouse. Nobody counted the number of times the wheel-chair was seen going slowly and carefully down toward the wonderful world that lay out beyond the turn, or up the other way toward the city. And sure as the hour came round, there was Sue ready for her part in the doctor's programme, and many a time the work carried her back to old days until she forgot her bargain, and the half hour stretched on into two or three times its length. How the pages were turned over in that arithmetic! But that wasn't all for Creepy. There were the doctor's visits! When he was there, such wonder, and such content; and when he was gone, there were the hours to be counted till he would come again. Every one in the house came to know the sound of the black horse's trot, coming down the road, and just how many seconds might be allowed between its being reined up and the doctor's having his hand on the door-knob. Very few they were, the listeners soon found; there was hardly time for Creepy's heart to give a bound and say, "There he is!" But after he was once at Creepy's side, no one would have dreamed that he was in a hurry. Time enough to hear just how many drives Enoch had given him, and to see the lessons that had been gone over, and to ask here and there, carelessly as it seemed, about the pain, and how the medicines were going. Then there was always a little chat about what he had seen going on in the city, and what the boys were doing there, so that, as he used to say laughing, Creepy shouldn't be altogether behind the times when he took his place among them. Then a moment with Mrs. Ganderby, or a compliment to Enoch, or Sue, and he was off again.

And all the while the days were slipping by, until November, dull and grim as some of its last hours had been, was fairly crowded out, the ground was frozen hard, and a few flakes of snow came fluttering down. Then the doctor found Enoch standing, cap in hand, in the hall, looking at the crooked chair, which, if it had been queer at first, was certainly queerer still since he had rigged the "running-gear."

"Is there any trouble, Enoch?" he asked, for the old carpenter was running his



hand through his hair, and with the most uncomfortable expression upon his face.

“Ah, sir, you never came in better time,” said Enoch; “it’s plain enough there’ll be no further use for these wheels this year, and they make an awkward thing to be standing about in the way; and yet it’s a job I don’t like to put my hand to, to undo a piece of work like that. And it’s only a few months after all.”

“A few months till when?” asked the doctor.

“Why, sir, till they’re wanted again,” said Enoch, staring in the wonder whether the doctor had asked a stupid question for once.

“Well,” said the doctor, “if you intend to keep a hospital here for broken legs and crippled children, I advise you to take good care of your wheels, but so far as my little patient is concerned, the sooner you make kindling-wood of them the better. I intend to have him walking into the city every day when the roads are settled again in the spring.”

Enoch’s stare grew ten times broader, but it was of no use. The doctor was gone, and if he had not been, Enoch would never have dared to ask him which of them had lost his senses.

“Now, my little man,” he was just that moment saying to Creepy, “we’ve come to a corner in our line of march. I’m not satisfied with what we’ve been doing for that pain, but I wouldn’t fight it any harder while these pleasant days lasted. There’s not going to be much getting out, I’m afraid, for a while, and this is the time to take. Suppose I should want to do something now and then that would make the pain seem even worse for a little while, would you have courage to try it with me?”

Up to Creepy’s mind rushed a story that Ben used always to be telling whenever anything came along that seemed a little hard to bear, about a certain slave, a great while ago and a great way off, Ben did not remember when or where, but he believed it was in the East, wherever that might be. And he did not remember what his name was, but that did not matter; he knew that his master one day ordered him to be beaten for a trifle, and when some one asked how he could bear it so patiently, he answered, “Shall I receive so much good at the hand of my master, and shall I not receive this little evil also?” And his master, hearing of it, was so filled with admiration that he gave him his liberty, and he became a famous philosopher.

But Creepy could not have told the doctor about it for his life, so he only nodded, and said,

“I am not afraid.”

“Good,” said the doctor; “and you need not be. It is only that there will be some days when things look rather forlorn, but every one of them is bringing you nearer to spring, and don’t forget that we are going fishing together when that time comes.”

So on went the weeks, and the days of pain came in among them here and there; but there were so many other things to think of! The arithmetic was no longer the only book, by any means; a geography and a copy-book came along one after the other, and for times when he did not feel like using those, there were stories enough to be read. But the doctor’s visits were more than all the books, and the great eyelids did not droop any more when he came, but Creepy had learned to look him square in the face, whatever incredible thing he might be saying. But he would not come *this* morning; that was certain enough, he thought, as he sat looking out of the window at the snow that came drifting through the air until it seemed the clouds themselves were falling. Faster and thicker every moment, and yet it had been coming all night; the trees were groaning under their loads, the drifts were like great ocean-waves up and down the road, and the grass-seeds the doctor had scattered over the path in the fall were buried ten times deeper than ever before; for though Enoch had had his shovel ready ever since breakfast, there it stood by the old clock; there was no use turning out to make paths yet.

So Creepy stood at the window, just waiting to see what would happen next, until his eyes were almost blinded; but there was certainly something coming down the road! Only a little dark object at first, but nearer and larger every moment. The black horse and his sleigh! And almost before Creepy could rub his eyes and try to see more surely, they were at the gate, Enoch’s path was broken for him, and the doctor was at the door shaking the snow from his shoulders and taking off his fur cap to knock down a pyramid from the crown, before Mrs. Ganderby should find it melting over her floor.

“So you thought it was the sheeted ghost of myself, eh?” he said, laughing, as Creepy opened the door; and Creepy laughed too, for that was one of the things he had learned of late, though not from any book. “You’re mistaken, sir; I never was heartier in my life. There’s nothing like fighting a storm, to send one’s

blood gayly to his finger-ends. And how are you this morning, my little man? Brave and well? Not quite equal to breasting this weather yet, eh?" and he stooped with one of those quick looks into Creepy's face that always made his heart leap up into his throat.

And the weather, as if finding that it had done its worst and troubled nobody, took a new tack; the clouds shut their gates and drew off, then began to break away, and by the time the doctor was ready to go, were rolling like great fleeces over a blue sky, and the sun was pouring down, and the whole work of the storm lay in one measureless, glorious glitter over the earth.

"It looks well this morning, doesn't it, this world that we own?" said the doctor, as he snatched a glance while he drew on his overcoat. "A pretty proud bit of ownership for us all, I think, don't you? Some of its treasures may not be distributed just even, all around, but the thing itself belongs to us. Eh, my man?"

What was he saying? Who? He said a great many things that seemed like dreaming, and yet, he surely would not say them, if they did not seem real to him!

As for a bit of this life belonging to Creepy, he didn't call that a dream any longer, since he had the doctor's friendship; it seemed to him he not only lived, but basked in the sunshine, since that joy had come in. But God's world, the real, great, wonderful world that lay out beyond the turn in the road, out beyond the city even, stretching away into beauty and treasure that he often tired himself with trying to imagine; ah, that could never be! That was for the well and the strong and the rich; for people who rode in their carriages, and would only think him fit to run after them and open the carriage-door. For the doctor too, of course, for every one ran after him, and *he* would be rich some day. But for himself—

The doctor stooped, shot a look into his eyes, and saw it all. In another moment he had lifted Creepy gently in his arms, as he did that first day under the old butternut, and was holding his face right before his own.

"Look here, my little man," he was saying, "I want to have this thing understood once for all. I have been trying to put some new ideas into this head of yours, these three months now, but I have not succeeded as well as I wish, and I must see if I can make myself understood this time. Who do you think made this world, and who do you think He made it for, this King of ours who has taught us all to call him Father? Don't you know that whatever a king owns, the princes

have a share in as heirs; and more than that, there's a dominion set apart for them now and then, as a birthright? This is a great, glorious, beautiful world, as everything our King makes is, and he made it for us, his children; and the Prince Royal, our Elder Brother, who came and walked among us, bought it again for us by his life and his death, after things began to go wrong. I tell you, my boy, we're of royal blood, you and I, just as much as the greatest man that other men bow down to; we can't be *more* than the children of the King, any of us. Only see to it that you keep close to the Prince Royal, and follow his steps like a child of the house, and you can claim your share with the tallest and the strongest of the sons. And if you don't get hold of a square acre that men will call your own, in the course of your life, you can look at the blue hills and the soft skies, and walk among the broad fields and the flowers, with just as happy and as glad a throb in your heart as the people who have paid thousands for them. Do you understand, little man? Do you believe what I say?"

Once more Creepy couldn't have spoken for his life; but though the understanding and the believing that the doctor was asking for were only stealing over the edge of his heart, like the first ray of morning, yet they were making a glow there not so very different from the rosy light he had seen the dawn spread over the snow-drift under his window. It flushed up to his cheek with very much the same color, and satisfied the doctor better than words could have done. With the same quiet, gentle pressure that Creepy remembered so well, he placed him in his chair again and was gone.

He was gone, and Creepy stood by the window once more; but was it the same little almshouse cripple that had looked out from it in the morning? It seemed to him that chains had fallen from him, as his heart opened wider and wider to the doctor's words. The warm glow grew to a great throbbing joy, and he felt himself stretching up from the stunted little soul he had been, and *almost* laying his hand upon things more joyful than he had ever dreamed that even a strong man could reach.

The Prince Royal his Elder Brother? That meant the Lord Christ, of course. The doctor had spoken of him more than once, but Creepy had not dared put the "all but me," aside then. But why not? Keep close to Him? Why shouldn't he? Didn't he come close to the doctor? and wasn't the Lord Jesus like him, only a thousand times stronger, and wiser and gentler even than he; for wasn't He a physician himself when He was here, and wasn't He always the same? Did He not call the weak and the lame to Him, and did He not once take some of them in his arms, just as the doctor had taken him to-day? Children of the King, and the Elder

Brother sharing his birthright with them? Oh, how different the world looked this time out of the queer old window! He stood still and almost held his breath, for it seemed to him as he looked up into the blue sky, that he felt some one drawing near, and the same bewildering joy that had come when he first felt the doctor's arms around him, rose up in his heart once more, only stronger and deeper than before. For was not this some one who would never go away?

“Which I did say,” exclaimed Mrs. Ganderby to Sue, a few days afterwards, as Creepy passed through the room with two or three of his precious books in his hand, “which I did say wonders never would cease; and here is the showing of it before our own eyes, for I mentioned at the same time that sometimes doctors cure and sometimes they kill, and sometimes they do neither one nor the other; and here it is, not only that he's getting the poor crooked thing where he's going about so light on his feet that the name Creepy will soon be no further use to him; but the child that I thought would never learn to look anybody in the face otherwise than to beg their pardon for being in the world at all, is certainly getting a way of holding up his head and going about as if he'd found out that his soul was his own, in spite of anything that heaven or some people that were lower hadn't seen fit to do for his body, which there is no one could be more pleased than myself to look on and see it, though if it isn't altogether like a miracle of the olden times, I don't know what any one could put themselves about to call it.”

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## CHAPTER VII.

The hum of Tom's schoolroom had gone steadily on all this time, and was busier than ever, if possible just now, looking forward to the few days' vacation just at hand, after which would come the short closing term of the year, followed by examination-day, the culmination of all excitement to the graduating class. Aleck was at the head of that, and Tom tried not to think of the day when he would go; it seemed to him school would be like a boxing-match without gloves after that; he wondered if he ever *should* get used to rubs and knocks so as to go on comfortably through the world. As for a world where people did not like giving them well enough to keep you in much danger, he never dreamed of such a possibility. If he could only pluck up enough not to mind it more than other boys! And yet he was sure, if the truth were told, they didn't like snubbing and being crowed over much better than he, but they had a way of getting over it as he couldn't.

However, if he stopped for more reflections, his arithmetic examples would not be done, and he plunged in among them with such zeal, that the last one was soon unravelled, and stopping to breathe a moment before taking up his Latin, he caught sight of a little performance going on between two of his neighbors, Carter, the catcher who had retrieved fortunes for Tom the afternoon when luck was so against him on the ball-ground, and Davis, who sat just behind him, and at Tom's elbow. They were in a class higher than Tom's, and had some pretty tough knots come in their way, as he very well knew, and they were at work at them just now, but each very much in his own fashion. Carter sat with one hand drawn through his hair, and pressing it tight with all his fingers as if that would help pull through his difficulties, and with knotted brow was working away like a Trojan, with no eyes or ears for anything off the battle-field, while Davis behind him shuffled over his pages for some rules or example that should throw a little light, frowned, put down a few figures, rubbed them out again, and pushed his slate impatiently aside.

At last, happening to peep over Carter's shoulder, he saw the result of his toil. Every example but the last done to a fraction, and lying in neat figures in its own corner of the slate. A gleam of satisfaction spread over his face, and drawing a little closer, he quietly and with rapid strokes, transferred every one to his own slate. All but the last. Carter was still at work upon that, but it wouldn't come.

Over and over again the figures were erased, and the example begun again at the beginning.

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Davis under his breath, “time’s nearly up;” and writing a note to one of the older boys who sat near, he quietly passed it over to him, and in a few moments received it again, with the example clear as daylight on the back, and requiring but a moment to transfer it to his slate.

None too soon, however, for the bell rang as he put down the last figure, and the class was called to the blackboard.

Carter was at the head, a place he had held for some time by persistent, hard work, and accordingly explained the first example with a precision that showed it lay clear-cut in his own mind. Others followed rapidly, and the last fell to Davis.

“Have you the last, Davis?” asked the professor.

“Yes, sir.”

“Let us have it, then.”

He made his proposition and began, but there seemed to be some trouble. He was not apt to get confused, but this certainly made hodge-podge.

“Where is that example?” asked the professor.

“There, sir,” said Davis, handing up his slate.

He ran his eye rapidly over it, and returned it.

“That is all right,” he said, “and very well done, and so are all the rest. You must learn to keep what you know a little more at your command, Davis. How many of you have the example?”

How they had managed poor Carter could not imagine, but every hand except his own went up.

“You haven’t it, Carter?”

“No, sir, I couldn’t get it.”

“I shall have to send you down, I’m sorry to say.”

The boys made a great deal more haste than was necessary, he thought, to let him pass down and change places with Davis, adding one or two very expressive winks to remind him that his hope for a star on the record of that term was gone.

But the reminders came in much plainer language at recess.

“Here we go up, up, up, and here we go downy, downy!” cried a voice, followed by a chorus.

“I can’t help it,” said Carter. “I couldn’t get it, and I don’t see how you did.”

“Don’t you wish you knew?” sneered Davis.

“Isn’t he game, to flunk at a straw like that?” shouted one of the boys, who had had the example comfortably done for him the night before under the gaslight at home.

“Never mind, Carter; perhaps the professor will let you go back to long-division next term.”

Carter looked so distressed that Tom, though furious at the whole affair, began to take a little courage that he wasn’t so much more of a fool about such things, after all, than some other fellows, when Aleck’s voice was heard to come to the rescue.

“What’s that about long-division? If it’s anything that wants a long head, and a sure one too, Carter is the right one to take it. I’ve watched him all the term, and he’s had more of those tough examples right than I ever did when I went over them, and works them out on his own hook, too, without as much cribbing as some fellows want for a single lesson. Come round this afternoon, can’t you, Carter? I’m going to unrig my iceboat, and you can handle a tool much better than I can.”

Off scattered the mousers, the bell rang, and it was every man looking out for his own again, till the exercises were ended and the tide poured outward once more.

Aleck walked on very busy with his thoughts, but this time they had nothing to do with lessons, nor even with examination-day, unless as an event that was to knock away his stays and launch him forth to make such headway as he might out of the quiet harbor of his schooldays. He had no fear of breasting contrary winds, or of ploughing the rough waves of life with a stout heart; the only trouble was to decide on the port he wished to clear for; and this question,



though it would have been easy enough if he had had only himself to consult, seemed balanced and counterbalanced whichever way he turned. But Carter never had a suspicion that anything worried him as they worked away on the iceboat that afternoon; he only thought Aleck was the handsomest fellow and the best company in the world, and wondered how it was everything went so smoothly where he was, the rough places always melting down, as the ice and snow were vanishing outside under the shining of the March sun.

He couldn't help telling him so at last, and Aleck laughed.

"Do they?" he said, "I didn't know they did; but there's something in one's way of looking at things, I suppose. If the sun were to pull a cloud of disgust over his face every time he saw a hummock of ice, they'd be likely to hold on a little longer. Looking straight at an ugly thing, with a bright face of your own, works pretty well generally, I think;" but when Carter was gone, and lessons pretty well out of the way, Aleck had need to try his own maxim, for the question that had been on his own mind in the morning came up again in full force, and didn't look any smoother or rounder for its brief absence.

It wasn't a brown-stone front, like Hal Fenimore's, in the library of which Aleck sat, but a bit of a gothic cottage slipped in between two large brick houses, with a clear sunset outlook from the rear, and a bay-window trailing with vines in front, while a tiny wing, that had begged room for itself on one side, formed a conservatory, from the windows of which flowers of every hue had refreshed the eyes of the passers-by through all the long, dreary winter months. If Creepy could but once have rested his eyes upon them! His most gorgeous dreams of what this world might be would have paled into gray twilight before their unimagined beauty.

The brick houses on either side stood guard over the cottage, as if they had taken it up for a pet, and inside its walls everything seemed to be petted as well. In every nook and corner stood some delicate, graceful thing, and every article of furniture, every picture on the walls, and every ornament about the room, seemed chosen to be loved. But the fairest ornament of all to Aleck's eyes was the sister from whom everything else had taken its coloring and its tone, and he glanced involuntarily up from his book now and then to watch the graceful movements of her white fingers as they followed the pattern of her embroidery.

"I don't believe there's a fellow in the city that's got anything to compare with her," he thought as his eye rested on the poise of the beautiful head, the golden

hair drawn back in waves and ripples from her forehead, the soft eyes drooped over their work, and the half-smile with which she followed her thoughts, whatever they might be. “I *know* there isn’t,” and down he plunged again into syntax, roots, and terminations.

The brown eyes were raised at him just then, and let the embroidery wait a moment, while their owner thought what a manly, handsome fellow Aleck was, and how like his father, and how proud she should be some day when she should see him taking his father’s place in his profession, his father’s old friends welcoming him, and new ones of his own rising up on every side. There were a good many sacrifices to be made, and a good deal of waiting to be done, before that day should come, but it would repay them all a thousand times.

Aleck lost all this, deep in the mazes of an irregular verb, but he was out again by the time the eyes had gone back to their embroidery, and snatched a minute for another look and thought of his own.

“Poor old Nell!” he said to himself, “she has set her heart on making a lawyer of me, and I—” up and down went the balances again, and then the lesson would have attention once more.

“Yes, yes, I see; it’s irregular, and it works under Rule 53. I’ll make a note of that.” Another glance at Nelly, and down went the balance again. “And if she does, what is it going to cost? Four years at college, three at law studies, and as many more, if not twice as many, before anybody’ll give me enough to do to keep soul and body together; and by that time, where will she be? All the bloom of her life brushed off while she’s waiting for me to come to something! Pshaw!” and in he went again among the Ps and the Qs of the dictionary.

The lesson was done at last; he was master of every word, and closed the book, but that was only to open the discussion of the future again.

“And I know very well how it’s to be done, too,” he went on. “There’s just enough, as things are now, to keep up the house for her, if I were to take care of myself; but when it comes to pulling me through those seven or eight years, there’s only one way to do it. Think of selling out everything here, and letting her follow me about in some ugly boardinghouse or other, with only the chance of my being able to make things up to her by-and-by!” and for once Aleck seemed to have found something he could not melt down by looking at it.

“Finished, Aleck?”

“Yes, Nelly, and to-morrow finishes the week, and next week finishes the term; then three days holiday, then ten weeks more.”

“And then?” said Nelly, and the half-smile brightened into something radiant.

Aleck hesitated. He knew the picture she was drawing; how was he going to rub it out, and drag her into all the bothers of a new decision? But he couldn’t put it off much longer. Perhaps it had better come at once.

“Never mind about then,” he said gayly, “let’s talk about now a little while. I never thought I should get ahead of you in anything, Nelly; but I don’t believe you had your first offer before you were sixteen, and I had mine day before yesterday.”

Nelly laughed.

“I hope you didn’t vow secresy,” she said.

“On the contrary, Uncle Ralph wished me particularly to consult you.”

“Uncle Ralph! What is it, Aleck? I don’t understand.”

“He wants me to go into the store with him, and offers to teach me all he knows, and to give me a share in the business as soon as I am ready for it.”

The smile vanished, and a shade of pity came over the beautiful face.

“Poor Uncle Ralph! He is alone in the world, and I suppose he longs to have some of his own kith and kin with him every day. I am sorry he asked you, it will be so hard to refuse him.”

“You don’t think I had better go, then?”

“Why, Aleck!”

That was all she said, but the tone and the look said a thousand times more.

Aleck laughed in his turn.

“Do you say why? Well, I say, why not? I don’t believe I shall ever make such a prodigy of a lawyer, sister mine, and it’s a horribly long pull ahead before I show whether I do or not, and here is a chance to take care of myself right away, instead of dragging on you a dozen years; and I tell you, Nelly, it would take all the man out of a better fellow than I am to do that.”

“Hush, Aleck! You know how much papa wished you to have a profession, and his own above all others.”

“I know it, Nelly,” said Aleck, gently; “but perhaps,” and he glanced questioning in her face, “perhaps he sees some things differently now. At any rate,” he added more lightly, “there are more professions in these days than there used to be, and I’m sure a druggist’s, or at least a chemist’s, is counted among the most respectable of them. And as for Uncle Ralph, every one knows that he makes a profession of his work. Why, what do you think came to him from England the other day? A certificate of fellowship in the Royal Academy of Sciences! Imagine me in that place! Wouldn’t that shine brighter than being called a brother by the members of some county bar?”

“Aleck, why will you trouble me by talking so?”

“Trouble you, Nelly! I wouldn’t for the world; but Uncle Ralph wants his answer day after to-morrow.”

“Well, it is ready for him; he need not have waited as long as that. Tell him we both love him with all our hearts, for his own sake and dear papa’s, and if he is lonely nothing would give us greater joy than to have him come right here with us, but that it was papa’s wish you should study.”

Aleck had left his seat and stood behind his sister’s chair, bending caressingly over the knot of golden curls.

“Nelly,” he said, in low earnest tones, “papa did not know how little there would be left; he did not know how it would have to be done. He was a gentleman himself, every inch, and he wanted me to be one; but which would he say was most worthy of the name, to take the little that belongs to my beautiful sister, and use it up, on the chance of returning it after years and years, or to go into an honorable place where I can be of more use in a month, saving life and health, than I could in a year of settling quarrels and splitting hairs? Nelly, I *can’t* do it! I *can’t* take what belongs to you! If I ever get a profession, I must wait till I can earn the money, and that will put the happy day so far off that you will be a tired-out old lady, waiting for it,” and he laughed again, for Aleck never looked on the gloomy side many minutes at a time.

“And if money were as thick as blackberries,” he went on, “I’d rather be a doctor, anyhow; and this comes next door to it, and I’m not sure but a little above, for the doctors can’t move hand or foot without the druggists. I tell you,

Nelly, there's more in it than you think, and I might come out so scientific, and such a wise man, that you wouldn't venture to speak to me except in the most respectful manner. It isn't as it was in old times, when doctors took a spoonful of almost anything out of their pockets for a patient! I wish you could just see them come to Uncle Ralph with some difficult, delicate thing that they want done, and that they can't do themselves with all their wisdom, to save their lives and their patients' too! And I promise you it's a place where the greenbacks come in! And I should get my share of them, instead of starving to death, waiting in my office like a spider in his web, to catch my first unlucky fly!"

He waited for an answer, but Nelly did not speak. "Nelly," he began again, very softly, "I believe papa can see into Uncle Ralph's heart now, and if he can, I know what he would say. I only got a glimpse, just one peep through his eyes, and it almost brought the tears into mine. They plead pretty hard, Nelly!"

Nelly's lips were pressed tightly together, and then parted suddenly. "Day after to-morrow, did you say, Aleck? Don't speak of it again till then. I will tell you when that time comes."

When it came, "Aleck, dear," she said, with a smile, "do whatever you like best, and whatever you think best. I shall be satisfied, whatever it is."

"All right," said Aleck, with his gayest glow in his face; "I'll go and see Uncle Ralph."

So it was settled: and Aleck never knew the pang it cost her to give up the long-cherished plan for his future, or how thankfully she would have made any sacrifice necessary to its accomplishment; and she had no suspicion that he had sacrificed the darling dream of his life, rather than feel himself a weight upon her, and say No to the lonely heart that was craving what only he could give it.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

The doctor had fallen into more than one fit of musing since the one that carried him three doors beyond his destination on the morning Enoch's wheels were being fitted, and the result was, that he had come to a determination. But as he always kept his determinations very quietly to himself until it was time to act upon them, no one was any the wiser for it as yet. But at last, when the snow-banks had dwindled away under the spring sun, until only a stray mound was left here or there, and the earth began to peep out once more, brown and bare, the doctor made up his mind that the time had come. He had just arrived at that conclusion, when his office-door opened, and some one came softly in. He knew the step, and could see the tall, gaunt form of old Joan, the housekeeper, with her apron-strings tied in a hard knot, her silver-rimmed spectacles, and her high-crowned cap, just as well as if he had raised his eyes from his book. But Joan never liked to be noticed when she came in; so he went on reading, with his feet in the chair before him, as though no one were within a thousand miles.

Joan had only come to see about the fire, that was all; at least all she meant should be understood; but the doctor knew very well, from the endless brushing she was giving the hearth, that she had something on her mind that would bring her round in front of his chair if he only gave her time enough, and this suited him very well, as he had something to say to her himself. Joan had followed the doctor from the time he needed a nurse until he required a housekeeper, and she would have been almost ready to quarrel even with him, if she had heard him talk to Creepy about their owning shares in the world together, for it was very much her opinion that the world was made for the doctor exclusively; and if there were a few other people in it, that was principally for the purpose of supplying him with a round of patients.

"Ah but he's a braw laddie, and ony auld heart might weel be proud o' raising sic a bairn," she said to herself, as she glanced toward him once or twice while she still brushed vigorously away at the hearth, "though it's true I never taught him the fashion he has o' taking the chair before him that's almost higher than his head to tilt his feet in, like a parrot fingering the trammels o' his cage. It's no so unco handsome as the rest o' him, but what can a young man do, shut up in a room like this, with never a fair face to smile on him from ane year's end to anither; and if he were to bring a young wife hame wi' him, wha kens where old

Joan might find hersel' then? Na, na, it's no change o' that kind I'm asking, but *some* things ought to gae differently, for the pride o' the house, and if he doesna see it for himsel', why then old Joan maun e'en speak her ain thocht, that is a'."

But the speaking did not seem so easy after all, and Joan had come fairly round before the doctor's chair, as he had expected, hearth-broom in hand, without getting her words into shape.

This wouldn't do. He had something to settle with Joan himself, and he must catch her in a propitious frame: at the same time he knew that if he spoke first, everything would go wrong; so without looking up from his book, he carelessly touched another that lay on the chair before him, with his foot, and down it went upon the floor, and the flood gates were opened.

"Hoot, mon!" exclaimed Joan, stooping to pick it up, and wiping it tenderly with the corner of her apron, "hoot, mon, and canna ye be content wi' finding yoursel' maister o' a book like this, that not one out o' ten thousand o' your neebors has learning eno' to ken the meaning o' the very cover itsel', that ye maun toss it under foot in sic a fashion? It's no that I begrudge gathering it up again, but I dinna like aught belonging to yoursel' to meet wi' disrespect, and that's what I'm fearing ilka day will be coming to the house, a'though no fault o' mine. Not that I fash mysel' sae muckle if folk maun e'en mind ither folk's affairs, but I'm an auld woman to be keeping up the credit o' an establishment like this."

"You want some one to help you, Joan?"

"Help me!" exclaimed Joan indignantly, brushing her apron off sidewise with both hands, as if to brush away the aspersion, "ye ken weel enough Joan wants nae help, nor ever will, while her two hands can serve the laddie she raised up to be the learned man he is, wi' half the city running after him to save their lives and show them the way out o' trouble. Nae, nae, it's no the work I'm fretting after, it's only the gude and proper face o' things before the een o' the world."

The doctor looked up at her as if he could not understand a word.

"But you've always been called a remarkably good-looking woman, Joan, and I don't see that you look a day older than you did the first time I saw you."

"Whist, mon!" and Joan brushed the apron harder than ever, "wad ye drive the patience clear frae a body? Dinna ye ken that ilka time there's a summons for

your services, if it's the richest mon in the town sending for you to come and bring him back from the grave, there's naebody but an auld woman with her cap and spectacles to open the door for him? The cap may be as white as snaw, but it's no the livery that's becoming to a skelfu' doctor's house, and are whose name will soon be kenned far an' wide among the wisest o' 'em."

"But what would you have me do, Joan? A young doctor may have all the wisdom of Solomon, but he's got his way to make, and his porridge to earn, for all that, and he must wait awhile before he can afford to waste his fees on the vanities of life."

"Waste! And wha kens better than yoursel' that it would be neither waste nor vanity to ha' things fitting and becoming and commanding the respect that's due a high calling like your ain? And what great physician's house did I ever see among my ain at home that had na his footman or two to open the door before ever a body had time to lay hold upon the handle o' the bell?"

"Suppose I get one then?" asked the doctor, looking very gravely in her face.

"You're no serious," she said; "you're no so easy to persuade, or to come round to the sound o' reason a' in the moment a body just sets it before your een."

"No," said the doctor, "I don't suppose I am, but the truth is I've been thinking of the same thing myself. But you know," and the doctor got up, laid down his book and shook himself, "you know, Joan, every ladder must have its lower rounds, and you must not expect all the glory of midday, when the sun is just getting above the horizon. Now suppose my new man should be rather small and rather young, so young in fact that it would be a good thing for him to go to school, out of office hours. That wouldn't make any difference, I suppose, in the welcome you would give him, or the kindness you would show him when he came in your way?"

Joan looked doubtful.

"It's no a' the gither what I wad choose," she said, "but half a bannock's better than nae loaf at a', and young folk grow, if you do but gie 'em time. But he suld be a braw laddie, weel favored and wi' good back and legs."

"Weel favored enough," said the doctor laughing, "but as for the back and legs, they are good in their way; and getting better every day, but I fear we can't make any more of them than the best a hunchback ever had."



Joan's face grew white. A hunchback opening the doctor's door? She would open it herself if she were a hundred years old, sooner than that should happen!

"I'll tell you about him," went on the doctor, not seeming to notice her; and beginning as far back as the night in Ben's room, he gave Joan a running sketch of the lame child as he had found him, of the dreary life, the great wistful eyes, the pain that was never tired, and the sensitive soul, shrinking away behind the "all but me" that had seemed always to rise like stony walls before it.

"Now a strong man with any soul in him can't see a child in a prison like that, without wanting to knock the gates down for him, if he can," went on the doctor, "and that's what I've been trying to do the last six months, with the help of all hands out there; and I don't think we've made a bad piece of work of it as far as we've gone. I've got the little fellow on his feet again, and he's had more than one walk already, since the snow is passing off, and he's beginning to believe all I've told him, or thinks he does, but it's more like a story than anything else, so far, and I want to make it a reality. I want to get him away from that place out there, and get him in here where things are civilized, and put him, as soon as he gets a little more strength, into the best school there is, and let him measure himself with other boys of his age, and see what he can make of himself and the world he's come into. And I don't see any way to do this, but to indulge myself in an office-boy for certain hours of the day. The child must have a shelter, and some one to look to; and he'll want more than I can be to him too. A friend something like yourself for instance, Joan;" and the doctor darted one of those quick looks and wonderful smiles at the housekeeper, that always made Creepy's heart leap to his throat. Joan's face ceased to be white long before the doctor had finished, and there was something the matter with her spectacles; she couldn't see well through them, and there was a struggle going on behind them that was plain enough. It was a drawn battle for a few moments more, and Joan flourished the hearth-broom again, as if determined to knock over one side or the other with it, but at last she spoke.

"Puir bairnie," she said, "it's no mysel' that wad we in the way o' a work like what you hae been doin', and if I have na the skill to help you in what you hae to do wi' the puir crooked back, I can e'en comfort the lane heart a bit now and then, and help it take courage for the fight with the world, that is na sae bad after a' as some folk would ca' it, nor bad enough to think the worse o' a young doctor that's willing to shelter one o' the Lord's sorrowful bairns, when he might hae the finest pair o' hands in the country to open the door for those that are looking for him."

“Good for you, Joan,” said the doctor, smiling again, “and you needn’t fear any one is going to look as far as the limbs after they once get sight of the pair of eyes that shine out above them.”

“That’s all right,” he added to himself a moment later, as he shook the reins over the black horse’s head. “Creepy has Joan for his friend for ever; now for Mrs. Ganderby.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

Joan left the doctor's office and retired to her own part of the house with mingled thoughts and sentiments. She had persuaded the doctor to grant her cherished wish: there was to be some one beside an old woman to open the door for his calls, and some one, if not in livery, at least in a tailor's suit. But a crooked back! How was that ever going to look?

"Weel, weel, it were a deed o' charity at the least, and like the doctor's ain sel' to see that sic a thing could be done at the same time he waur gratifying old Joan's pride, and doing the worthy and respectable thing for himsel'. And who kenned but it might gie a bit o' look o' distinction to the house, after a'? And who could leave a bairn like that to greet his days awa' alane and unpitied in what the doctor who kenned the truth o' it a' was pleased to call a prison. Not auld Joan. Nane suld ever say that."

Her reflections were hardly ended, before the black horse had sped away over the distance from the office to the almshouse, and the doctor was at the door again. That had long ago ceased to surprise any one; the wonder to-day was that, instead of making his way at once to Creepy's corner, he remained at least ten minutes closeted with Mrs. Ganderby, and when at last the door opened, he held it ajar long enough for Sue, just ready to dart away from the old clock, to hear her say,

"Well, well, sir, if you have such a thought in your heart, it's not for me to do anything but rejoice that the Lord has shown such pity upon him, which at the same time, there's no one in the house but will be sorry to miss the poor crooked thing, nor can do anything but wonder how you can find any way to manage things for a poor little ill-favored creature like him, much less to find him of any use to yourself; though after the change you've succeeded in making already, which it often seems to me you have done it more as the apostles used to cause the lame to walk than as a real living man of our day could be expected, no one can feel inclined to doubt or to wonder at anything you undertake."

In another moment Sue had fled away just in time, and was calling upon Enoch and all the rest to help her imagine what this mysterious speech could mean, and amid all this excitement the doctor was at Creepy's side again, and darting one

of the old quick inquiring looks into his face. But it was a joyous look too, and Creepy responded with a smile; he had learned to do that long ago, but ever since the morning the doctor had talked to him about the Brotherhood, the blood had seemed to flow with a fuller throb through his veins, and he could raise his head and meet the look of any one with what it seemed to him must be the same feeling that was making the earth blossom out into spring, green grass and flowers once more.

“So, so, my little man! All bright and well this morning, and troubles vanishing away like the last rags and tatters of winter that have been hiding in the corners of the field? Well, that is as it should be; and now, if you haven’t been taking a walk with Enoch and tiring yourself out already, suppose you should get into that chaise of mine, and see how life seems to me, driving about in it all day. I can’t let you learn what exercise is all at once, and I want to get you into drill for that fishing excursion of ours; it will be time for it now before we can say Jack Robinson.”

Six months ago this would have made Creepy’s heart stand still, and then beat with such a great, trembling pulse that he could hardly have breathed, but now he only got up from his chair with a glow in his cheeks and a great shining in his eyes, and said he was ready.

“Good! And suppose, if you shouldn’t be tired of everything before we get there, suppose we should stop at my house a while, and see if you can find anything to amuse yourself with? And if you should, and if I should be busy, as I am very likely to be, suppose we should not come back at all to-day; or if we didn’t feel in the mood of it, not even to-morrow, and give you a chance to see if you like life anywhere else as well as here?”

The black horse seemed to understand that something to deal tenderly with was being lifted into the chaise. He stopped pawing the ground as he always did when he heard the doctor’s step, and instead of dashing off at the first touch of a foot upon the chaise floor, he stood as if such a thing as moving had never been heard of, and only looked over his shoulder with wondering eyes as the doctor placed Creepy exactly where he wanted him among the cushions, and tucked the lap-robe carefully round on that side. But it was only a moment; they were all right then and off, but there was a touch on the rein that told him very plainly they were not going as fast as usual, and that every roughness in the road was to be left one side, or, if that couldn’t be, smoothed over by the best motion possible.

“Driving isn’t quite what it might be, yet,” said the doctor; “but things are getting better every day, and by the end of another week we may see the dust flying, after all. Do you see that bit of green grass showing itself over there? We had better feast our eyes while we can, for we shall be coming to city pavements before we know it.”

But he seemed to be in no hurry to come to them, or indeed to come to anything or any place in particular. They took the first turn in the road, it is true, the same that Creepy used to wonder at in days gone by, and which Enoch had showed him, in the queer chair, so many times since; but instead of keeping on after that towards the city, they swept off into another, and then leisurely on till they came to what seemed hardly more than a lane, overhung by sweeping branches of great old trees.

“There,” said the doctor, “that is the way we shall take when we bring our fishing rods along with us. Do you see those willows down there, yellow as gold, and buds swelling on every twig. When they have fairly burst forth, and made green leaves of themselves, that will be the time for us to come. But this morning I don’t know that we can do better than drive a little farther.”

Creepy did not answer a word, but that was of no consequence with the doctor; he always understood him just as well when he could not speak. Was this the world that he had dreamed of so long? Was this what life had always been to other people, “all but him,” this thrill that was filling every vein, this joy at his heart, this free fresh air, this sunlight, this feeling that there was something more, still lying beyond every turn? He leaned back among the cushions and drew long deep breaths, as if in that way he could drink more deeply, and make something more his own.

The doctor chatted on, they took one turn after another, until at last there were no more to take, and they were coming fairly into the city. And now the doctor watched his patient more carefully; he saw that the great blue veins were swelling up in his forehead as he had not seen them now for a long time. The palaces and castles, as they seemed to Creepy’s eyes, the countless, wonderful throngs of people, the hurry and bustle and bewildering noise, were going to be too much for him; they must take the shortest cut home.

That brought them past the little cottage between its two brick guardians, and Creepy caught sight of the conservatory window. In an instant he had started up with a sudden cry, his cheeks turned pale and then crimson, and he leaned past

the side of the chaise until, for a second, the doctor thought he had lost him.

“Wait a bit, my man,” he said, laughing, as he caught Creepy’s arm; “they’re worth looking at, that is true enough; but I can’t quite consent that you should break your neck for the sake of a peep at them. Sit up now, like a sensible fellow, till I can roll up the curtain and then we will walk past once or twice and see what we can make of it all.”

The curtain was rolled up, and the black horse brought to a walk and then turned to pass the window again. This time Creepy’s heart *did* stand still! Geraniums, azaleas, roses, heliotropes, and jessamines; and almost loveliest of all, some one standing behind the flowers, her face as fair as any of them, and her golden hair bound back from her forehead like rippling sunlight.

She had caught sight of Creepy too, Nellie Halliday, and though she could not read the whole story on the quivering face and great shining eyes, her quick glance told her enough, and when the horse had been turned again and was passing once more for Creepy’s last look, she had broken off a handful of the rarest flowers, thrown up one of the sashes a little way, and stood holding them toward him with a smile.

Creepy turned one entreating look toward the doctor, and then felt the reins put into his hand; the doctor had sprung down and was taking them from her.

“Excuse me,” she was saying, “I thought the little fellow was an invalid, and that perhaps they might be a pleasure to him, but I’m afraid I am venturing too much,” and a blush like one of her own roses spread over her face as the doctor took them from her hand.

“Quite the contrary,” said the doctor; “my little patient is indebted to you for his first taste of one of God’s rarest gifts;” and with his hat still in his hand he was in the chaise again, and the flowers in Creepy’s grasp.

“Well, and what do you think of them?” he asked gently, after a few moments as Creepy still held them reverently, scarcely pressing his white fingers upon their stems, and turning them from side to side before his enraptured eyes.

He turned and looked in the doctor’s face. “I think,” he said, “the King must have made them for his princess.”

“Good!” said the doctor, “that’s it exactly—or for a princess now and then. At least I believe that was one who stood holding these out to you.”

But there was no time to talk about the flowers, they had stopped before the doctor's door. Could Creepy bear anything more?

With a word to the black horse, the doctor had lifted him gently from the chaise, and they were going up the steps together. And this was where the doctor lived! This had been one of the dreams over which Creepy's thoughts had run a thousand times, trying to imagine where it could be, and what it could be like. And here it was, an everyday sort of place enough to city eyes, too closely between others for any thought of conservatory windows, a brown-stone front, and an iron railing up the steps; but grandeur itself to Creepy's eyes. And now they were in the office. Books, books on every hand, and marvellous, mysterious glittering things that he could not divine the use of; an arm-chair or two, a lounge, and an ivy trailing over the window. But the doctor gave him very little time to go from one to the other.

"Now, my man, or my prince," he said, with one of his old smiles, "I want you to remember that even you might possibly, under some circumstances, get tired, and I'm afraid your physician may not be pleased if it goes too far; you have done a good deal for one step out into life, and I have some writing that hasn't been done. Suppose I just make you all right on that lounge a while, and you keep quiet there half an hour or so, while I do a little work by myself. There—I think that's about right; now if you should by any accident fall asleep a few moments, there would be no harm done."

The doctor settled himself to his writing, and appeared to have forgotten there was such a thing in existence as the throbbing little life that lay upon his sofa; but he did not forget it, not for an instant, and stole a look once in a while to see how things were going. He was afraid there had been a little too much; he had planned all he thought would do very well before the matter of the flowers came up. But he was soon relieved by seeing the great eyelids droop, then rest quietly, and in a few moments more he was sure his patient was asleep.

"That's good," he said as he took one more look to make sure he was not mistaken; "only a child could do that, and I'm glad to see he has even so much of it in him. Perhaps he'll grow young enough to make up for lost time, after all."

When Creepy opened his eyes, everything was as he had left it; the doctor still sat at his table, not an article in the room had moved from its place, not a wonder had lessened, not a vision had vanished away. He wasn't even sure he had been

asleep, and the doctor said nothing about it as he laid down his pen and turned to look at him.

“There, that’s done,” he said, “and now, I suppose, I ought to go out. Do you feel rested enough to amuse yourself for a while? I think I’ll call old Joan to help you for this time. You must make friends with Joan, for you wouldn’t have had much of a doctor if it hadn’t been for her. I was smaller than you, and not a bit stronger, when she undertook to make something of me.”

He rang the bell, and the gaunt form, cap, and spectacles appeared.

“Joan, this is the little man I was speaking to you of; he is going to stay with me to-day, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps longer, if we can make him like it. Can’t you find something to entertain him with while I make a few calls?”

Joan’s face was a study as she looked at the tiny, crooked form, the pale face, and the great dark eyes that still lay on the corner of the lounge. First, amazement, then perplexity and the tender pity and readiness to help that are somewhere in every woman’s heart, no matter how sharp the outlines of her shoulders; and in none more warmly than in the old Scotch nurse’s, doubtful as she had looked for a moment.

“Indeed, mon,” she said, “it’s nae sae muckle auld Joan remembers o’ the tricks that used to amuse yoursel’ in days gone by; not that the time’s sae very lang past, either, but it’s brought its changes wi’ it, and I’ve ta’en my share o’ them, I suppose. But I’ll do what’s in my power for ony visitor o’ yours gladly enough, and more than a’ for a tired little heart sic as this seems to be.”

“Well, well,” said the doctor, “I’ll venture it. Tell him some of the marvellous stories I used to hear, or take him in your own part of the house, if he likes, and let him see how we manage to live here all by ourselves. Good-by, my little man; I’ll see you again before you’re half done with Joan,” and he was gone.

It seemed a long time, and yet a short one, before the black horse’s hoofs were heard clattering up to the pavement again. It took all Creepy’s quick wits to follow Joan in her strange talk and make head or tail of what she was saying, and she found something quite as new to herself in the gentle, patient soul, the twisted form, and the “unco sorrowfu” look that met her out of the brown eyes.

But they both kept their difficulties to themselves, and got bravely along with them; and, best of all to Creepy, Joan was never tired of talking of the doctor.



“It’ll take a lang day and a lang search,” she said, “to find anither man of nae mair years than his that can measure off against his little finger in all that suld mak the warld the better or the happier for his living in it. There’s mair wisdom in his head than in a hundred that think themselves equal wi’ him; an’ sic a braw an’ winsome laddie as he waur, an’ sae strang an’ gladsome, never dree or wearied, an’ I never kenned him afraid to raise his head amang the proudest, nor feel that he couldna fash himsel’ to lift up the weakest and the humblest o’ them a’. Ye canna see it a’ yet, but maybe ye hae kenned him lang enough to get a glimmer o’ the truth. Dinne ye think sae, bairnie?”

“I think,” said Creepy, slowly rising up from where he lay, and fixing the great brown eyes on Joan’s face, “I think the weak and the sick must come to him as they came to the Lord Christ when he was here. Don’t you think He has taught him to be like Himself?”

From that moment Joan would have fought with wild beasts, if it had been necessary, to protect and cherish her new charge.

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## CHAPTER X.

A week later Creepy was as quietly domesticated in the doctor's house as if he had been left among the inside finishings by the builder; and instead of the shrinking from everybody and everything that would once have made it impossible to him, the warm glow in his veins, that he had thought must be like spring to the earth, kept on, as warm and as life-giving as ever; his own old "All but me" seemed to have fled away, and the doctor's "Why not you?" to have made some little hold for itself at last.

And there was still one more change that covered up, if it did not eclipse, all others: a new suit from the tailor's, which, though not "worried out" by Mrs. Ganderby's "wits and patience," smoothed away so much from the queer figure, and showed to so much advantage the delicacy of face and form there really was, that Joan was actually proud to have them appear at the front door.

But the books were the great thing, after all. A whole new set, and the doctor to hear his lessons, though the doctor did not think as much of that as Creepy did.

"Well enough for a while," he said to himself, "till I can bring him up to the mark, but I don't want him moping at home with an old fellow like me; I want to get him into that schoolhouse over yonder, and let him get his blood stirred among boys like himself."

"Like himself!" he repeated, with a smile; "well, no, not exactly that, that's a fact. They've got better backs than he has, but he's got a head that will beat any half dozen of them together, if they don't look sharp. If I saw other people putting a boy of his health over the ground he's making, in the same time, I should say they were a set of fools, but it seems nothing more than play to him. I believe I could get him admitted there in another six weeks, and he'll make a steady run through, if I can only keep up his health, and then—"

The doctor glanced with a look quite like fatherly pride at Creepy, where he sat with his hair pushed back from his forehead, his slender fingers buried in the pages of his book, and the brown eyes devouring what lay before them.

"And then," he went on, "I don't know about trusting him at college. I'm not sure he'll have strength for that; but we'll make a doctor of him yet, and one that

knows what he's about too, if I'm not very much mistaken."

And so the time slipped away; long, velvety grass made one forget the snow had ever lain in the fields, the willow-buds had burst and were swinging like long, gray plumes over the brook, and Creepy and the doctor had been trouting along its shore. That was a day that bewildered him as much as the sight of Nelly Halliday's flowers, but the doctor was not afraid this time; the cool, fresh air and the quiet rests under the old trees with the picnic-baskets were a balance on the other side, and Creepy's quiet laughs breaking out now and then told that everything was going right.

"So," said the doctor that evening, as Creepy lay curled up in the sofa-corner for a rest, "do you remember the two things we talked about under the old butternut-tree? Fishing and going to school, weren't they? Well, now we've tried one of them and like it pretty well, hadn't we better be getting ready for the other?"

Creepy only laughed and drew himself up with a look that rewarded the doctor for all the pains he had taken. It was the "Why not you?" smiling quietly out of his eyes, for after he had really gone fishing with the doctor, what else might not come to pass?

But not quite yet. Creepy must get used to as much of the new wine of life as he was tasting now before the doctor could venture on filling any nearer to the brim; and moreover he was afraid the "Why not you?" was still a pretty feeble little thing. If anything should happen to crush it down and break it off to the roots, he did not know as he should ever be able to raise it again. He was very much afraid the "All but me" would start up once more and choke it out for ever.

So Creepy went on with his lessons, and understood Joan better every day, and drove about behind the black horse until the palaces and castles began to look more like houses for real men and women. But best of all was a walk now and then quite by himself past Nelly Halliday's window, and more than once he had come home with just such a handful of treasures as had set him beside himself the first day he came into the city.

But if Creepy was getting used to the affair of the flowers, and began to take it quietly, so that it didn't set him in a toss any more, the doctor didn't seem to be.

"Pshaw!" he said to himself as he saw them, "that's the privilege a child has without asking for it! I'd give a month of my life to see a face like that again, and I don't dare even to steal a look through the side of my chaise as I drive by,

while he can walk up to the very window-pane and wait till it opens to him.”

But he only asked quietly, “Who gave them to you, my little man?”

“The princess,” said Creepy, seriously enough.

The doctor laughed, and said, “Good,” again, but the second time Creepy had a different answer.

“The princess cut them for me, but some one else who was with her jumped through the window and brought them to me. He was handsome, too,” and then the doctor had two to envy, instead of one.

He would not have disturbed himself much about it, though, if he had seen that it was only Aleck, and had heard him at that very moment telling Nelly, with great fun in his eyes, that it was all very fine for him to play humble servant and dispense her favors, until some older pair of beseeching eyes than their new visitor’s should stand pleading before the door.

But Nelly’s sweet thoughts were wandering off after Creepy, and she would have envied the doctor to his heart’s content had she known that he had the happiness of doing every day and all day long what had only fallen in her way two or three times, and might never come again.

“I wish we knew where the little fellow lives, Aleck, and whom he belongs to. Somebody is kind to him, I know; but it seems strange they don’t provide him with a few flowers of his own, he seems so ravenous for them. I’m almost glad they don’t, though, it is so delightful to have him coming here now and then.”

The doctor thought it strange, too, and was just then berating himself for a stupid fellow, that it had never occurred to him how they would have brightened up the almshouse the last winter. However, he couldn’t be altogether sorry, and if things had come round so that Miss Halliday’s flowers were straying into the office, and bringing in a light and a fragrance such as the dull, old room had never known before, it was too pleasant to quarrel with altogether.

“An’ what’s the doctor been making up his mind to, now, I wonder?” said old Joan to herself as she lingered about with her dusting one morning. “Something, I ken well enough by the glint in his een and the close-pulled line about his lips. Something is sure to happen when his face sets itsel’ that fashion;” and she was right.

“Joan,” he said, “the boy is ready to go to school. It is high time; it’s altogether too dull music shut up here with only an old woman and a young doctor to speak to from one day to another. The last term of the year is half out, it is true, but he had better go the half and make a few acquaintances to amuse himself with through the long vacation, and then he’ll be ready to start fair and square when the next year begins.”

“Hoot, mon,” she said, “canna ye see that the wee bairnie is doing weel enough whaur he bides, that ye maun tak him and turn him loose amang a parcel o’ boys that’s mair like wild animals than anything fit to be trusted wi’ a tender flower ye hae but just now taught to haud up its head a bit at the best? Only let ane o’ them trample down your wark wi’ a rough-shod foot, an’ whaur would it be then?”

“That would be an ugly piece of work,” said the doctor; “but boys are not so bad as you think, and a wild animal would be a mild term for one that wouldn’t lend a helping hand when a little fellow like Creepy came in his way. And that’s the very thing I want; there are some things you and I can’t do for him, let our will be ever so good.”

“Weel, weel,” said Joan, “its no becoming for me to be disputing wi’ a doctor about his patient; but if any harm comes, it may need doctor and nurse baith to bring things right again.”

“We wont look for anything of that kind,” said the doctor; “and as for ‘bringing things right,’ I don’t see that much help is needed from anybody just now. Did you ever think the boy would stand as straight, or walk as fast, as you see him to-day? It’s about time to say Good-by to that name of his, I think, though I don’t know exactly where to look for another.”

“And what need hae ye o’ anither, if anither means aught different frae your ain?” said Joan. “Havena ye as fair a name as the world turns its ear to, and dinna ye intend keeping the bairn near eneugh yoursel’ to let him hae a share in it? What harm wad come to ony o’ us if folk should learn to ca’ him Thorndyke?”

“None in the world,” said the doctor, laughing, “and if you and he are agreed, we’ll call it settled.”

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## CHAPTER XI.

The hurrying, scurrying, scrambling stream of boys was once more leaping and pushing, running and walking up the schoolhouse-stairs, where Tom had waited so long in vain hope that Hal would "move on." There were not so very many of them, not more than thirty-five or forty at the most; but there was something in the way they were getting up stairs that would have made any one who wasn't used to it sure there were legs and boots enough for fifty or a hundred. They subsided considerably at the schoolroom-door, though not altogether, as the bell had not yet rung, but one by one, as they passed in, they seemed struck into dumb astonishment at what they saw. It was only Creepy standing by his desk while the professor looked over his books, and talked pleasantly of the place he had better take in the classes. But the queer, twisted little form, the great head with its high, white forehead and brilliant eyes, and the color coming and going like a living thing in the pale cheeks, seemed to put a spell on the boys, and held their eyes as if they had seen a hobgoblin, until the professor turned his own upon them with such a flash and frown as sent them off to their seats and their own affairs in a twinkling. But Creepy hardly heard what the professor was saying; the rush had taken his breath away, and though he had not dared look up as it came, he felt every step that passed near him, and his heart was throbbing again as it had not since the day when he crept out to his little room after the first visit from the doctor.

And it would not be quiet after the bell had rung, and every one was so busy that he had ventured as many glances as he liked about the room. Was this school? Were these the boys he was to know and call his schoolmates and companions? But so many! Such a great crowd! He had not thought so many boys ever got together in one school; he had hardly thought there were as many in the city! How should he ever come to know one from the other? how would he ever dare to speak to any of them? Oh, why did he come away from the doctor and Joan? He felt happy, and remembered that he was one of the princes when he was with them; and the professor, too, he did not mind; the doctor and he had had such a pleasant talk when the doctor came to introduce him, and he had said so many kind things already. No, he should never be afraid of him, but there were too many of these boys, and still more in the next room.

His head felt dizzy and he laid it down upon his desk, and listened to the hum a

while with his eyes shut. How was he ever going to study in the midst of it?

But somehow, after the first half hour, it did not seem quite so much, and by the time the bell struck ten o'clock, Creepy was going on with his lessons with a steadier pulse and almost a feeling of pleasure warming up in his heart again. What if he were to like it, after all! What if some of the boys were even to like him, and they should come to be friends, as the doctor wished! At any rate, he should see their games at recess! The doctor had told him about them, and given him a great many directions not to run too much until he got a little used to it; he couldn't understand very well yet, but it would all come right if he once saw.

Hum, hum, went the schoolroom, and on went the routine of lessons. If any of the other boys had been told the new-comer thought it exciting, they would have called it about the strangest thing they ever heard of. Carter and Davis were busy at that very moment in the next room over an illustrated almanac they had been getting up, to show how many days and hours still remained before it would all be over, and the long vacation come on. How many hours said almanac had taken from their studies, and how much care had been necessary to conceal it from proper authorities, were questions they did not vex their souls about; it was trouble enough to Davis to furnish the plan, the leading ideas, and the plain work, while Carter designed the illustrations, and a pretty good thing they had made of it altogether, they thought.

It lay open now on Carters desk, just inside his astronomy, and he made a sign to Davis to look at the last and crowning design just completed.

Davis signalled "Tip-top" with telegraphic taps of his pencil upon his slate, and then the astronomy-class was called.

The boys filed past the open door that led from the small room into the one where Creepy sat, with a quiet, regular step until Aleck reached it, and his eyes wandering through, caught sight of the face that had looked in at the conservatory-window with such rapture two or three times, but had been missing now so long that he and Nelly had feared they should never meet it again. Without knowing he did it, he came to such a sudden halt that Carter, who was behind him, was "brought up all standing," his astronomy knocked from his hand, and the almanac went skimming away until at last it fluttered down directly before the professor's feet.

"Thank you," said the professor, with a nod and a bow to Carter; "yes, I will look at it with pleasure," and picking it up he turned leaf after leaf, and studied

one after another of the chefs-d'œuvres.

“Ah,” he said, after what seemed to the two boys an eternity of suspense, “I really was not aware I had such an artist in the school. Modesty is a virtue, and shrinks from having its work exhibited, but such masterpieces as these I must beg to hold up for one moment to the admiration of the class,” and mounting the platform he took his seat at the desk, and holding up the almanac to the view of the whole room, he turned the pages and exhibited one after another of the grand designs for the five weeks remaining, in every one of which a caricature of himself formed a prominent figure.

A suppressed murmur arose as the pictures met the devouring eyes of the boys, beginning with a bonfire of compositions at which the professor was trying to warm his icy heart, and ending with the Fourth of July in the shape of a spread eagle with wings of stars and stripes, the school bell in one talon and the blackboard brush in the other, flying away with the professor bodily, while a pile of books like a small haystack was heaped upon its back, geographies, Virgils, philosophies and grammars, helter-skelter, and hanging together no one could tell how.

Carter looked as if he would sink, or at least as if he would give all he expected to die possessed of, if a knot-hole would open and let him escape, but Davis made a tremendous effort and kept so unmoved a face that no one suspected him of having anything to do with the affair.

“Allow me to congratulate you,” said the professor, as he returned the almanac, “not only is such talent worthy of commendation, but the faithful use of time, and the expenditure of precious moments upon work of genuine importance, will if formed into a habit, become of life-long value, and I must congratulate myself that accident has brought the indication of such promise to my notice;” and with another bow he placed the fated subject of discussion in Carter’s hands, which would far sooner have reached themselves out for a flogging than to acknowledge such an ownership.

The lesson went on, but a more vivid picture filled Aleck’s mind than any Carter’s pencil could produce. That face at the desk in the other room! Their eyes had met, and Creepy had recognized him at the same instant and with a great bound of joy, and was over his book now without seeing a word, with no room for anything but the thought that he was here; and Aleck himself had to take good care that he did not stumble in his recitation, he was so busy thinking



what Nelly would say when he told her whom he had found, and how she would delight to surprise him with a handful of flowers on his desk now and then.

But the recitation was over at last and with it the first division of the morning session; the bell rang for recess and the stream poured out once more, though soberly as a funeral procession compared with the way it had passed in a few hours before.

This was what Creepy had been longing for, and yet when the moment fairly came, it seemed to him he could not stir. If he could only see that face that had looked in at the door! But he saw only one strange one after another, and each glancing curiously at him as it passed.

But the professor caught sight of him just then and divined the difficulty.

“Don’t you feel like going out? I think I would try if I were you,” he said with the same smile that had been so reassuring in the morning. “Here, Haggarty,” he added to Tom, who had hung behind as usual, to keep clear of something he knew Hal had on his tongue’s end, “take this boy along with you, can’t you, and see that he makes a good time out of it somehow. It don’t do to sit here too long without a breath of air.”

They went down stairs together, and though Creepy thought Tom seemed to be casting sidelong glances at him, it never occurred to him that he saw anything peculiar beyond his being a stranger, and the shouts coming up from the playground had such a tempting sound, that he hurried over the stairs in a way that astonished Tom beyond measure.

“This is the way,” said Tom, pushing open the door, and leading Creepy out, with a feeling that he would do anything in the world if he only knew what was the right thing, but that he really didn’t, he took refuge in a corner close at hand, and a little off the common track of the players.

“Hurrah for Carter and his almanac!” was the shout just now coming up, “Carter’s almanac, the newest thing out!”

“I say, old fellow, is it time to look out for storms?” cried Hal Fenimore’s voice.

“And I say, what quarter of the moon is best for sowing winter wheat?” said another.

“You don’t give away those almanacs, do you?” cried a third; “if you do I want

the first chance.”

“Come, come,” said Aleck, who had been distressed enough at being the unlucky cause of all the trouble, “what’s the use of harping for ever on one string. Let’s have a game of ball, or time will be up before we know it.”

The mousers scattered again, and drew off for their game, while another set were establishing bounds for a run of tag. All this had been Greek to Creepy; he hadn’t understood a word, but it would all come to him in time, he supposed, if he could ever get through this business of being acquainted. Aleck had watched for him when the stream first poured out, but had given him up before now, and moved off, and poor little Tom, feeling more and more awkward every moment, made a great effort at last to say, “They’re going to have a game; don’t you want to come?”

Creepy hesitated a moment, trying to find voice.

“What a plague! He isn’t going to answer at all,” thought Tom, and in a fit of desperation, dreading above all lest Hal should get a sight of the situation, plunged his hands into his pockets, and walked away to join the players. A sudden thought sent Aleck back into the school-room, and Creepy, who had caught one glimpse of him, felt his last hope depart.

“However nobody seems to be taking any notice,” he thought, “and I can look on, at any rate, I suppose, of course.”

So this was a real game of ball, that he had so longed to see ever since the doctor first described it to him! He couldn’t understand it yet, any better than the talk about the almanac, but the shouts and the quick runs and the eager contest took hold of him in a moment, and he forgot himself and his embarrassment together.

“Oh what sport that must be,” he thought, as the game went on; “and how strong they are, and how swift, and what throws they make! I wonder if I shall ever learn? Of course I shall, the doctor said I should;” and his cheek warmed again, not as it had when the boys rushed into the school-room, but with as spirited a glow as the swiftest runner felt in his.

“Hurrah!” shouted the chorus, at an extra toss, and “hurrah,” echoed Creepy, silently to be sure, but with none the less gusto for all that.

“Oh how I should like to try! I wonder when they’ll ask me;” and suddenly the thought that no one noticed him, which had been such a refuge at first, rushed on

him with a very disagreeable suggestion and brought the old “all but me” nearer to his lips than it had been for months. But just then he saw that they *were* noticing him; the game was halting and more than one group were putting their heads together and glancing towards his corner with whispers that must have something to do with him.

“You ought to ask him to play,” said Tom, whose feeling of responsibility in the matter had made him decidedly uncomfortable all the time—only, as he had declared at first, he really didn’t know what to do.

“Humph,” said Carter, who, still smarting under his own humiliation, felt that it would be a relief to put somebody else in his place, “ask *him* to play! A bright idea that would be. What’s a fellow like him going to do?”

The words floated over to Creepy’s ears, though they were not really intended to do so, and sent the blood tingling to his fingers’ ends, and the thought of the doctor seemed as far off as if a whole world lay between them.

The boys laughed and the game began again, but a feeling like ice was gathering around Creepy’s heart. He was not to play! They would not ask him! “Why not you?” Perhaps he did not hear, perhaps he had made a mistake. Oh, where was the doctor? Why had he ever come here at all?

“I say, you ought to do it,” began Tom again, uneasily; “the professor said he was to have a good time out of it somehow.”

“Suppose you mind your own business,” said Carter; but it seemed to Davis, who felt himself “just on the brink” with the professor about the almanac, that he might lay an anchor to windward, and he made his way across to where Creepy stood.

“Hallo, can you pitch a ball?” he asked.

“I don’t know, I never tried,” said Creepy, forcing the words from between his lips.

“Well, take this,” said Davis, falling back a little, “and stand about where you are, and let me have it the best you know how.”

Creepy took the ball and threw it with a trembling hand; it struck the ground some distance from Davis’ feet.

“Ha, ha,” shouted Carter, “how’s that for high?”

“How is that for Humpy?” answered Hal Fenimore, in a rather low tone, but heard well enough for all that.

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.”

Half a dozen voices in the crowd took up the chorus, and it rang across the playground until Tom looked up at the professor's window in agony.

Ah, those words! The lame child understood it all now! In one instant the veil his good angel had hung for all those years between his eyes and his deformity was taken away and an evil demon seemed to be chuckling the whole truth in his ear.

He was a cripple, a hunchback, an ugly thing to look upon! He should never be like other people, and other people would never forget that he was unlike them. Wherever he went he was to be marked, ridiculed, and avoided! A prince indeed! Ah, the doctor had been mocking him, mocking him, with all the rest! The lonely life he had thought ended to-day, had in reality only begun, for “what was a fellow like him going to do?” Who wanted a humpback to take a share in their games, much less to be counted among their friends? What was there for him but to shrink away and hide from scornful eyes for ever?

His eager, glowing face had turned white as marble; the great eyes dilated and flashed. He drew himself up for a moment, quite beyond his poor shrunken height, and then with a wild cry, started from the grounds and fled away down the street. Away, away! Anywhere that his flying feet could carry him, only away from everybody and everything!

The boys stood and looked in each others' faces without a word. “I guess you've done it now,” said Davis, turning to where Carter stood.

“I didn't do it,” said Carter, too near being really terrified to retort as warmly as he might another time. “Better aim where it belongs if you've got anything to say.”

At this moment Aleck ran down the steps, looking as if in search of some one.

“I say, Tom,” he began, “where's that little fellow that came this morning? I thought he was up stairs, but the professor says he made him over to you. What have you done with him?”

Tom's tongue was fast to the roof of his mouth, and Aleck looked at the tell-tale faces of the other boys.

“Look here!” and his eyes flashed as the boys had never seen them, “don’t tell me there’s a coward among you dastardly enough to touch a helpless little fellow that’s carrying a burden like that!”

“We didn’t touch him,” muttered Hal Fenimore. “I suppose he didn’t like what we had to say, and he stepped out.”

“Didn’t touch him! You’d better have touched him, better have struck him in the face a hundred times over, than—which way did he go?”

Tom pointed to one of the gates, and Aleck followed through it in a flash, and was looking up and down the street; but in vain—only brisk, erect walkers were passing on as far as his eye could reach. He ran a little way past one corner and then another, but no crooked, dwarfed little figure was in sight; and burning with indignation, he came hastily back, to find the bell had rung and the boys had taken seats some time before.

And was that the professor standing in the desk, his eyes flashing fire, his face white, and his voice so terrible that half the boys had got their heads hidden behind one thing or another, as if they thought it was going to strike them?

“Didn’t think, and didn’t touch him!” he was thundering, in answer to the excuses offered; “you *did* think; you thought it would be a pleasure to see a suffering little life crushed down still farther under your taunts! And you *did* touch him; you touched him with words that were sharper than a serpent’s tooth, and may rankle like poisoned arrows in his heart to the latest day of his life! No one could ever have made me believe that I had such a school; and I could give it up now, and give my whole time to one little fellow like that you have driven away, with more hope of reward than I feel with you to-day.”

There was no reprimand for Aleck’s tardiness; the professor understood too well. He had missed the two boys together, and on inquiring for them the truth had come out. It seemed as if the rest of that morning never would take itself away, but it was gone at last, and the boys filed out under the still scornful glances of the master.

But as Aleck passed he beckoned him to the desk with a different look.

“You are a friend of that little fellow?” he asked.

“I’d like to be,” said Aleck; “but though I’ve seen him two or three times, I didn’t know his name or even where he lives.”

“You know where Dr. Thorndyke’s is?”

Aleck nodded assent.

“Well, he belongs there, and I want to send our apologies to the doctor; excuses I have none. Will you go and see how much harm has been done, and say whatever can be said? And assure the doctor, if he will try once more, not only shall there be no more trouble, but every possible reparation shall be made.”

Aleck took the commission gladly, but at the same time doubtfully enough. Now he should be able to tell Nelly that he had really found him; but to “say whatever was to be said,” was not so easy, by a long mark. Still he must know the worst of what had been done, and perhaps it might not be so very bad, after all, and it would certainly be some comfort to the little fellow to hear what a towering wrath the professor was in about it.

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## CHAPTER XII.

The black horse stood at the door, but Joan had no idea of letting Aleck see the doctor. It was part of her duty to stand guard over his minutes and save them for him when she could.

“The doctor’s hame,” she said; “I’ll nae deny it, but it’s no office-hours, and I mind he’s engaged just at this moment. If ye wad hae the gudeness to call again atween the hours o’ twa and three ye might see him then wi’ convenience to every one, or if ye will e’en leave an order on the slate. It hangs just here in the reach o’ all.”

“Thank you,” said Aleck; “but if the doctor is engaged, can I see—” he hesitated, for in all the excitement of coming off he had not even asked the professor Creepy’s name.

“The little fellow that—that came to school this morning?” he went on.

“The wee bairnie? He’s no come hame, and unco whiles it is to keep a bit thing like him cooped between walls where never a breath of free air or sunshine can find its way.”

“He’s not come home?” said Aleck in alarm, “then I *must* see the doctor!” and Joan, frightened herself, though she did not know why, opened the office-door without another word.

The doctor stood before the library with an open book in his hand, studying up authorities on a difficult point, but one glance at Aleck brought back his thoughts and sent a misgiving through them like a flash; he remembered seeing him on the school-grounds that morning.

“Have you a message from the little fellow at the school?” he asked, with one of his quick looks, and without waiting for Aleck.

“No, sir, I hoped I should find him here; but the professor wished me to say how much he regretted—indeed, sir, he is very sorry, as well as very angry, and we cannot really tell how it happened, but the boys did something or said something at recess that troubled him, and he disappeared before any one could tell which way he went. The professor was sure he was at home, or he would have sent



sooner, but—”

Before the sentence was finished the doctor had thrown his book across the room with such force that it went flying through the open window, where nothing but the iron railing of the little balcony outside saved it from the sidewalk, and the doctor himself was halfway out of the front-door. He turned suddenly and put his hand on Aleck's shoulder.

“Thank you, my man,” he said, “and thank the professor for me, if you please,” and in another instant he was gone, and sparks were flying from under the black horse's hoofs, almost out of sight down the road leading to the almshouse. He did not know why he chose it, except that it was the way he had taken so many times to find him before, and the one most familiar to Creepy himself. On, on, a mile, more than a mile, no distance at all to the flying hoofs, but a walk the doctor had never consented to Creepy's trying yet, though he had begged for it more than once. The almshouse was in sight now, but there was Enoch working on the road, and taking off his hat with as grand a flourish and as serene a smile as if he had never heard of such a thing as trouble in the world. Creepy could not have gone that way, but here was the old turn in the road that he used to visit so often.

A sudden thought struck the doctor. They had passed in there to follow the trout brook, and down the road, perhaps half a mile away, was a great overhanging rock, facing the brook, covered with moss, and a deep velvety bed of moss beneath it. Creepy had looked at it, and said what a place that would be to hide from a storm, and the doctor remembered the half-laughing half-serious look in his face as he said it.

He turned the black horse with a whirl round the corner and down the road toward the point where the rock lay. Not a trace of any one yet, and none to ask whom they had seen; but now the rock was coming in sight, and what was that fluttering on a torn splinter of the fence? Something white, a little thing, one of the very handkerchiefs Joan had been hemming in such a hurry that “the wee bairnie suld be as weel supplied wi' everything as ony he might meet wi' at the school.”

Was that Creepy, that poor little huddled up heap of something lying there, with hands holding tightly the very roots of the moss, and a white face half buried in its depths?

For one instant, at the sound of the doctor's step, he raised the eyes that had been

so bright that morning; but in another he had turned them hastily away.

“What did you come here for?” he cried, as he had once before so long ago; “what does any one come to me for? I came here to be alone! No one must come to me again! No one must ever look at me until I die!”

The doctor stooped and lifted Creepy gently but firmly in his arms.

“Yes, they must,” he said, “I must come and take you away from here this very moment. Don’t you know you might die, lying on such a bed as that all this time?”

“Oh, I *wish* I could! I wish I were dead, dead, dead!” and then suddenly raising his head, he looked almost fiercely in the doctor’s face.

“No I don’t! I *don’t* wish it, for then the angels would cry out, ‘Look at Humpy!’ when they saw me coming! Oh, where shall I go? Where will no one ever come?”

What the doctor would have said at that moment, if he could have reached the right people to say it to, and how much more terrible than even the professor’s his words would have been, there was no opportunity to know. He clenched his teeth together for a moment as if he were fighting a terrible battle with something, and then spoke in tenderer tones than even Creepy had ever heard from him, but with the same ring in them that had always brought comfort to the lame child.

“Where shall you go? I hope you don’t want to go anywhere away from me; don’t you know you are all I have in the world, little man?”

Once more Creepy opened his eyes and looked at him. All through the long hour that he had lain there, an hour that had seemed like a year of agony sweeping through his life, the same evil voice that had whispered to him on the playground, had brought up every such word the doctor had ever spoken, and thrown them at him like cruel taunts! He had been mocking him with all the rest! It was not *true* there was a place in the world and a share in it for him, as well as other people! He had never meant it, he had known better all the time! How dared he ever tell him so!

But he was here again, he had come to find him, he *did* care! He had not meant to mock him, it was *not* all a vanished dream!

With a low cry he threw his arms around the doctor's neck and clung convulsively there, and in another moment Jet looked wonderingly over his shoulder again while the doctor, one arm still holding the crippled child, stepped into the chaise and gathered up the reins with his free hand.



## CHAPTER XIII.

There never had been anything in the professor's school like the excitement that was buzzing in every corner the next morning before the bell rang. The boys were gathered in groups here and there, and the affair of the day before, and its probable consequences, were the only subjects under discussion.

"I say, Carter," said one of the smaller boys, "I guess you wont hear much more about the almanac, after what you had to do with this!"

"What did I have to do with it?" retorted Carter. "If you've got anything to say, you'd better keep it for the one that was first to call out *Humpty*!"

"And if it comes to that," answered Hal, bravely enough, but looking rather pale, "the first one never would have been heard if a dozen or more of you hadn't taken it up and shouted it loud enough for all the world to hear. There's a few of you to divide what the professor has to say anyhow."

"Well, never mind who it was," said another voice, "but what's up anyhow? What's the mischief done, and what's the professor going to do about it?"

No one seemed to have an answer to these questions, and at last Tom ventured, though terrified at the sound of his own words.

"They say he'll never get over it; they say he's going to die."

"Pshaw!" said Carter, "die of what?" but Tom's words sounded very disagreeably and there was a moment's silence again.

"Well," said one of the larger boys at last, "it's too bad anyhow; it's a shame to crowd a little fellow like that, that's never had half a chance, though I don't know as anybody meant to do it; but anyhow the professor is in a terrible way, and I don't know how he's going to get over it, if one or two fellows don't get a ticket of leave before he's done with the thing."

This had about as ugly a sound as what Tom had said, and the boys feeling there wasn't much comfort to be had in pursuing the subject, broke up and went slowly into their places. But that was only fleeing into the very teeth of the tempest. The black eyes of the professor were fixed on the door, and each one as

he entered had to pass under a look so scathing that it seemed every guilty conscience must be read through to the depths. And when he did speak, the words of yesterday seemed only the first mutterings of a storm that was crashing over their very heads to-day.

“Would you like to hear the message Dr. Thorndyke sends to my school this morning? He sends you word that he doesn’t know whether you have killed the little fellow or not; the chances of life and death seem about equal at present; but that you might about as well have killed him, as to do the work you did for him, body and soul!

“And *I* would rather have heard that any misfortune had fallen on you, than that you were capable of so cowardly a deed: striking at the one little glimmer of light that was struggling up in a poor life like that, and putting it out for ever, for aught you know! I have seen enough of the same spirit among yourselves—the spirit that delights in seeing another humiliated and pained; and it’s base and contemptible enough even where each one takes his turn and stands his chance with the rest. But when it comes to a little creature who, with hardly the physical strength that lies in the left-hand of one of you great, cowardly fellows, is trying to stand up, and *is* standing like a hero under the burden Heaven has seen fit to lay upon him, I have no words for it. If I had had the least conception of the natures you have, I would have gone down into the playground and defended him from you as I would from a company of tigers; and with more need, for I believe many a wild beast would have found some noble instinct by which the strong cherishes the weak, and have saved his life. And if I can learn the names of those who are responsible in this affair, I will expel them every one from my school, for nothing I can teach them from books will ever make anything better than brutes of them, until they learn what are the first elements of a manly nature and a life that is above contempt!”

There was no hiding away this time. No one dared to hide, lest he should be taken for the guilty one; but guilty and innocent alike almost felt their blood stand still before the professor was done with them, and could bring those flashing eyes back from their sweep around the room and fasten them down upon anything like a book. Carter felt that if he could only live through the next six weeks, till his graduation, he would not meet the professor’s eyes again as long as he lived, if he could help it; Hal Fenimore had a mental somersets by which his memory carried him back to the night of his chess-playing with Tom, and a vague idea occurred to him that what his uncle had said about “principles” then hadn’t altogether a different key-note from what the professor was

thundering this morning; and poor innocent little Tom sat trembling with the feeling that in some way the whole thing lay at his door, and would almost have been ready to change places with Creepy, if that could in any sense have undone or atoned for it.

Aleck sat feeling almost as much distressed as Tom with the thought how different everything might have been if he had spied Creepy before going back to the schoolroom, where his errand had really been to see if he could find him. He had followed slowly behind, when the doctor left the house in such hot haste, wishing he could do something or search somewhere—but where? He felt sure the doctor knew, however, from the unhesitating way he had dashed off, and it would be all right; but when evening came he felt as if he must go once more and see how things really were, and, moreover, he had given only half of the professor's message. Perhaps there had been no great harm done, after all, and it would be such a comfort to know.

But he would hardly have mustered courage if he had realized the reception he was to meet with. The moment Joan recognized him she bristled like a watchdog that had seen one onset upon his charge, and did not know how to be furious enough in guarding it from a second. Her face was white and hard, the spectacles sat grimly on her nose, and she held the door so little open that her own form filled the space, as if she thought Aleck was going to squeeze himself in if the least opportunity were left.

“He's asleep,” she said in a sharp, dry tone, “and the doctor says he's to remain sae for mony an hour yet, and it's o' the Lord's mercy that there's aught in the power o' medicine that can do it for a puir suffering soul and body that a parcel o' iron-clad boys have made it their pleasure to trample upon.”

“Is he so very ill?” asked Aleck, too much troubled to be intimidated by her manner. “The boys will want to know how he is.”

“The boys!” exclaimed Joan; “we want nane o' their messages, but if ye will tak them ane from mysel', ye might tell them—”

She checked herself. “Na, na, that were a sinfu' thought; I maun forgie as I hope to be forgi'en; but it's a cruel sight to look upon a little life that the doctor had been cherishing and nourishing as no other man could or would hae done, and see it lyin' there now a crushed and blighted thing.”

“Is he too ill?” ventured Aleck once more; “do you think he will be too ill when

he wakes to care for these flowers my sister has sent him? He has seemed to like them once or twice before.”

“And were it your very sel’,” exclaimed Joan, throwing open the door, “were it your very sel’ that made the bairnie’s heart sae glad mony a time, when he’d never kenned before sae muckle as the fashion God made a flower to grow in? Come inside, then, and see the doctor himsel’. It will do his heart good to see a face that has once looked friendly on the bairn.”

“No,” said Aleck, “I wont come in now, thank you, but I would like to come every day for a while and ask how he is.”

“Come, then,” said Joan, “and as often as ye like, and the first day he’s weel enough to speak to ony friend but the twa that’s truest to him, ye shall e’en talk wi’ him a bit yoursel’.”

Joan wondered what made the doctor start, just the merest trifle, as she carried the flowers to him and told him where they came from, and she didn’t hear him say to himself, “So, so! the little fellow has been thinking he hasn’t a friend in the world, and he’s richer than I am this very moment!” She marched off up stairs again to take another look at Creepy, and make sure the medicine was doing its work, and that he was still asleep. But the doctor had looked out for that; and wherever Creepy might be wandering, this world with all its ugliness and sharp places was shut out; perfect rest for body and heart was the only hope for saving them from going down together under the shock they had received, and not until late the next morning did Creepy open his eyes with anything like a clear look at things around him.

There stood the doctor, looking as strong and as fresh and exactly the same in every way as the first day he saw him under the old butternut.

“Well, little man, and so you have waked at last. You and I both had a nap of it last night; but the sun is shining and the birds are singing for us once more.”

“All but me!”

“All but me!” those self-same dreaded, almost forgotten words once more. So that miserable work of yesterday had brought them to life, and killed everything else at the same time! The doctor stepped out of sight, and for one instant Creepy did not know where he was. Only at the window, having a sharp tussle with yesterday’s battle again; but the next moment he was at Creepy’s side once

more, looking just as before, and holding Nellie Halliday's flowers before his eyes.

"See here, little man, the world is beautiful after all, is it not?"

"All but me," and the great eyes looked wearily at the doctor.

It took all the self-command the doctor could muster at that moment to place the vase quietly on the table again, and take Creepy's pulse in his fingers without letting him suspect how hotly his own were flying.

"What is it?" he asked as gently as if there were neither battles nor enemies to be thought of, as Creepy closed his eyes and turned wearily on his pillow.

"Only the pain."

"The old pain?"

Creepy nodded, and the doctor laid down his hand and stepped quietly out of sight again, for that was the very story he had dreaded to hear. There it was, raging and burning up and down the twisted spine, the same trouble as of old, and threatening not only to undo all the winter's work, but to make mischief ten times greater than had ever been there before.

"Hoot!" muttered Joan from the half-open door where she had been watching the whole scene, "and fever too, plain eneugh, and as dree a pain i' the head, I warrant, as in the puir back itsel', wi' sic great cords o' blue veins swellin' above the bairn's brow. Not a word wad the doctor hearken when I told him a cripple like itsel' wad be wantin' a nurse ane day; but now the day has come, the nurse shall be Joan and nane beside;" and stalking noiselessly to the head of the bed she took her stand.

Aleck came the next day and the next; there was only the same story to be told.

"He's no himsel' at all yet, wi' all the drugs and sleeping potions we're striving to rest his soul and body wi'," Joan said, and Aleck turned away, feeling miserable enough. As he reached the corner, he heard some one call him, and Carter came running up from behind.

"I say," he said, pointing back toward Dr. Thorndyke's, "have you been up there?"

"Yes," said Aleck.



“What’s the news there?”

“Just the same.”

“Do they call him very sick?”

“I’m afraid so. It’s the shock, they say, and the long run, and lying so long on the wet ground. They say even if he pulls through this, he’ll never be well again.”

“Well, it’s a shame,” said Carter, “and I’d give all I’m worth if I’d had nothing to do with it. But I felt so confounded mean when they were all letting me have it about that miserable almanac, that I couldn’t help letting fly at the first game that came along.”

“And did that take off any of the meanness?” asked Aleck.

“Did it? I tell you I could have sold myself for a yellow dog any minute since. I didn’t see it at the time; but if I ever get through with this, I’m going to start things on a different tack somehow. The only trouble is to see just how.”

“I’ll tell you how,” said Aleck. “If you could manage to remember how the Lord has treated us, and that the only way to make a gentleman or a Christian, is the one he taught us, to love him first, and your neighbor as yourself.”

“Yes, but it makes a fellow too much of a prig to keep going over all that in his mind all the time, and measuring a text to everything he does or says.”

“Well, don’t go over it in your mind then,” said Aleck smiling; “just feel it in your heart, and you’ll be all right without stopping to measure anything when the time comes.”

“I don’t know,” said Carter, “but I must manage it somehow; I’ll never be mean enough to make anybody else feel mean again, if I can help it. But what’s the professor going to do about it? Has he found out anything yet?”

“I don’t know; I think he’s got an idea he’d have to come into the graduating class, and he don’t like to break that up. And I heard the doctor begging him not to make any trouble.”

“Good for him,” said Carter, with a grateful warming at his heart; “it would make a horrid mess for me at home if I got into trouble just now. The executive has some pretty strict notions, and I should be likely to lose something I’ve been fighting hard for, for a year. Do you know what I want to strike for when I’ve

done with Latin grammar and all that rubbish? I want to go to sea, and my father wants me in the counting-house with him. Think of that! Mounted up on a stool behind a set of leather-covered books, with never a chance to stretch yourself, or breathe the air from morning till night, and smelling of everything from gunny-bags up.”

“And what do you expect to smell if you get aboard ship?” asked Aleck laughing.

“Oh, I don’t know; horrid things enough, I suppose, but there will always be a sniff of the glorious old ocean, and the feeling you’re a free man, any how. That is to say, after you get on to the quarter-deck, and that’s what I shall aim for, and make it too, as fast as those things can be done. There are ships enough coming to the counting-house every year to give all the boys in the firm good berths if they wanted them; and as I’m the only one that does, it would seem pretty tough if I couldn’t have one. The counting-house! Bah!”

“Where do you think I’m going, if you think the counting-house so bad?” asked Aleck.

“I don’t know. Where?”

“In with Uncle Ralph.”

“You don’t mean it!” exclaimed Carter, looking at him in amazement. “I thought you were a dead shot for the law.”

“So dead that I shall never come to life again, I guess,” said Aleck. “Just step in one week after graduation, and you’ll find me there behind the counter, mixing up everything that ever went into a mortar, and not feeling myself anything but a free man either. But you never could rest on dry land since I knew you, and I suppose you must follow your destiny.”

“And when I have caught it, I’ll come to you to fit out my medicine chest, and we’ll have time then to decide who’s having the best of it,” said Carter. “But see here, can’t a fellow do anything down there at the doctor’s? It would be a sort of comfort to make amends if there was any way to do it.”

Aleck shook his head.

“He won’t be fit to see any one for longer than I like to think, and I believe his old nurse would sooner let a flying dragon into the house, if she knew you

belonged to the school. Making amends is a comfort that don't always come after a piece of work like that."

"That's a fact," said Carter; "well, let me know if there's a chance turning up anywhere;" and the two boys separated.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

Aleck came for news every day for a week before he got any different report, but at last the hard anxious look had lifted a little from Joan's face, and she almost smiled as she saw who was there.

"The bairnie's waked once mair," she said, "and lifts his een at us as if he kenned wha were his friends again, and the doctor'll no object to his having a pillow on the lounge for a bit change, the day. But the pain is unco dree, and shows no sign o' wearin' out for many a day, though the Lord suld een show pity and tak it frae him at the last. But ye'll come again, and I mak nae doubt we'll soon find the day when ye can speak wi' him yoursel', and get his ain thanks for all your kindness."

But the doctor was not quite ready for any more experiments just yet. If he had been sure that Creepy had only seen Aleck at the window, he would gladly have tried, but he would have liked to keep every remembrance of the school out of his sight for ever.

But in a few days more, it showed plainly that something must be done, or he would have only the same little patient as a year ago on his hands, and with nothing like the hope there was of better things.

"They've done their work well, those boys," he said. "I should say that was the same grieved hopeless face, the same old pain, and the same silent matter-of-course bearing of it, that I found under that dismal old butternut-tree a year ago. The only difference is, it's got a ten-times stronger hold than it ever had before, the pain as well as the rest of it, and I'm afraid it's a life business this time. I can't get a word from the child unless I fight for it, and I don't dare try even that, for fear of that miserable 'all but me,' that's taken possession of him again. I wish those fellows at the school could just once see the smile he tries to give me, as if he wanted things to be comfortable with *me*, though there was no hope for *him* in the world. And there isn't, if time and doing just the right thing don't bring him up out of this better than I see any promise of just now; and what that right thing is, isn't so easy to decide from one day to another."

The doctor paced the room two or three times, and then stopped and shot one of the old quick looks and warming smiles into Creepy's face.

“See here, little man, do you know what friend has been bringing you these flowers ever since you were sick?”

Creepy shook his head.

“I haven’t any friends except you—you two,” he said.

“Haven’t you? Perhaps you have more than you think. Do you remember who jumped through a window to give you a bunch of roses one day? It is he, and he wants to see you. Do you think you feel well enough to-day?”

“Oh no!” exclaimed Creepy, shrinking back among his pillows with almost a look of terror, and a hot flush coming up to his face, “don’t let *any* one come here! Don’t let any one come to see me ever again, as long as I live!” and the doctor saw the slender fingers tremble as he shut them tightly together.

“Well, well,” said the doctor quickly, “no one shall come until you wish it, but perhaps you will think differently before long. You will be tired of Joan and me some day;” and he turned off to talking of something else.

But he would not leave it so long.

“This will never do,” he said, when he had waited a few days more and Creepy was regularly established on the lounge; “the child must have his medicines, however bitter the first taste may be, and he needs just what he did need when I sent him to school. If he had found companions then, instead of a set of wild animals—” The doctor stopped, for he didn’t like to finish the sentence, even in his thoughts. The contrast of what might have been, with what was likely to be, was too sharp.

So he turned suddenly and lifted Creepy in his arms. “Look here, little man,” he said, “whose word would you take first, mine or the first person’s you might happen to come across?”

Creepy hesitated.

The recollection of the whispering he had heard as he lay under the old rock, shot through him. “The doctor had been mocking him with all the rest;” but he could not think so; he knew it was a lie—and yet!

“Eh, little man?” asked the doctor again, waiting for his answer.

“I know—I know you always tell me what you think is true,” he said at last.

The doctor wouldn't notice how he shaped what he said, and went on.

"Good. Do you remember I told you once there was a place in the world and a share in it for you, the same as for anyone else? Well, I told you the truth, and it is just as true to-day as it was then, but there's a battle to share in, as well as a kingdom. We've each got to take our place in the ranks, little man, and you with the rest, and you've got some fighting to do that doesn't come to all of us for each one has his own. As a general thing you've got to fight this old pain of yours I'm afraid. I hoped it was sent where it would never find its way back, but I'm afraid now we shall have more or less of it in the way, for a good many years. And you'll have to fight with feeling tired and ill a good deal, while you see others well and strong; and you'll have to remember that you are small and crooked while you see them tall and straight. And you will have to know that every one who looks at you for the first time will notice this, though those who know you will never think of it, unless to be sorry.

"Do you think you can step right into the ranks and meet all this like a brave soldier, remembering that you are serving the King and the Elder Brother? Never mind about answering just now; you can think about it awhile, and remember he has not set you to do this without providing you with weapons. He has given you a nature that can make every one love you, and a brain that can make every one respect you, and can enable you to leave half the rest of the world behind in anything you undertake; and I promise you you'll get stronger, and find yourself richer, every day you carry on the fight, like a brave little man as you are."

The fight began then and there! *Must* he, *could* he go out into the world again? Must he let any one but the doctor and Joan look at him? must he hear what any one might choose to say? He *had* thought he could *never* open the doctor's door again, never see a boy of his own age, never see any one. But if it was serving the King and the Elder Brother! If *they* wished it! And if they would think he were a coward or a shirk if he didn't come up!

There isn't sharper fighting on many a battle-field, than went on in the corner of Creepy's lounge that day; but it was too sharp to last long, and he was too brave a little soldier to lose the battle; and when Joan opened the door for Aleck the next morning, a voice, not very strong to be sure, but clear and true, called from the little room at the head of the stairs, "Ask him to come in, please."

"Come, then," said Joan, only too gladly, and Aleck sprang up the stairs and pushed open the door which stood a little ajar.

Creepy's courage had almost left him again, by that time. What if he should say anything about that day?

Aleck himself had taken one second on the way to wonder how he was going to manage it, but he stepped in as briskly and as gayly as if they were the oldest friends in the world, and everything had always been going on merrily between them.

"Why, how are you?" he said, giving his hand to Creepy; "we've missed you so long from the window, Nelly and I, that we were afraid you weren't coming any more, and how to find you we didn't know. And here you are, not five minutes walk from us after all! You see we couldn't let it go so, after we had once got to expecting you, and so when you stopped coming I returned some of your visits. That's fair, isn't it? But you've been horridly sick, haven't you? Shut up here all these pleasant days, and no end of pain, they tell me."

"Yes," said Creepy, "but that doesn't matter much. I was used to pain a long time, and if it comes back now, why it's only the same thing, you know."



“Well, if it went off once, it will again, I hope; and the first thing when it’s better, we shall be looking for you. There isn’t much in the conservatory just now of course, but the garden almost goes ahead of it. Did you ever take care of flowers?”

“I never saw one till I saw yours,” said Creepy; and then seeing a look of astonishment, he added, “I never saw anything, until the doctor came.”



“I don’t know about that,” said Aleck, laughing, that Creepy need not see how he really felt, “those eyes of yours look as if they had seen a great deal, and looked through it all pretty well too. But books are the main things, I guess, from what I see about here. Does the doctor let you read yet?”

“Not much; he brought me a book yesterday, but I’m not to read it yet.”

“That looks jolly,” said Aleck, taking up the book and running over the illustrations. “There’s a sail-boat that looks for all the world like mine. Do you like sailing? I’m going out in the harbor this afternoon, and I wish you were well enough to go along. Perhaps you’d like a row-boat better; everybody likes rowing, I believe.”

“All but me,” said Creepy, and then he was glad the doctor was not there to hear; he did not mean to say it, but it slipped out.

“It does want a pretty strong arm,” said Aleck, “and I don’t know that it’s quite equal to sailing, after all;” and then he went off into a long discourse about boats and yachts and rigging, that was rather bewildering to Creepy; but it was so pleasant to hear it for all that, that he almost forgot everything else, and the battle of the day before went clear out of sight. But it all rose up again when Aleck said he was afraid he was staying too long, and then returned to the subject of Creepy’s visits.

“You’ll come and let Nelly see you again the first day you’re well enough, wont you?”

The hot flush came up once more, and Creepy shrank back among the pillows, as he had when the doctor had asked him to see Aleck, and for a moment the enemy had the upper-hand again.

“Oh, I can’t! I can’t let her see me, and I don’t want ever to look at her again; she is too beautiful!”

“And don’t you like beautiful things?” asked Aleck, though fearing that he understood only too well.

“Yes; but if *she* should look at *me*! If she should say ‘Humpy!’ She would think it, if she didn’t say the words, and I couldn’t bear it.”

There! he had done the very thing he had thought would kill him if Aleck did it!

In a moment Aleck was on his knee before Creepy's corner, and had one arm placed gently and tenderly about his neck.

"Are you thinking of that still?" he said. "Haven't you got those miserable words out of your head yet? If you only knew how the boys are always saying such things to each other, and how nobody ever minds it or thinks of it again. It's a horrid way they have, and they ought to have seen that you weren't used to roughing it; they've been sorry enough since, but if you only knew how they never gave a thought to what they were saying, you might forget it."

"But they told the truth," said Creepy, looking drearily at Aleck; "they called me Humpy, and said, 'What is a fellow like him going to do?' and it was true! No, I can't forget it, but I can bear it; the doctor says I must, to be a good soldier, but I shall always know it is true."

"And what if it is true? What if you are not as straight as they, and haven't the strength for all the rough things they have going on? Don't you know you've got a face that would make up for all the backs in the world, and that you can leave all the boys where they can't find themselves in their studies?"

Creepy shook his head.

"It isn't only they; every one will say it as long as I live."

"Nobody will say it that has any sense, and you can soon show the rest of them that they don't know what they are talking about. You'll make a place for yourself in the world to be proud of yet."

Creepy looked up with the same smile that worried the doctor so when he saw it.

"No," he said, "I don't think there'll be anything for me but to fight. The doctor used to think I should have my share, but he doesn't think so now; he thinks I shall always be sick. Not that he says so, but I know."

"Oh, don't say so, don't even think so, until you know it is true. And even if it should be true, don't you know how close the Lord Jesus used to come to the weak and the sick, and that he's just the same now in his heart? It always seemed to me it would almost pay to suffer a good deal, just to know how tender his heart was towards you, and how he must be thinking of it all, and only waiting for the day to come when he can take it all away. He must have a great many thoughts about you, that he never has about great, strong, rough fellows like the rest of us."

Creepy did not answer for a moment; he could not have told Aleck for his life what a help it was to hear him say all these things. He only looked in his face, and said, "I shall never be one of His princes, but I'll try to make as good a soldier as I can. And I hope you'll come again—that is—you've been so kind that I forgot—but, of course, you'll have other things to do."

"Of course I'll come," said Aleck; "I should not know how to be refused, after this. I've got to keep a sharp look out ahead, it's true, till after examination; but a fellow must have his pleasures somewhere, you know. Good-by; I'll be sure to find you better when I come again."

The doctor thought so too. Creepy was off the lounge the next day, and in a day or two more insisted upon beginning to open the door for patients again. The pain was there still, and bad enough, it is true, and there was too much of the old expression in his smile; but there he was, going quietly about again, very much as if nothing had happened, except indeed that there was no strength yet.

"Look at that!" said the doctor. "If one visit from a boy four years older than himself has been such a medicine, what would it have been if he could have gone to school with twenty of his own age, as I wanted him to, instead of being hunted down by a set of—well, no matter what they were—the very first day I trusted him among them!"

The doctor was right, but he hadn't got hold of quite the whole of it. Aleck's visit had done a great work, true enough, but the best part of it was helping Creepy to clinch the victory the doctor's words had set him to fighting for just before. And if he had lost the feeling, perhaps for ever, that had made Mrs. Ganderby notice how light his step was, and how he "held up his head to look other folks in the face," there was something else keeping his heart warm, and giving him courage for what might be before him. He couldn't help seeing what he had to meet; no one could convince him that it was not there; but he would be one of the King's soldiers; he would fight as bravely as he could!

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## CHAPTER XV.

Examination-day passed off as it always did at the professor's school, creditably, if not brilliantly, for teachers and scholars. Aleck was decidedly the star, but Carter and Davis both did well; and in the lower classes Hal and Tom came off with a very respectable score and some flying colors. Tom had kept out of Hal's way as he would have avoided rocks and shallows if he had been putting to sea; and Hal was for once so entirely engrossed in keeping his own lookout, that he had no leisure to watch for slips in his neighbors, or to enjoy them if they happened to occur. There was enough for the boys to talk over for at least the first week of holidays, and Carter lost very little time in getting hold of Aleck for a talk about past, present, and future. The future had the best of it, though, and he was jubilant over the prospect that it gave.

"Isn't that what you call pretty jolly?" he went on. "Carter & Co. have consented at last, and are going to give me a chance in life, instead of making me into a wooden thing mounted on a stool and doing short sums in arithmetic for them all day! Just imagine me standing on the quarter-deck and giving orders to every soul on board, and feeling my vessel bound over the blue waves as I direct!"

Aleck laughed.

"Do you expect to take command the day you go aboard?"

"Well, no, it must be confessed, that isn't the usual way. I've got to share my mess with the roughest of them for a while, and work my way up; but I shall have a command just as soon as I am fit for it."

"And when will that be?" asked Aleck.

"When I understand the ship and the ship's work. A man isn't fit to give orders until he knows how everything, to the very last twist of a rope, ought to be done, and how to do it himself, too."

"And is that all?"

"I don't know," said Carter, a little puzzled; "that's what the officers say. Shouldn't you think that was about the whole of it?"

“It may be,” said Aleck; “but I was always taught that a man wasn’t ready to command others until he had learned to command himself.”

“Pshaw!” said Carter. “What a fellow you are to preach! I don’t believe I could tell you what time it is, that it wouldn’t give you a handle for a sermon or a lecture, whatever it may be. But the truth is, you hit the nail on the head so well that I can’t help liking it every time. I’ll treasure that up, and what you said the other day about making a man and a gentleman of myself.”

“By becoming a Christian!” said Aleck.

“Well, I suppose so, only it sounds so much like prigging to put it that way.”

“What sounds like prigging? If a ship-captain should offer to take you under his special instruction after you get aboard, and teach you all he knew, and make a first-rate officer of you, would you call it prigging if you were to try your best to learn, and come as near his own mark as you could?”

“No, indeed! And if I can only get a chance on the Cumbermede, I should be proud to be even the shadow of the captain, for I tell you what it is, I don’t believe a finer officer ever stepped the quarter-deck! But he wont notice me, not for a year at least. It would be beneath him, of course.”

“Well, I’ll tell you who will notice you, and not think it beneath him, either, and that is the Great Captain, and you know what he is; all the hosts of heaven call him glorious. You can study him and study with him and wear his colors, and get closer to his standard every year, and not be very much of a prig either.”

“And is that what you call being a Christian? I thought it was all in drawing down your face and quoting Scripture, and never doing anything to have a good time.”

“I don’t believe you thought any such thing,” said Aleck, “you have too much sense for that. A Christian is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing more or less, except that you can’t very well follow him without believing in him first and loving him afterwards.”

“Well, a fellow might look at it that way, and not be a milksop, after all; and I’ve got to get hold of something or other that will carry me a peg beyond where I was that day we got the professor into such a rage. It wasn’t the rage I cared for, but I did feel so contemptibly mean; and an idea came across me that there must be some different rule a fellow could work by; but I don’t know as I should ever

have seen it any plainer if you hadn't given me a lift."

"You'll want more lifts than I can give you," said Aleck; "it's only the Commander-in-chief that can take raw recruits like us and bring them up to the ranks; but he'll never think it beneath him to help the lowest of us, you may be sure of that."

A week from that day the Cumbermede weighed anchor, and Carter, regularly shipped as ordinary seaman, stood on her deck, the desire of his heart accomplished.

"Good-by, old fellow, I shall take that sermon along!" were his last words to Aleck; and Aleck, after watching the vessel towed well out into the stream, turned and made his way back to town, and presented himself for his own enrolment behind the counter at his Uncle Ralph's. He could hardly realize he was there at first; it seemed more like a joke played off for the day than a life-long decision, and he could not quite persuade himself that he had set sail for a longer voyage than Carter's. But as the day wore on, the earnest way his uncle took of setting him to work at this and that, and the occasional quiet glance of pleasure that he cast towards him, began to make him feel that it was a real thing to one party at least, and would soon become so to the other.

"I tell you what it is, Nelly," he said, when business hours were over at last, and he was at home once more, "I feel as if I had taken a flying leap somewhere, and hadn't quite found out what sort of ground I was going to strike yet. It's a pretty different thing from old times, anyhow."

"And different from what we thought new times were going to be, once," said Nelly, looking up half regretfully from her work.

"Well, if you could just get one look at Uncle Ralph's face, you'd think the difference was pretty good, and I'm sure papa would too. The only trouble is, Uncle Ralph hasn't found out yet what a stupid fellow he has taken up. I declare I thought my poor head would be turned there to-day; chemistry and science went clear out of sight, and it was nothing but weights and measures and compatibilities and all the rest. But I assure you there's some pleasure in seeing how the best doctors in the city hang by Uncle Ralph, Doctor Thorndyke among the rest."

"Have you been to the doctor's within a day or two, Aleck?"

“Yes,” said Aleck, with a sudden change of tone.

“No better yet, Aleck?”

“Oh, I suppose so; but it’s a horrid shame to see the way he is. He never had known a well day in his life till the doctor took hold of him; but he said there was no reason why he shouldn’t, and he went to work and did everything that could be thought of for six months or more, and had just got him where he was finding out what life was—of course not to be quite as strong as other people, but ready to feel pretty well and have a good time with the rest of the world; and now there he is, just able to creep about the house or look at a book now and then, the old pain ten times worse than ever, and what’s more, the doctor don’t believe he can ever bring him round to where he was again. It’s more than he had much hope of at one time to get him through at all. And that isn’t the worst of it, either; he behaves like a little man, but I don’t believe he’ll ever forget what happened an hour as long as he lives.”

“Oh, he *must* forget it, Aleck. Bring him up here, and see if we can’t make him.”

“I don’t know,” said Aleck, smiling. “I invited him once, but I don’t know as I can flatter you by telling you what objection he had.”

“Well, only once persuade him, and I’m sure we can find some way to make his objections vanish.”

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## CHAPTER XVI.

A year passed away, and things began to look a good deal clearer to Aleck; and the farther he went, the more ready he was to confess his uncle was keeping his promise to show him he could study a profession behind his counter, as well as he could in a doctor's office or a law-school.

"It isn't so bad, after all, Nelly," he said now and then as he came home with a glowing account of some new experiment, "and you may be proud of me yet as a distinguished chemist, assayer, and what not. If you're not, it will only be because you can't appreciate me."

The year as it closed brought another graduating-class to their leave-takings at the professor's, and this time Hal Fenimore gathered his laurels, and said farewell with the rest, but with no tears of regret for the past or the future.

"What a ridiculous little goose Will Carter was," he said the next day as he came into Halliday's for a few minutes' chat with Aleck; "what a queer notion that he didn't like business, and would rather go off and play middy on that old prison of a ship than enter the counting-house. I'm going straight in with my uncle, and thankful enough to do it, and expect to be taken in as partner, and make my fortune before he's anything more than second-mate, and it isn't half the chance there was at Carter & Co.'s, either. I don't wonder he didn't want to go to college and stuff with Latin and Greek four years more; but to throw away such a chance as he had at home, to go and put himself under the thumb of a second-mate, and tar ropes and eat hard-tack for nobody knows how long before he gets a peg higher!"

Aleck didn't tell Hal that he himself was stealing every hour he could get by day and by night to follow up the college course; he only laughed, and said,

"Well, it might go rather hard with your store if nobody took a fancy to go to sea; I don't know where some of your best goods would come from."

"That's a fact," said Hal; "every one to his taste, and I'm glad Carter's got a berth to his fancy, and I hope he'll make the most of it."

Just as Hal left the store, old Joan opened the door of the doctor's office and



stepped softly in. There was no fire to be brushed up this time, but she made one pretext after another until she got round in front of the doctor's chair, as she always did when she meant to open a discussion. But this time it seemed as if she could not manage to begin, and the doctor, guessing at her subject, concluded he must help her.

"Where's Thorndyke, Joan?"

That was enough; Joan was fairly launched.

"Hoot, laddie, and where suld the bairnie be, but moping over a book in some corner or anither o' the house? It's little change frae that he has; and what wi' his books and the pain, and nae companions to run in the free sunshine wi', e'en if he had the strength to do it, we shall no find we ha' him wi' us much longer; either the gude Lord will take him a'thegither frae our hands, or we shall hae no bairn at a', but only a little auld mon, withered and shrunken before his time."

"And what do you propose to do about it, Joan?"

"What wad I propose to do? Ye ken weel eneugh it's na proposing or disposing o' mine, to say what suld be done wi' the bairn. It were no notion o' mine sending him to the school i' the first place; but I'm no sae sure I wadna be more favorable to trying something o' the kind once mair, provided sic a place could be found and sic companions as wouldn't trample the soul out o' his body before they had time to see what it waur made of. But I'm e'en thinking he might hae mair strength to bear a little rough wind now, and it's a cruel and unnatural thing to let a bairn o' his age ken nae mair o' life than lies within these four walls and the covers o' his book, except indeed when the one friend he has outside comes to talk a bit wi' him, or tak him to pass an hour at his ain house now and then."

"And you don't think that's as much as any reasonable man could ask?" said the doctor, as a vision of Nelly Halliday, as she stopped one day with her pony-chaise to leave Thorndyke, as every one called him now, at the door, rose up before him.

"As muckle as what?" asked Joan, quite in a puzzle. "I dinna a'thegither understand how muckle it may be, but mercifu' as it is, and sent frae the Lord's pity, it's no eneugh. It's no eneugh for ony bairn to gang frae his book to the front-door all day lang, and never a step farther into the world, and never feel his blood stirred wi' ony little brush in life, and always wearing a patient, sorrowfu' look that's eneugh to grieve the hardest heart that could look upon it. Not that I

wad hae the boldness to bring aught before your notice as if ye couldna see the whole wi' far better een than mysel'."

The doctor got up and paced the room a few times after Joan went out, and when he sat down again, he had come to another decision. Not that Joan had put any new thoughts into his mind; she had only dropped a spark upon tinder that he had been gathering together for some months past, as he watched Thorndyke from week to week. He was no slower to act upon a decision than a year ago, and in fifteen minutes more the black horse stood before Halliday's, and the doctor was having a little private talk behind the desk.

"I'd like to put him in here," he was saying, "for I can't think of any place where he would do so well. The boy has got brains enough to make almost anything, and I meant to have made a doctor of him, and one that would have found high-water mark in his profession before many years; but that's all over now. If all I can do for him can give him strength to get over here two or three times a day and meet his work after he gets here, it's the most I can hope for; but we'll make a man of him yet, and one we can both be proud of, if you'll take him after he gets here and do what you can for him. And I assure you, you shall not be the loser, if you can manage the matter for me as I wish."

Mr. Halliday looked thoughtful, but not because he was hesitating as to his answer. He was thinking of the time when some one, once long ago, had it in his power to decide for him whether he should be anything or nothing in the world.

He turned suddenly with a smile,

"You don't care about sending him before to-morrow," he said.

"Why, no," said the doctor, smiling in return. "I don't know that to-morrow would not do on the whole."

"Well, send him to-morrow, then, or any day after, when you and he are ready, and Aleck here shall teach him what he knows for a while, and then I'll take him in hand and see if we can't make something pretty nearly as good as a doctor out of him."

"All right, and thank you," said the doctor laughing; "I don't doubt you'll get him in advance of some of us, and before so very many years either."

So far so good; now for settling the matter with Thorndyke, and he lost no more time about that than in what had come before.

“See here, little man,” he said, darting one of the old glances in Thorndyke’s face, as he came in and found him waiting as usual in the office, and as usual buried in a book, “do you remember my telling you once on a time, and possibly more than once, that there was a place in the world for you as well as for the rest of us?”

Thorndyke had started, as he always did, at the first sound of the doctor’s voice, and met it with the same smile that had troubled him a year ago, but which he had seen so many times since as to expect nothing else. But as the sentence was finished he shrank back again. What could the doctor be going to say? If it were only about a share in the fight, why that was all right, but anything more! The doctor could not be mistaken in anything else, but it was of no use talking about that. He could be a soldier, and he was trying hard for it; but one of the princes!

“Do you remember, little man?” said the doctor again.

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, that’s just as true as it ever was; but there’s another thing, that I did not say at that time. The only way to make sure of places, sometimes, is to step into them, and the only way to get our share, is to reach out and take it. Do you see?”

Thorndyke nodded.

“Well, now, there comes a time to most of us, when we have to do that, though the change from pleasant old ways makes a rough sort of break sometimes. For instance, it would go pretty hard with me to miss you out of the office, but it would not do to keep you here too long, and I never meant to do it. I meant to make a doctor of you after awhile, but I’m afraid that isn’t going to do, as things are. Doctors have a pretty hard time now and then, and as long as that pain holds on, I’m afraid it wouldn’t do. But what would you say to just going round the corner to Halliday’s once or twice a day, and trying whether you or your friend Aleck there can do most toward keeping up the credit of the firm? How do you think that would do?”

A soldier! Thorndyke had meant to be one, and thought he had won some battles, and vanquished some foes for ever, but here the whole thing seemed to be rising up again, stronger than ever, and the soldier thrown to the ground in a moment.

He dropped his book on the table, and hid his face in it for a moment; then he

looked suddenly up.

“Oh, I cannot,” he cried; “I never, never can! Why do you ask me such a thing? To stand there all day long and have people come in every minute to say, ‘Look at Humpy!’ Oh, it would be too much! I don’t believe even the King would ever think I could do it.”

A whole year, and that wound no nearer healing than it was at first! Not even the words forgotten! Then might not the doctor as well give up all hope that they ever would be! and all hope of everything else but making life a little easier from day to day! The pain would be there, in the heart as well as in the back, for life, he feared.

It was lucky for Carter and Hal Fenimore that he had nothing to say to them at that instant, but he stopped before Thorndyke’s chair, and lifting the white face that had dropped upon the book again, held it gently in his hands.

“You cannot let people see the form the King has seen fit to give you, when you can show them at the same time that he has given you a soul and a brain worthy of any of his princes? Is it hard to choose between hiding away here like some poor frightened thing, and stepping out where you can find every hour filled with work any man might be proud of, and make yourself known and valued all over the city by-and-by? What should you say if the day were to come when I thought I could not be satisfied with any prescription that you should not put up? Wouldn’t that be almost as good as having you for a partner, as I might if you were stronger?

“And even if you can’t get over feeling that this costs you a good deal, can’t you remember that when the Prince Royal was here, his visage was more marred than any man’s, and yet he let every one look at it? And if he has a work for you now, and a place where you can gather up a great share of what is worth having in life, can’t you take it up for his sake, and for my sake, if not for you own?”

The blue veins were swelling again, and the old throbbing at the heart coming back in full force; but he would not forget that he was a soldier! And yet even a soldier might beg for a truce!

“Oh, wait, please,” he cried, “only wait till to-morrow!”

“Of course we will wait,” said the doctor, “and as long as you like; and in the meantime we will eat our dinner, and after that, suppose we have a drive

together? Not so far as to meddle with the pain, but I think we might get a breath of what lies outside the city for once in a way.”

The battle lasted well into the night, in spite of the drive behind Jet, and everything the doctor could think of to make it seem as if there were no such thing as fighting in the world. But though Thorndyke had begged for a truce, he was determined not to go to sleep till the enemy was put to rout again, and it seemed at one time as if it were going to take the whole night to do it. He lay with his eyes wide open, the moon shining into the little room that had seemed so wonderful when it was first given him, but only a mockery so many times since; and the forms of all the terrible things he should have to meet if he did as the doctor wished stalked about it like evil spirits of the night. The fight had been sharp enough when he determined to open the door for patients again, and the first time he went home with Aleck it seemed as if he should die; but opening the door was for the doctor, and he had got accustomed to it now; and Nellie Halliday never seemed to see anything but his face, and had taken it in her slender white hands one day and asked him if he knew it was a wonderful gift of Heaven; he could not tell what she meant, but he had never been afraid to let her see him since then.

But Halliday's! There would be hundreds of people coming in all day long, and he himself would be standing behind the counter scarcely able to look over it, and every one looking down upon him to see how strangely he was made! And then going through the street so many times every day! Going on errands here and there, very likely, and letting every one wonder where Halliday had found such a strange little creature to do his work! He could bear the pain, he could bear knowing that he was never to learn the games of the boys, and to go about with them as the doctor had thought he should, he could bear never feeling that he was one of the princes again, but he could not bear this!

He shut his eyes, but there it all was, just the same; what could he do? The ugly forms would not be beaten down, and yet he must not give it up!

But at last, a different thought rose up, that seemed to make them shrink away, and he felt himself gaining a little once more! There were the Prince Royal and the doctor! If they wished it, and it would please *them*, why should he care for anything else! If he could only once determine that he did not care! No, he never could do that, but if he could only be so happy in pleasing them as to trample all the pain that might come from anywhere else under his feet! And after all, would it not be a great thing to have a business, a profession of his own, and know so much that he could be really of some use as well as if he were like other people, instead of “hiding away all his life,” as the doctor called it? And perhaps other people *might* come to respect him for what he knew and could do, some day! Oh, he could see it all now! Why had he not seen it before, and how could he ever thank the doctor for seeing it for him? He would do it; he would be ready any day!

The battle was won, and the tired soldier turned on his pillow to go to sleep, with something nearer the old joyous thrill in his veins than he had thought he could ever feel again.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

So it was decided, and when Thorndyke had once decided, he was ready, and an early day was fixed for his first morning at Halliday's before the week was past.

"Why, hallo, old fellow, if this isn't about the jolliest go! We'll have the old store all in the family yet!" was Aleck's greeting, so joyous that it didn't stop to be elegant; and a "jolly go" it was, as far as he could possibly help to make it so. Thorndyke could never make a mistake, in his view; and as to teaching him, that was only letting him see once how a thing must be done, and he knew it as well as his teacher. As for Thorndyke, he always felt that the sun shone, and everything was right, as soon as Aleck came in. All went on as gayly as it could, and by the time a year had passed, nobody thought the store was quite right if Thorndyke was absent for a day. Mr. Halliday missed something, he could not tell what; the customers wanted to know what had become of "the little fellow;" and Aleck felt as if he were in imminent peril of some catastrophe, for, paragon as Thorndyke thought him, he had his one fault, which horrified Uncle Ralph, and humiliated himself: he *did* now and then forget something very important to be remembered, and Thorndyke had not been long in the store before he established himself as guardian over this possibility, and had already saved Aleck half a dozen times when just "on the brink" of some predicament or other.

But the absences came very seldom, only here and there when the pain was too bad for a day, and then he was back again: sometimes so out of sight that only a little rustling told he was there; sometimes just coming into view above a showcase, and sometimes, again, mounting a little step which had been run along for him just inside the counter, and which brought him high enough to wait upon customers conveniently. It made every one start at first to see those great, brilliant eyes, the high, white forehead, and the delicate features, looking over at them, when they could scarcely see what they belonged to. And every one that knew much of such things could read in the wistful eyes and patient smile a good deal of what had come into them after that dreadful day a year ago, with still a little change. The pain was still there; he knew he should never be like other people, but he was bearing it as a brave soldier should, and he was glad other people were not like him, and he should learn to be useful to them, yet.

So another year went on, and another examination-day was coming at the professor's, and Tom Haggarty came in the day before to talk about it with Aleck, though Aleck had taken good care to hush him up when Thorndyke came within hearing.

"It's just as well not to say anything about that before Thorndyke," he said; "it isn't likely to bring very pleasant reminiscences to him!"

"That's a fact," said Tom; "I shouldn't think he'd ever want to hear of the school again as long as he lives; and it's a horrid shame, too, and always will be; and I always feel as if I had something to do with it, though I never could tell how. But wont you come down? We shall have a high old time, and it's the last but one for me. You know I'm through next year."

"You've done well," said Aleck. "You're a little shaver to be fitted for college."

"Little's nothing," said Tom. "I was thirteen last fall, and I shall be almost fifteen when I step off. It has seemed for ever and a day to me since I first saw the professor."

"But that's too young; you wont think of entering right away, will you?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "I may have to wait a bit, but I sha'n't know how to; if it only wasn't for being a freshman, and the hazing, and all that. I don't see how a fellow is ever to get through with that part of it, but I suppose I've got to be hazed wherever I go. If I can live through it, 'twill be better than to be shut up in a store all my life. I don't see how you make it go, with such a smooth face."

"Don't you?" said Aleck, laughing; "come and try it a while, and perhaps you'll see."

"No, thank you," said Tom, "I should hate it so that they would turn me off in a very short time. It's hard enough to make a fellow's way in the world if you let him take the way he likes best, and I'm thankful enough I've got the promise ahead for all the study I can do for the next eight or ten years. I shall have to strike out for myself then, and it will be tough enough, I suppose, but I don't mean to worry myself about that till the time comes. Come down to-morrow, wont you?"

Tom went off, and Aleck soon followed towards home, for it was his hour to go to tea. He walked quickly, for he begrudged every moment lost on the way, and was soon near the house, with some thoughts running on that came up once in a



while, and which went to make up the only secret ever kept between himself and Nelly. Tom was right about business. To be sure, his own came nearer to being professional than almost anything, and there was some comfort in helping to save people's lives, if he did only come in as second fiddler. But his dream of a profession! Neither Uncle Ralph nor Nelly should ever have a suspicion of the sacrifice he was making. Why should they? If there didn't happen to be money enough for him to study on, it was no fault of theirs; and if Uncle Ralph could take any pleasure in having him in the store, why, he need not think the favor was all on that side; he had something to be thankful for himself.

But what was that sound behind him? A horse's hoofs flying wildly up the pavement, and wheels swaying from one side to the other of the street! He turned, and one glance was enough to show him what was happening, and that he had better look out for himself while there was time. It was Tom Haggarty's father and the horse he was accustomed to drive quietly past on his way home every night; but in some way the animal had become terrified and altogether beyond his control, and was dashing wildly up the road, and aiming now directly for the spot where Aleck stood. Aleck had just time to spring aside and mount his doorstep with a flying leap when the wheels struck the curbstone, the horse's hoofs clattered on the sidewalk, there was a crash, a plunge, an overthrow, and in another moment the horse had cleared himself from the carriage, and was dashing madly on, while his owner lay senseless on the pavement.

In an instant a group had gathered about the fallen man, but Aleck was first among them, raising his head and searching hastily for his pulse.

"All right so far," he said; "he's breathing yet, but—" and he glanced quickly towards the window. Nelly was standing there, and answered the look with a beckoning signal.

"Lend a hand here, will you?" said Aleck; "we'll get him inside and then see what's to be done next."

They lifted him, hardly believing Aleck that he was still alive, and carrying him in, laid him on the sofa to which Nelly pointed.

"Is he alive, Aleck?"

"Yes, his pulse is beating."

"Then a doctor, and the nearest one. Remember what a friend he was to papa!"

“Not so much the nearest one, as the best one,” thought Aleck as he sped away. “I’ll have Dr. Thorndyke here, if he can be found, and I think it’s just the time Jet is most likely to be standing at the door.”

Yes, there was Jet, the reins thrown over his back, and still panting after his dash into town from a visit a mile outside; the doctor had just closed the front-door behind him, and it took but a moment for Aleck to find him and tell his errand.

For the first time in his life there was a moment when the doctor didn’t care a fig about what was wanted, compared to some other considerations. He should see Nelly Halliday in her own house at last, after all this time that Thorndyke had been having it all to himself, without the slightest appreciation of what it was!

But only an instant; at the next he and Aleck were in the chaise, and one more brought them to where the shattered carriage still lay before the door.

“Isn’t that enough to bring a dead man to life!” thought the doctor as he stepped into the room. There was the same face he had seen two years ago smiling from the conservatory-window at Thorndyke, the same soft eyes, the same rippling sunlight in her hair, just as he had remembered them all this while, only this time bending over the still motionless form of her father’s friend, and watching anxiously for some sign of returning consciousness.

But there was no time for ceremony.

“Here is Dr. Thorndyke, Nelly,” said Aleck, and with a quick smile of recognition she stepped aside and let the doctor come close to his patient.

“Ah! Possibly *she* recollects, too!” thought the doctor. “But pshaw! there’s nothing to be thought of just here but this poor fellow,” and he plunged into the examination of his patient.

Not a word was spoken for a few moments, except as the doctor asked for what he wanted.

“A wine-glass, please,” and Nelly handed it to him with a quick, noiseless movement.

But when he had given the restorative and was waiting a moment for its effect, she spoke,

“Is it so very bad, doctor? Oh, I hope you can say it is not!”

“It is pretty bad, I am afraid. If we cannot succeed in improving things in a few moments, I think Aleck had better call a carriage and get him home as soon as possible. This has been something of a shock to you already, Miss Halliday.”

The remedies seemed of no avail; only a low, heavy breathing and flitting pulse told there was any life remaining, and at a sign from the doctor Aleck disappeared. It was but a few moments until he returned with the carriage, but it seemed hours to Nelly as she watched the doctor trying one remedy after another, and all equally in vain. The doctor did not tell her he was almost sure it would be so before he began; he went on as quietly as if there were more hope, with a few cheerful words now and then, and at last Aleck came with the carriage.

“You have been very kind, doctor,” she said, when Mr. Haggarty was placed inside the carriage and the doctor was preparing to go with him. “I take it almost as if it were done for papa, they were such friends. You’ll come again, will you not, some brighter day, and let us thank you?”

The doctor answered with one of those quick looks in her face which Thorndyke knew so well.

“*Some* one ought to come very soon and see how you are,” he said. “This has been rather trying for you, Miss Halliday.”

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Poor Tom! It was a dark to-morrow to which he had invited Aleck, and darker still the days that followed, that he had thought would be full of holiday enjoyment! Could it be true that his father was gone? Gone! What did that mean! Oh, if it only were not true! If every one were mistaken, or had told him false!

It seemed to him he could never see the boys again. But Aleck would not leave him to that very long, and Tom really felt the first touch of comfort when he heard him asking for him at the door.

“Oh, but you don’t know anything about it, Aleck; you don’t understand! No one can understand, until it come, how terrible it seems.”

“And isn’t that the very way I *can* understand?”

Tom stared at him with wide eyes a moment.

“Oh, I forgot! How could I forget! It was horrid in me, but it seems as if I could not remember anything or know anything except this one terrible feeling that is everywhere through the house. And it doesn’t seem as if it could ever be any better!”

“It *will* be better,” said Aleck, but Tom only shook his head. “Don’t you suppose it was just as terrible in the houses that the Lord Jesus came into long ago, because there was trouble in them?”

“I don’t know,” said Tom, hesitating a little, for he was not used to talking of such things, and didn’t know exactly where he was; “but he came to bring people back to life, then, and he doesn’t do that now.”

“No, he doesn’t, but he comes just as close and just as much to bring comfort as he did then. Suppose he should come so close and speak so tenderly that you could almost feel his heart beating against yours, wouldn’t that make it better? And if he should promise he would never go away, but would watch you even more faithfully than your father could, and help you along to make the man he hoped to see you, wouldn’t that make it better?”

“Perhaps so,” said Tom, not very clear yet that all this amounted to anything

more than talking.

“I tell you there’s no mistake,” said Aleck. “There are just two or three things, it seems to me, that we have got to have before we can be happy, taking us just as we are; we want some one to love and some one to love us; we want something to do that’s worth doing, and we want our own affairs to be looked out for at the same time.”

“But I’ve got to look out for myself, now,” said poor Tom.

“I know it, Tom, and yet you haven’t, after all. If your father had been here when you went to college, didn’t you expect to send to him when you needed anything, or when you didn’t see just what ’twas best to do about anything? And wouldn’t that have left you free to go right along with your work, and interest yourself for other people, instead of all the time worrying about yourself? And can’t you do just the same with the Lord?”

“But I loved him so! I miss him so!” cried poor little Tom, breaking down altogether.

“I know; that comes hard, and there’s no getting away from it; but I tell you, Tom, it isn’t going to be such a very great while, and I don’t believe he’s so very far off either. It may be there’s only a veil between, and who knows but he can see through it as plainly as if wasn’t there at all? And you’ll find lots to do; that’s one of the greatest things after all. Just think what you can come to be in taking his place at home, besides something for somebody outside, every day of your life, if you’re only looking out for it. And there’s no one to say he wont see it; and however that may be, there’s One that will be sure to, and think a good deal of it too.”

Tom didn’t say much, but he had his own times of going over in his mind all Aleck had said, until things did begin to seem a little better after a while, as Aleck had promised, and going back to school did not seem so very terrible as he had thought; and as the year came once more to a close, the thought of the new step into college studies really looked bright and tempting.

All but the freshman woes, in the way of hazing and all that sort of thing. Poor Tom hadn’t yet got over his dread of being snubbed or run upon, only as he had been in the higher class the last year, and there was no one left in the school who was quite so endlessly doing it since Hal had left. He had almost forgotten how uncomfortable it was; at any rate, he was sure he never could see any worse

times than some he had had with Hal, and he had lived through those somehow.

So he was making the most of his holidays, and the little interval of deciding what came next; and going into Halliday's now and then, for a few moments with Aleck and Thorndyke, was one of the great resources of the time.

He came gayly out one day, to see some one beckoning to him, and reining in his horse close by. Ah, that was Mr. Willoughby, his guardian, and Tom ran to the chaise.

"Going towards home, Haggarty?" he said. "Suppose you jump in, and we drive out together. I want to talk to you about one or two matters, if you're not aiming in another direction."

Tom sprang in, only too gladly. He should hear something about going to college, he was sure.

"Well, and how does it seem to be a free man once more?" he asked, as Tom took his seat and they started off.

"Prime," said Tom, "only if a free man never has anything to do, I shouldn't like it to last very long."

"Good," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, "and that's just the very point. How long should you call long enough?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "I suppose I ought to enter college this Commencement, if I'm going at all this year; and if I wait till next, I ought to be studying or working at something before a great while."

"And you are sure of going this year or next? Could you not think of anything but college and be satisfied?"

Tom started.

"My father wished me to go to college."

"I know he did; but, Tom, he is not here now to send you. You have been a brave fellow this last year, and I know you will be brave about what I have to tell you. I have said nothing about money-matters so far, for I wished you to get through school with a quiet mind; but perhaps it is best now to let you understand just how things are. There were some embarrassments in your father's affairs that he could have overcome if he had lived a year or two longer,

but as things were left, they have made a great deal of trouble; and in fact, there does not seem to be the means of carrying out his plans for you. I'm afraid you'll have to go to work, my boy, without waiting for college or Germany or anything of the kind; and the sooner you can make a man of yourself and get a start in the world, the better it will be for the rest at home."

Tom took hold of the side of the chaise; it seemed to him that the whole of life had been knocked out from under his feet.

"I can't think you'll find business so very bad," went on Mr. Willoughby, "and I think you've got the making of a good business man in you; all you want is a fair chance, and a good send off, to begin with, and that I think I've found for you, by good luck. I've been making some proposals to the Fenimores, and they are ready to take you in there, and see what you can do for yourself, as soon as you can make up your mind that you're ready. It isn't every day that a chance like that opens to a boy of your age, and I rather think you'll decide to make the most of it."

Poor Tom! If what Aleck had said to him that day had been a comfort before, he needed to get closer hold of it yet this time.

"You'll find lots to do, Tom, and that is one of the greatest things, after all; and there's One that will be sure to see, and think a good deal of it, too."

He kept saying it over to himself, and the rest of what Aleck had said about "some one caring for him, while he went about his work for other people." And he needed it all; "pretty tough," Aleck called the sudden change in his prospects, when he heard of it, but even then he hadn't the least idea how Tom dreaded coming so directly in Hal's way as he knew he should, every day. That seemed to be the last and bitterest drop in the cup! Not that Hal wasn't a good fellow; he knew he was, and that he would do him many a kind turn before the year was out, but—pshaw! he must get over being such a goose!

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## CHAPTER XIX.

Thorndyke had left the store just as Mr. Willoughby picked Tom up; he never stayed in the evening and it was six o'clock now. But he had an errand to do that took him past the little cottage with the bay window, and there stood Jet and the doctor's chaise. And the doctor himself came out of the door, just as he came in sight again on his way back.

"Stand still, Jet!" said the doctor, and Jet pawed the ground till Thorndyke came up. The doctor reached him a hand, he climbed in, and Jet's hoofs struck sparks again as he carried them towards home. The doctor scarcely spoke, but there was a shining in his eyes that made Thorndyke feel he could say a good deal if he chose; indeed he had seen it there every day of late; he wondered if anything had happened!

But when he came into the office, he was sitting as quietly over a medical review as if nothing had ever happened, or would ever happen, and Thorndyke took his own book and his own seat in the window. But it did not last long; Thorndyke heard a flutter and a fall, and the doctor had sent the magazine flying.

"Come over here, Thorndyke," he said; "I want to say something to you."

Thorndyke started, but before he had got halfway, the doctor met him, and stood there with his hands on his shoulders, and looking full into his eyes with the shining out of his own brighter than ever.

"Little man," he said, "if I told you you had been the means of bringing to me the greatest gift of my life, what would you say?"

For an instant Thorndyke stood as much astonished as on the day when the doctor first talked to him about fishing and going to school.

"I never gave you anything," he said; "you give me everything, and it makes me feel happy and strong even to know that you are near; but I never gave you anything. What do I ever have to give?"

"Tut," said the doctor stooping a little and looking closer into his face with the old smile, "don't you know you are all I have in the world; all I *have had*, rather. Did you ever see my chaise standing where it did to-night, before?"



“Yes,” said Thorndyke, “and I supposed something was the matter, but I did not ask of course.”

The doctor laughed, and letting go his hold of Thorndyke, walked back and forth across the room.

“Did it ever occur to you,” he asked, after a while, “did it ever occur to you that you and I had lived here like two miserable old bachelors, almost long enough? And if there was any one on the face of the earth that could come here and take this old world of ours and make a new one of it that would seem a good deal like Paradise, who should you say it would be?”

A sudden thought swept over Thorndyke’s mind, though it seemed only a dream.

“The princess!” he exclaimed; “but—”

“Ah, you think that would be like plucking the morning star down from over our own heads? And so it is, more like that than anything I ever thought I should dare try, much less have success granted me, if I did; but *she is coming*, little man! The King has given her to me! But I should never have seen her, much less known her, a thousand times less asked for her, if *you* had not found her for me!”

“Well, if this isn’t about the most magnificent thing that ever happened!” said Aleck the next day, when a sharp look into Thorndyke’s face told him he knew all; “The doctor is the only man I know in the world fit to loosen the latchet of Nellie’s shoe, but I don’t believe there’s another woman fit to do the same for him, and I shall be the proudest fellow in the city when I can call him brother. Except you, Thorndyke! He is a heap more yours than he ever will be mine, no matter what he calls me, and I always thought you were the luckiest fellow in the world to have a claim on him; but I never thought I should ever come in for any share! But what will become of me, when I’m left alone in my glory?”

This was a question that came into Nellie’s mind also, and she had her own plans to meet it. When October was turning all the world to garnet and gold once more, then came the wedding, and Thorndyke was there with the rest. No pain of any kind could have kept him away; the old throbbing at his heart rose up, until he could hardly breathe, and when the bride, with all her beauty and her loveliness, her orange blossoms and the veil that seemed to Thorndyke like a halo around her golden hair, stooped and gave him his kiss, he didn’t know whether he were in the world or not! Only let him get out of sight once more! He slipped away into a sheltered spot and Uncle Ralph stepped into his place.

“Uncle Ralph,” said Nelly, when almost all the guests were gone. “I know you cannot find it in your heart to refuse me anything on my wedding-day. I want to leave the house just as it is for Aleck, but of course he cannot stay in it alone. Wont you say goodbye to your hotel room, and come and fill my place here until either you or he follow in my footsteps?”

Uncle Ralph pooh-poohed for a while, but he couldn't find it in his heart, as Nelly said, to refuse her; and before the wedding journey was over, bachelor's hall was thoroughly established behind the conservatory window.

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## CHAPTER XX.

The Cumbermede had made a long list of successful voyages since Aleck watched her out of sight and waved his farewell to Carter, and she was homeward bound once more, with a full cargo and a quick run so far, before the trade-winds. The moonlight lay soft and clear across the deck, the phosphorus flashed like monster diamonds in her track, and not a sound was heard but the low plashing at the bow, as the vessel made her seven knots, steady before a light breeze. But now the wind freshened, and the second mate's voice was heard giving sharp quick orders to two of his watch.

"Go aloft there, and close up the main-top-gallant."

The men sprang to the rigging, and a few moments more one of them came down the ratlines and went forward to some work he had left, but the other seemed to find some delay in accomplishing his share of the task. The mate glanced impatiently into the rigging once or twice, then angrily, and then shouted aloft:

"What are you about up there, you landlubber Jake? If I had a *dog* and he didn't know more than you do, I'd shoot him."

The man halfway down by this time, finished his descent and passed the mate without a word, but a dark scowl covered his face. The mate caught sight of it and his fury increased; he seized the man by the collar and pushed him violently toward the wheel.

"There, go and try your hand at that," he said, "and see if you can keep a decent face before your betters! A miserable fool that never saw three months' service since he was born, shipping as able seaman, and then grumbling about under his officers' feet till it's enough to drive them mad! If the next wave should take you overboard 'twould be the best thing that could happen!"

The sailor recovered his balance and went off to relieve the man at the wheel, but the scowl grew darker, and harder lines gathered about his mouth. Eight bells sounded at last, and the first mate's watch came tumbling up from their berths, to relieve those on duty. But it was too warm to go below, and after loitering a few moments till the second mate had disappeared to turn in, two or three of the men

sauntered forward, the dark scowl among them, and getting noiselessly together in the shadow of the foremast, began to talk in low undertones, that could not reach far aft of their position.

“I tell you, I won’t bear it any longer,” said Jake between his teeth. “One or other of us has got to go under, and that before another twenty-four hours is past.”

The man next him gave a low laugh, and then seeing how black the other’s face was, grew sober again.

“Pshaw, Jake, you look as if you were in earnest. I should think you were a landlubber, as the mate says, if you’re going to take notice of anything an officer says to a hand! If he’d shoot his dog for what you did, it’s only a wonder he didn’t knock you overboard. A sailor don’t count for as much as a dog any day.”

“He knows I’ve only had my hand out of the sling for two days, and how was I going to handle the earrings,” muttered Jake; “I tell you I mean what I say. If I can get two or three to stand by me, well and good, and if not I’ll tackle him alone. I’d as lief jump overboard with him, as lead this life any longer.”

“Jake’s about right,” growled the other sailor, under his breath; “’twould be as good a day’s work as I ever did to stand by Jake and see the second mate get his dues.”

“Humph! and do you know what they call that? That’s mutiny, in plain English, and we should have the other officers with their pistols out, and if we didn’t get a little cold lead for our pains, we should find out how bread and water tasted in the hold for a few weeks.”

“Who cares for that?” said Jake. “Let ’em come on, if they want to! They wouldn’t shoot down three or four of us; and if they should try it, we might get some new recruits on our side, and see which of us could take the ship into port. If I was a dog when I came aboard, he’s made a devil of me since, and he may look sharp that I don’t carry him where I belong, with me.”

“You wouldn’t get any of the first mate’s watch to stand by you, if the worst comes to the worst,” said the growling sailor; “a man’s got to do his duty with him, but when he’s done it he treats him as if he had a soul in him, after all.”

“That’s a fact; Carter’s the only officer I ever saw that could get duty out of a watch and never speak an ugly word to them,” said the other; “he don’t seem to like it. But he’s sharp as a gun to the mark, at the same time, where any other

man would get tipped over for it.”

“I’d be sorry to go against *him*” said Jake, “and so I hope he’ll let me alone, that’s all; for I’ve got where nothing will stop me. If you’ll give me your hand on it, shipmates, we’ll set sail together, and if we drop anchor in a worse port, it won’t be till I’ve had some satisfaction, anyhow.”

“I don’t say but I’m ready,” said the growling sailor; “we shall find we’ve raised a lively gale of wind, but I don’t much care where it blows me. I’ve made as many voyages as any man aboard, and been kicked and cursed my share; but when it comes to crowding a man every hour and minute of a day, what do you say, Jim?”

“I say I don’t like to stand to windward of a shipmate,” said Jim, “but it will be a bad business, and we’re homeward bound. You’d better speak to Ratlins, anyhow, and see what he says. He’s gone below.”

“And that’s where we’d better go,” said the growling sailor, “or the birds of the air will be getting their eye on us before we’re ready.”

Carter had taken part of his watch below, late as it was, to finish up some ship’s writing, and his stateroom being close by the companion-way, he had heard what passed between the second officer and Jake.

“Pshaw!” he said to himself, fidgeting in his chair, “what’s the use of that, Penfield? If a man’s rough enough to need that, you can’t hope to make anything of him; and if he isn’t, it hurts. A man’s got some feeling, whatever shape he’s in,” and a vision of a crooked little form, fleeing away like the wind, rose up before him, as it always had, from that miserable time at the professor’s to this very day, whenever he heard any one use taunting or cutting words.

He went on with his writing, but the second mate’s words seemed to echo in his ears.

“I wish Penfield wouldn’t be such a bear,” he said again as he put aside his book to turn in at last for a nap before his watch was called; “it don’t do to show a soft side with a man, to be sure, and I know he’s got some rough fellows in his watch; but he’s got two or three that started as fair as most men, and he’ll make beasts of them all if he goes on this way. I haven’t heard him speak to a man of them since he came aboard but as if hanging was too good for him.”

Carter’s nap was sound enough to make up for its shortness, and he paced the

quarter-deck all right and fresh for the four hours before him as the second mate went below.

“‘Tisn’t a bad idea that every wave we cut brings us so much nearer home,” he said as he watched the foam flying back over the bow. “‘A life on the ocean wave!’ that’s the only thing, to be sure; but, after all, it’s always certain the roughest hand aboard is counting how many days we’ve made on the home-run. Well, I’ll be glad to see it, for one.”

His thoughts made the trip before the sentence was finished, and brought up where they were very apt to do, in a place he always started for before he had been half a day ashore—Halliday’s.

“What a number-one fellow that Aleck is,” he went on, “and I owe him for some things I never should have seen if he hadn’t showed them to me,” and for the thousandth time some of Aleck’s words came up to his mind.

“The only way is to remember how the Lord has treated us, and the way he has taught us, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

“And that’s something I wish we officers remembered a little oftener; to be sure they say you can’t treat a sailor like a man, and keep him where he ought to be. But Penfield is too much of a Tartar, and he’s got one fellow there that it don’t do any good to, and he don’t see the difference. Some of them will take anything; but this Jake, though he seemed fair enough when he shipped, is getting blacker every day, and the ship that takes him next voyage will find him more so, I’m afraid. I wonder what those fellows are talking about, forward there; they ought to be below, but I’ll manage not to see them, if they don’t stay too long.”

They glided down, one after the other, as he spoke, and a moment after Jake was at Ratlins’ bunk and rousing him cautiously from a rather sonorous dream. “Hush!” he said, “there’s no need of saying anything just yet;” and leaning closer to him, he whispered the substance of what had been said at the foremast in his ear.

Ratlins raised himself on his elbow and swore a bitter oath.

“How did you know that was the very thing I was dreaming of? But what’s the use? A sailor is only made to be kicked like a dog, anyhow, and if one mate kicks harder than another, why that’s all it is, and we’re homeward-bound, you

know.”

“Homeward-bound,” muttered Jake; “*he’s* homeward-bound if I get hold of him, for I’ve got murder in my heart, and it’s his own lookout, for he put it there! I’ve got a mother at home that’s done praying enough for me to bring a worse ship into port, but she may as well give it up about this time. I tell you, Penfield is going overboard before his second dog-watch is over, unless I can get three or four of you to lend me a hand and help me settle him in some way that he’ll know more about, and won’t leave a mark on me that *she’d* feel quite so much aground about, if she knew it. What do you say? Ned and Jim are pretty much agreed.”

“Oh, luff a little, shipmate,” said Ratlins, “and let a fellow sleep on it, anyhow. I’ll stand by you somehow, for he deserves it; but I reckon you’ll ease off a little by morning, if you don’t lay to altogether.”

“Not I,” said Jake; “but give me your hand on doing *something*.”

Ratlins gave him his hand, and Jake went to his bunk to nurse his revenge and lay plans for what should be done in case the men would agree to unite.

“But if they *don’t*,” he muttered, “‘t won’t save the mate. When a worm does turn, it’s sure to sting, and he’ll never go through another midnight-watch safe with me!”

The breeze died down again, and the watch was a lazy one, and Carter’s thoughts, after making voyages round the world, came back to Jake again.

“Now I suppose a fellow like that is my neighbor,” he said, “let sailors be what they will. God put a soul in him once, anyhow, and I can’t believe it’s altogether dead yet. Of course it isn’t, or he wouldn’t care for Penfield until it came to breaking his head with a marlingspike, or something of that kind. I’ve got a fellow in my watch that couldn’t feel anything less than that, but it isn’t so with Jake. I wonder if I could manage to give him a lift. Who knows but there’s somebody watching for him at home, that doesn’t want to see him spoiled? At any rate, there’s One watching above, that laid down his life for him as well as the rest of us, and it’s a pity to see a fellow so tormented, if nothing worse should come of it.”

Penfield’s dog-watch came, the men did their duty, and then went forward for breakfast. Jake’s face had lost none of its darkness with the sunrising, but was

harder and more threatening than ever.

“Well, shipmate,” whispered Ratlins, as they sat down, each with his tin-dipper of coffee, his allowance of duff and ship’s biscuit, “how many knots is she making this morning? The breeze has gone down a little, hasn’t it, by daylight?”

“No, it hasn’t,” said Jake; “and remember you gave me your hand on it, last night, to stand by.”

“So I did,” said Ratlins, “and my two hours on the dog-watch this morning has given me more of a relish for it; but still—”

“No hanging fire,” said Jake. “Ned and Jim, where are you? If you’re bound another way, I can cruise alone, and if I go down, it won’t be without carrying some one else with me.”

“Who said you were to cruise alone?” said the growling sailor, breaking a biscuit on his knee; “I guess we can fix something before to-night,” and the whispering grew lower and thicker, until even Jake seemed satisfied.

When seven bells struck that noon, Carter came on deck, and seemed to be loafing about for the half-hour before his watch came on, but in the course of it he managed to come across the second mate, where a few words could pass between them unobserved.

“Look here, Penfield,” he said, “I want to make a little change in the watch if it’s all the same to you. That long-limbed fellow there, Jake, I’ve taken a notion to try my hand on him, and I’ve got a fellow among mine that don’t work in so well with the rest. I’ll let you try what you can make of him, and you turn Jake over to me.”

The mate stared; a queer sort of proceeding, he thought, and wouldn’t be called ship-shape on some vessels, but he knew Carter owned in the Cumbermede, and he supposed he could do as he liked.

“Taken a notion to Jake,” he said, suppressing the oath that rose to his lips, out of respect to his superior officer, “I should as soon think of taking a notion to one of the imps below. You’re welcome to him if you want him; I’m sure I don’t care if he goes to the bottom. A miserable dog, for ever under foot, and taking more swearing to get a little duty out of him, than any three men on board.”

“Well, I’ll try him,” said Carter; “you let him know, and I’ll send Dave over to



you.”

Jake stood in the broiling sun, scraping the paint from the house—ugly work in the heat, and a hideous noise, but no vessel ever stood into port in more perfect trim than the *Cumbermede*, and this voyage every particle of the old paint must be removed from aft, and she was to shine brighter than ever in new. He did not stir as he heard the mate approach, but he watched him with eye and ear from under his broad hat. The mate stopped beside him, and Jake set his teeth, with the thought that whatever came, it was one of the last times.

“You go over to the first mate’s watch to-night, and much joy may he have of you,” was all he said, and passed along.

Jake started, and the knife almost fell from his hands. Were they suspected? Discovered? What did it mean?

But he went on with his work, as if the mate had only spoken to a statue. Penfield passed back and forth, but Jake did not dare lift his eyes to read his face. At any rate, he had the rest of the day for a lookout; it would be his watch below soon, and he could consult with the others.

“Now I tell you, shipmates, that’s a lucky thing all round,” said Ratlins. “Maybe they’ve got a scent on the wind; I don’t know, but it don’t look to me much like foul weather, and if they’re only wind-clouds, why then we’re all out of a bad business easy; and what do you care what the second-mate is to us, Jake, so long as he keeps out of your wake?”

“But I wont keep out of his,” said Jake. “Do you think I’ll let go as easy as that?”

“Easy,” said Ned. “You may as well reef topsails and scud before the wind a day or two, anyhow, till you see how she trims. We sha’n’t be out more than three weeks now, and there’s no great fun going into port down in the hold, with iron bracelets on.”

“What’s that got to do with paying off scores?” said Jake; but though the scowl was still dark, he turned in without another word.

All through the midnight watch there was a sharp fight going on between the hatred in Jake’s heart and some new influence that seemed to be cooling and soothing the fire, he did not know how. Was he going to be a spooney, and let what he’d vowed one night die out the next, or get frightened by Ratlins’ talk about cold lead and iron bracelets? But after all, what was the second mate to

him any longer? Yet he *had* been something to him, and was he going to forget it? Never!

The watch wore away, and still the struggle went on.

“If it only wasn’t for the old woman at home!” thought Jake. “She’s kept a long watch and done a good deal of praying, in hopes to make something of me. And I *might* have been something if it hadn’t been for—!” and Jake shook his fist towards the mate’s room. “But after all, foul deeds leave a black mark on a man’s soul, and she’d fret her heart out if the hearing of it should come to her. But if every man’s hand is against me, who says it’s my fault if my hand’s against every man? It’s so long since I’ve had a word spoken to me as if I had as much of a soul as the plank under my feet, that I don’t know as I have any to put a stain on; and whose fault is it, I say? And if I don’t keep the men to their word to-night, they’re bound no longer. And what difference does it make? There’s nobody that thinks I’ve got any soul to save.”

Carter’s voice was heard giving orders to haul taut the main-sheet. The tones were quiet and decided, but there was something in them that made the men spring to with a will, and the work was done almost in a minute.

“Belay there, my hearty!” said Carter; and Jake, who had the end, glanced suddenly in his face, and caught a look of kindness, friendliness, and good cheer, more perhaps than discipline would have allowed, the mate to show if he had thought it would be observed.

The work was done! What chord had he touched? Jake did not know, but he felt a change sweeping through his heart like coming out of an icebelt into tradewinds. A few moments later the bell relieved the watch; Jake plunged below and threw himself into his bunk, his face covered with his hard hands and sobbing like a child.

Carter had been the means of bringing one man to repentance, and saving the life of another—perhaps of half a dozen more.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

The same evening that Penfield's fate was hanging in the balance, Uncle Ralph sat cosily by the library fire, newspaper in hand, and waiting for Aleck to come home. Everything was so sure to go well with his two faithful clerks, and the new luxury of home was so tempting, that he was getting into the way of leaving business early, and for the first time in his life enjoying his own fireside for an hour or two in the evening. But the newspaper was upside down this time, and his own thoughts seemed to be uppermost and so engrossing that he started when he heard Aleck's key in the door.

"Well, sir," he said, as Aleck came in with as light a step and as glowing a face as if such a thing as work had never been heard of, "I've been making a discovery, sitting here all alone; and that is, that I've been a poor fool not to have made a home for myself, in some shape or other, thirty years ago! Don't you follow my example, old fellow. You must get a wife all in good time, but still it is possible there are some other things to be thought of first. What day is to-morrow?"

"Tuesday, I believe," said Aleck.

"Humph! Yes. Anything else?"

"Only my birthday, so far as I know. I shall be twenty-one, I suppose, if I live to see it."

"Ah! Well that is what I was thinking about half an hour ago, I believe; and I was only waiting for you to come home to ask you how you would like to have 'Halliday's' known as 'Halliday & Co.' in future."

Aleck started.

"O uncle, I don't deserve that! That is too much!"

"We wont go as far as to talk of deserts," said his uncle. "If I could tell you how my life came to be a lonely one, and how lonely it has been, you could understand better what you have been to me the last few years. If you had refused me when I asked you to come, I don't know what I should have done, and it would be ten times worse to part with you now; and as one never knows

what notion a young man may take, you see I'm only casting an anchor to windward for myself, if I can pin you a little closer. There aren't many men lucky enough to have two such right-hands as you and Thorndyke; and if I can get one of them for a partner, why, we'll divide the other between us, that is all. Thorndyke is a genius! If he keeps on at this rate, we old men may have to step aside and let him come in as number one some day, yet. But you are my brother's son, Aleck, and I want you in my sight and by my side as long as I live; you have been the greatest comfort of my life; you have made a green spot in it the last few years, and it would be like going back to Sahara to give you up."

Aleck did not sleep much that night; not for worlds would he have told his uncle that he had been fighting away with college studies all these years; and as he had watched Thorndyke coming on, a faint hope had grown stronger and stronger that he might take his place some day, and so much more than fill it that he could slip away without being really missed. But that was all gone now; he would never leave his uncle! And as for himself! Well, he had been happy in the store, even while dreaming all the time of getting away, and if he could once settle that question, and be done with fidgeting about it, he might be very happy. And he was quite sincere in all his gratitude to his uncle. He was giving him a position to be envied by any business man, and there was no better place than Halliday's for making a fortune, at all events.

So it was all settled, and no one was more proud of the new arrangement than the senior clerk, as Thorndyke now became.

"And a lucky fellow you are, Thorndyke, to get your foot on that round in the ladder," said Tom, who had come in to see how Aleck carried his new dignity, and stopped, as he always did, for a few words with Thorndyke. "If I thought I should ever get to that I should take courage, but it seems as if I never should; and I don't know that I shall be any better off, after all, when the day comes at last."

Thorndyke glanced quickly in Tom's face. It had seemed to him looking rather woe-begone for some time past, and he wondered if Tom was having any trouble. He could give a faint guess, for he had been sent over to Fenimore & Co.'s a good many times since he had been in the store, and though the thought of Hal was so inseparably connected with the one terrible memory of his life, that he had avoided even the sight of him when possible, he had heard him speak to Tom with those same taunting tones that brought the whole thing up with a rush, and made him tingle to his fingers' ends for Tom. Never since that dreadful day

could he hear an unkind word spoken to any human being without a shiver through his own heart; and when it came in Hal's own voice, he could only look at Tom and wonder how he could bear it, and wish he were a strong man and a rich one, that he might somehow get hold of him and pull him out of the reach of it.

"It wont be very long, will it?" he asked; "isn't Hal going in as partner soon?"

"Yes," said Tom, "in two or three months; but there's Gray between us, you know; and, after all, I don't know that it makes any great difference. It will be the same old mill, whatever wheel in it I turn, and the same ugly grind. Some day before I know it I shall find it has ground whatever soul I ever had into such small dust I cannot find it."

"If you think there is any danger of that, why don't you get out of it?" asked Thorndyke, more earnestly than he dared to show Tom, and the next moment he was almost frightened at the look that came into Tom's face.

"I tell you," said Tom, "it's all very fine to ask a drowning man why he don't catch at some straw, when there are half a dozen other people hanging on him at the same time. If it wasn't that they're depending on me at home, and have been waiting for me all these years, the world isn't so wide but I'd put half of it between me and Fenimore's before many days had passed. But, as things are, of course there's nothing for it but to stick by. I'll hold on as long as I can, but if I go down, and the rest with me, I can't help it."

Tom's eyes met Thorndyke's with an almost desperate look, and then he turned suddenly away. "Pshaw, Thorndyke, I tell you again you don't know what a lucky dog you are. Shut up here with a fellow like Aleck I should not think you had a trouble left in the world!"

So it was all out! It was Hal, as Thorndyke had thought! And with Tom's forlorn face turning away as if ashamed of what he had said, Thorndyke felt more troubled than ever. What could he do about it?—as he had asked himself many times before.

But after Tom had gone the consciousness of another pain came over him; he had felt it like a stab, at Tom's last words, but he was too much engrossed by anxiety for him, to dwell upon them at the moment; now they came echoing back: "I shouldn't think you'd feel you had a trouble in the world."

And was that all Tom knew, all he realized after all these years and with his memory of that terrible day long ago? Well, that was just as Thorndyke had meant it should be, just as he was trying to have it all the time; and why should he feel this strange pain when he found it was so? He had been so bent on being a brave soldier.

He had let every one look at him, and heard whisperings now and then, and had done his work, and gone home with a smile for the doctor and Nellie, and the thought of the great Captain had kept him strong through it all. It had been hard enough sometimes, and some of the hardest had been when the other boys came in to tell Aleck about their games or their excursions, or to beg him off to join them.

“All but me!” always came quickly up with its old ring, and brought with it the echo of what the doctor had said when he nodded good-by to him at the school-room.

“Remember you don’t run too hard till you are used to it; but I won’t be afraid to match you with the fleetest of them, in a few months’ time.”

He thought no one had ever guessed a word; the pale face and great dark eyes looked quietly over the counter, or went about their work, or smiled good-by as Aleck went off, as if they had no thought of anything else; but Aleck and the doctor knew it all; and the doctor used to tramp up and down the room now and then, until Nelly would glance up wonderingly from her work.

“The very same! The very same look he gave me the first time he opened his eyes at me, after it began to seem as if he might pull through after all! Nothing in the world for him, and it’s all right there shouldn’t be, and he’s glad there’s such a good time for you and me; that’s what there is in that smile of his.”

“I don’t see how he can quite feel that there’s nothing in the world for him when he has us all,” said Nelly gently. “He surely can’t forget that.”

“No,” said the doctor, “he does not forget that, and I don’t believe the thought of us is out of his mind a moment from the time he leaves the house in the morning, and he hangs upon it till he comes back at night; but still, life has something outside of us, or ought to have, to a fellow like him. And it would have had, if it hadn’t been for a set of miserable——”

The doctor’s book was very near taking another fly out of the window; but he

only added quietly, "However, he'll find out that he's somebody yet, and make his fortune, if nothing more. Halliday says he's a genius, and he'll be known as the first chemist in the state, some day."

The doctor was right about Thorndyke's "hanging on." It seemed as if, aside from the thought of the Prince Royal, he lived and moved in the doctor and Aleck; and as for Nelly, she had never come to seem quite like a real person yet, always the beautiful vision of the flower window. The doctor was first of all, of course; Thorndyke watched his every movement as if it were food for his eyes, no matter how engrossed they might be with any work. But still, it only seemed wonderful that he had them all; he could not make it seem anything that really belonged to him; only a grace from day to day.

But poor Tom! He was sure he was having trouble somehow, and to see any one in trouble was always trouble itself to Thorndyke; what could he do? How could he make things seem any better? If he could only get Tom over to Halliday's, with Aleck! But that would be throwing away the years he had been working and waiting for promotion at Fenimore's.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

Tom was too busy just then to be thinking of promotion, or of woes by the way; the busy season was coming on, and he had just been advanced to the wholesale room; quite a step, and he couldn't help liking it, though Hal was in the same department. Hal was a good fellow enough when he didn't happen to feel like saying anything disagreeable, and when he did—pshaw! would Tom never get over being a goose?

Hal was busy in his turn; a customer had just come in whom the junior partner had turned over to him with the whisper that it was especially important he should be pleased, and Hal had been sharpening his business wits to capture him. But it seemed for some time as if he would not be caught; he knew precisely what he wanted and would not be taken in any other net. But if he knew what he wanted it would only be the more of a failure if Fenimore & Co. couldn't suit him, and Hal redoubled his energies, and called every resource into requisition.

At last it seemed as if triumph were at hand. The customer caught sight of a lot of goods and stopped suddenly before them.

“There!” he exclaimed, “there’s something I should like, if they’re what they seem to be;” and he stooped to examine them.

Hal caught a look from the junior partner which said, “Don’t have any difficulty there; push your advantage,” and he waited anxiously for what should come next.

The inspection was concluded, and the goods pronounced very handsome.

“Now what do you ask for those?”

At another look from the partner, Hal named the price, a trifle lower than the mark.

“That’s reasonable,” said the customer. “I think I’ll take the whole lot;” and Hal’s triumph rose to high-water mark as the junior smiled across to him. A good piece of work for so early in the morning, for this was a man who bought heavily and paid well, but had never brought his patronage to Fenimore & Co. before.



“But wait a moment,” he said, “are these all you have?”

“All we have,” said Hal, “and we had the only invoice. We sold a smaller lot to Pollard & Leighton, and I assure you no one else will have them.”

“Ah! Pollard & Leighton have them? Then I do not care to take them, and as I see nothing else that I require, I will bid you good morning,” and with a bow he left the store.

The junior partner hardly waited for him to be out of hearing.

“And a nice piece of work you’ve made of it for a fellow almost twenty-one, and coming into the firm before long! He didn’t ask you if any of the goods had been sold, and you needn’t have gone out of your way to tell him; but even if you must needs do that, it was quite another thing to give names. We’ve lost that man now, I suppose.”

Hal walked into the next room without a word, more annoyed and chagrined than at anything that had happened since he had been in the store. He had made a great mistake and there was no getting over it, and he had sufficient pride in Fenimore & Co. to feel sorry enough at the best; but the junior being so disturbed about it made the matter worse. However there was no use fretting, and perhaps he should find something in the next room to help him forget it.

Yes there was something sure enough. Tom had got hold of an equally desirable customer, and was making a great swing with him. His spirits were rising tremendously, and by the time he had finished his sale he had forgotten that anything disagreeable had ever happened in the course of his life.

“Who was that?” asked Hal.

“A man from Illinois,” said Tom, “and a pretty good thing we’ve made of it too.”

“Let me see the bill,” said Hal, and he ran his eye over it.

“Look here,” he exclaimed, putting his finger on a point in the list where Tom’s pride was particularly centred, “you didn’t sell him those goods at the price marked here, did you?”

“Of course I did; why not?”

“Why not?” asked Hal, with the sting of the old sneer made sharper than ever by

the freshness of his own annoyance, “no reason in the world that I know of, except that it is five cents a yard less than we paid for them.”

Tom stood aghast, and his tongue seem fast to the roof of his mouth. His first week in the salesroom, and a blunder like that! Should he be sent down again in disgrace, or only left to feel as if he ought to be?

Hal’s own trouble went clear out of sight, and he laughed a most exasperating laugh that Tom was only too familiar with.

“Better take that bill down to the senior,” he said. “Illinois is a great state; perhaps he’d like to send you out there to establish a branch.”

Tom’s memory suddenly ran back, he didn’t stop to ask how, to a certain night, years ago, when he sat over his game of chess under Hal’s gaslight, and the same miserable feeling that had sent him home so fast that evening hugged him tight as he went down to the counting-room to have things set right if there was any way to do it. He remembered in what a hurry he had tucked himself away under his blankets that night; but there was no such skulking to be done now; he had got to face things the best way he could.

And he *could* face almost anything if people only wouldn’t say something disagreeable about it! He supposed it was ridiculous, but it was no use; he would rather any one would knock him down any day. Well, he must try to keep out of Hal’s way for a few days; that was all that could be done this time.

But that was of no use either. Hal stood square in the doorway, with two or three clerks at his side, the next morning, and the very first salute was, “How’s Illinois this morning? Suppose we give three cheers for the Hoosier state?”

For one moment Tom felt as if *he* could have knocked somebody down; but that wasn’t like Tom, and was gone again as quickly as it came, only the old forlornness that had come to be almost an everyday thing since he came into the store, stuck by.

The last straw breaks the camel’s back, and this time Tom found himself getting desperate. He pushed past Hal, and made his way to his post, but he was thankful enough that no important business came to him that day; he should have made worse work of it than yesterday, for his only thought was how to get out of it altogether, a thousand miles away if he could, he didn’t care where or what became of him afterwards, if only he need never see Hal again! And he *would*

get away! Hal was to be junior partner himself soon, and things would be worse than ever, and even if the day *should* ever come when the firm kept their promise to Mr. Willoughby, Hal would be above him still; and for ever, so far as he could see. He would rather earn his living with a pick-axe, if he could only be left to feel like a man while he carried it on his shoulder.

“Don’t care what becomes of you, Tom Haggarty! All very well, but what is going to become of the rest waiting for you at home?” whispered something in his ear.

Ah, there it was, and it always came round to that again, no matter what desperate resolves he took up for a moment.

Yes, he supposed he must stick where he was and take what came, though he believed he’d rather be a galley-slave, provided nobody ever spoke to him; it must be he wasn’t much of a man, after all, or nobody would dare taunt him quite as often as Hal!

There was his voice at this moment!

“Where’s the hoosier general betaken himself? I want to inquire how he’s brought out profit and loss this morning;” and Tom heard a laugh from the younger clerks that seemed the echo of Hal’s own.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

“Doctor! are you there?” called a voice through Dr. Thorndyke’s speaking-tube, in the dead of night.

“Yes,” was the answer; “what’s wanted?”

“Come down right away, can’t you? It’s Aleck. Uncle Ralph isn’t all right, I think.”

“Wait three minutes for me,” and they were scarcely past when the front-door opened and the doctor was ready.

“What do you say, Aleck? What’s wrong?”

“I can’t tell, indeed,” said Aleck as they hurried on; “some sound I heard led me to fear that he was in trouble, and I went to his room. He seems to be sleeping, but he looks strangely, and I can’t rouse him.”

Neither could the doctor. He knew that as soon as he got one look in the face, but he did not say so; he stepped quietly to the bed and shook him gently by the shoulder, then lifted an eyelid, listened to the heavy breathing, and looked Aleck slowly in the face.

“Stimulants?” asked Aleck, eagerly.

The doctor shook his head.

“No use, my boy; we will try, if you like, but the work is done, I’m afraid.”

Aleck brought something, but only to find, as the doctor said, it was of no use.

“Oh, what is it?” he cried; “what *is* the matter? Why cannot we do something?”

“Because there is nothing to be done, Aleck, nothing but to wait and watch by him, that he may not be alone at the last.”

“Oh, why would not he listen to me!” groaned Aleck. “It has seemed as if he were beside himself of late, arranging his business. I could not see why he need hurry things so, but I have found him busy over his papers every night when I

came home, and left him busy when I went to bed. I was sure he was doing too much, but I never thought of this!”

“That is the secret of it,” said the doctor, “but not the whole secret. He has not been well; he has felt some symptoms probably that urged him to it; either weight alone he might have borne.”

“And there is no hope? He is going to leave us? Oh, do let me call Nelly!”

“Not quite yet,” said the doctor, detaining him gently; “let us watch him awhile. A little nearer morning would be better for Nelly.”

So they watched and waited, and just as morning dawned and Nelly came, Uncle Ralph was gone, not even knowing that any one stood by his side to say good-bye.

Gone! Aleck had almost forgotten all the word meant, it was so many years now since he and Nelly were first left alone together, and he had not realized how nearly his father’s place had been filled since his uncle came to make his home at the cottage. And now it was all over again! The world looked dark enough as he opened the front-door to step out into it again the next morning, but it was as real as ever, and making more demands upon him than ever before. There were a thousand things to be done and thought of, and after a day or two Aleck found himself, though still bewildered with all that had happened, called upon on every hand—everything referred to him at the store, and he knew there must be affairs to be attended to beyond what the books could show.

The first thing was to send for his uncle’s lawyer. He came at once, but the usual form of condolence was rather shortened, and he looked in Aleck’s face with a smile.

“And now, sir, you must allow me to present my congratulations to yourself.”

“To me!” exclaimed Aleck, between surprise and anger; what could he mean?

“Yes, sir, to you, as sole heir of your uncle’s estate, which has been supposed for some years to be large, but the amount disposed of in the will may even surprise yourself.”

“The will! I did not suppose a will existed, and indeed I know it did not a while ago.”

“Very possibly,” said the lawyer; “but there is one deposited in my safe at present bearing, I think, the same date with your admission into partnership, and with the exception of a handsome legacy to your sister and to the young man associated with you here—Thorndyke, I think his name is—you will find yourself the recipient of the whole; and I must beg once more to congratulate you on a fortune and a business establishment such as fall to the lot of few young men.”

Aleck stood bewildered, but when Thorndyke heard the news, the “all but me” was forgotten in his smile for once. “O Aleck, it’s glorious! The Prince Royal has given it to you, I know he has, and it’s only the small beginning of what you deserve, and what He’ll find for you some day.”

“What I deserve?” said Aleck, putting his hands on Thorndyke’s shoulders and looking earnestly in his face. “I do not deserve anything from Him.”

Thorndyke shook his head.

“What did He say about a cup of cold water to one of the least? I should have died of thirst if it had not been for the doctor and you; you know that very well.”

“And don’t you think I would rather have had Uncle Ralph than all the fortunes in the world?”

“Yes, I know you would, and I have lost him too; but, O Aleck, you can’t help my being glad for what has happened to you.”

“And something has happened to you, too, young man, if the story is true at all.”

“Oh, I hope not,” said Thorndyke; “that wouldn’t be right. What have I ever done, and I owe him everything! No, Aleck, I want you to take everything, and just let me stay and help you always; that is more than I deserve.”

“Tut,” said Aleck, “we’ll see, my boy; but if you shouldn’t stay by, the old ship would go down on very short notice; you know well enough, I was never anything more than the tail of the comet, since I undertook this business.”

“The story,” as Aleck called it, was quite true, and thanks to all the toil Uncle Ralph had expended upon his affairs, those last few weeks, Aleck stepped into his new dignities with very little perplexity or trouble.

Some people shook their heads and said they were a young set of hands left at

Halliday's, to steer such a craft as that. But they soon found that higher authorities did not think so; the physicians' patronage came in just the same, so the rest of the world concluded to give up their doubts, and popular as Aleck and Thorndyke had always been, it was more than ever the thing to go to Halliday's.

So all went on smoothly and well, only they missed Uncle Ralph more than they could tell. But as time wore on, Thorndyke, who was always watching Aleck, thought he saw more of a shadow in his face than even his loss could account for; it was not natural for Aleck to look as if his thoughts were busy with something outside, while people and things close by were forgotten, or only attended to as if they disturbed him. But once or twice when Thorndyke tried to sound him, or even ventured to ask what he was thinking about, he got for answer a sudden lighting up of Aleck's face, and the old gay laugh that had been music to Thorndyke so many times.



“Thinking about you, old fellow!” he would say, and put his hands on Thorndyke’s shoulders a moment, and for a little while seemed to have come back again. But not for long. He had told the truth, as he always did, and he was thinking about Thorndyke; but that was not all, and the thinking went on, until at last the problem was worked out, questions were settled, and Aleck came back to stay. This time Thorndyke asked no questions; only a quick look and a smile passed between him and Aleck, and they understood each other perfectly. But Aleck had something to say, if Thorndyke did not ask, only not quite yet.



“Not yet,” he said to himself. “I must wait for his birthday; and after waiting all these years, a few months wont count for much.”

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

The few months slipped away and the birthday came, or at least the day that was always celebrated as such; for though neither Mrs. Ganderby nor any of the other people under the shadow of the old butternut-tree had the least idea when or where the record should have been made, the doctor called him just twelve when he first saw him, and insisted upon a birthday every year that same day in October.

Aleck went to the store an hour before time to catch him and have his talk out before people began to come in. But early as he was, Thorndyke was there before him, and a customer too; so Aleck retreated into the sheltered corner behind the desk to wait his opportunity. Thorndyke gave him a nod and a radiant look as he came in, for these birthdays were times when, for one day in the year, the "all but me" was *forced* to flee away; the doctor had always planned some excursion, and managed that he could bear it; and the little room, that had seemed such a paradise the first time he saw it, was gradually filling up with treasures, more and more beautiful every year, until the walls would hardly hold anything more. Uncle Ralph's was missing this time, but all the rest were there, even to old Joan's; and the flowers that had always come from Nelly since the very first, "went ahead," as Aleck called it, of all that had ever come before. The doctor was in high spirits, and Thorndyke thought "the princess" had never been so bewitching in her gentle, lovely ways. He *couldn't* say "All but me" this morning; he had almost forgotten it, and there was actually a bit of color in his cheeks, and the great eyes shone as Aleck had not seen them since that day he stood before the window so many years ago.

Aleck sat and watched him as he went about to fill the prescription waited for.

"Good for him!" he said to himself; "the boy looks gay this morning. But I declare I wish I didn't remember how he looked that miserable day at the school. That thing between his shoulders was hardly worth noticing then; I wonder the boys saw it at all—and now! It seems as if it almost buried that splendid head and face of his, and I know the pain is always there by the patient, wistful look out of his eyes. And his step that flew down the street so that I couldn't catch him that day! It never breaks now from that slow, noiseless way it has. Well, it's no use thinking what might have been, and I suppose I should never have had

him here if all had gone well. Will that man *never* be ready to go? Ah, there he is actually steering for the door!”

But at the same instant somebody else came in, only a little child, however, wanting something that would take but a moment. So Aleck possessed his soul in patience; there surely would not be any one else in, it was so early.

But what was the matter with Thorndyke?

The child stood innocently enough before the counter, but Thorndyke’s face was growing white, the glow was gone, and sharp lines coming in its place, and the thin fingers trembled so that it seemed as if the package never would be tied. But it was done at last, and Thorndyke handed it to the child with the same smile and the same gentle “Anything more?” that the customers had learned to expect. But when the door was shut, Aleck started. What *was* the matter? Thorndyke was leaning against the wall, his lips pressed tightly together, and the great veins showing blue and hard on his forehead.

“What is it, Thorndyke?” said Aleck, springing towards him.

Thorndyke covered his face with his fingers, and his whole frame quivered as Aleck had never seen it before, but as the doctor saw it once under the overhanging of the old rock.

“O Aleck, I cannot bear it! Didn’t you see? I can bear anything else. I can let a strong man look down at me, but that wondering, pitying look of a little child! That is the one thing I cannot bear! Oh, why must I always be a soldier? I am so tired, and I had almost forgotten I was one to-day!”

Aleck drew him quickly into the shelter of the desk, and got his arm round his neck.

“There, there, rest a little if you are so tired! you are the bravest little soldier in all the world, and the lightest weapons are the hardest to stand against sometimes. Is that the reason you always get out of the way when a child comes in? I noticed it, but I never knew. Why didn’t you tell me? Don’t, old fellow! don’t mind. I’ve got lots I want to say to you this morning, and I thought it should be such a happy day. If you only knew, if you only would believe how wonderful you are to every one! The doctor and Nelly would think they had nothing in the world to be proud of, if it weren’t for you; and you know what Uncle Ralph thought and everybody else is finding out. And as for fighting, you

get victories every day where the strongest of us would go down.”

But Aleck had to wait awhile for his talk. The next customer that came in saw the queer little form going about just as usual, but Aleck knew it was no time for him, and waited till evening when he got Thorndyke by himself in his own room, the fire crackling and the room shining as if there had never been such a thing as a shadow in the world.

“Now, old fellow,” he began, after he had been going on merrily for a while, “I’ve got a little business proposal to make. I want you to buy me out.”

The great eyes opened in amazement.

“Buy you out, Aleck! What do you mean?”

“I mean exactly what I say,” and then Aleck told him all the sacrifice it had been to him to go into the store to begin with, how he had done it for Nellie’s sake and his uncle’s, and how he had gone steadily through the whole college course out of hours, as well as it was possible to do by himself.

“I had an idea, you see, of slipping off and leaving the coast to you, you were doing so splendidly and Uncle Ralph was so proud of you; but that night he talked to me about the partnership, I saw it would not do then. But now, why not? I know he thought I should always stay, but if he sees how things go among us at all, he sees what it would be to me to get away, and I know what he would say. We’ll never take the name down, old fellow, it shall be Halliday still, and I’ll hang about more or less till you have one more birthday, and when you are twenty-one, up goes ‘Halliday & Thorndyke,’ and I leave you to your own devices altogether.”

“But Aleck, where are you going? What do you want to do?”

“What do I want to do? I want to get my profession: what I have always wanted, and what my father wanted for me. He thought I should be a lawyer, I know, but I should never make one in the world; there is only one profession for me, and I am going to the headquarters you and I think most of. I’m going to study with Dr. Thorndyke. Why shouldn’t a man be a doctor if he wants to?”

“All but me!” The doctor had meant to make one of him, Thorndyke knew that very well. However that was neither here nor there. Aleck was going to leave him; that was all to be thought of now.

“But Aleck!” he cried, and then stopped himself. Aleck had sacrificed everything all these years, because his uncle wanted him; he should never know what the store and life would seem, when he hadn’t him at his side any longer!

“Only you know—why, Aleck, I can’t buy you out! you know very well what I have wouldn’t buy a corner of the store.”

“Well, put that in, if you’re not afraid to risk it, and you shall have the whole profits of the business from to-day onward; and if you manage the old concern as well as I know you can, you will own the whole of it before many years. Uncle Ralph would like it, I know, and I don’t see why we sha’n’t be jolly all around.”

“But Aleck!” said Thorndyke again, “I can’t do it! It would be just taking what belongs to you and putting it in my pocket. I never will do it in the world.”

“Well now, wait a minute,” said Aleck. “I haven’t finished my remarks about it. In the first place, there’s more than I know what to do with, without it, and in the second place, I owe it to you if there wasn’t, for you have made life in the store a different thing to me a thousand times over. Do you think I could ever have kept up heart if I hadn’t thought so much of your being there every day, or could ever have been patient through it all if I hadn’t seen such a little fighter at my side? So that’s settled so far, and now in the third place, I can’t desert the ship, unless you will take the whole command, and if you do you ought to have the whole profits. And in the fourth place,” and Aleck put his arm around his future partner’s neck again in a most unbusinesslike way, “in the fourth place, it’s all in the family, whatever you do and have, you dear, little old soldier? Don’t you know nobody could be closer to us all? Flesh and blood couldn’t bring it any nearer, and if we’re so proud of you now, what will it be by-and-by?”

Nobody could resist Aleck. It was all settled with the doctor and Thorndyke and everybody else, just as he would like it, and before they really knew what he was about, and Thorndyke very soon found himself really steering the ship, and Aleck only “hanging about more or less,” as he had said. A good deal “less,” Thorndyke thought, but it was better than losing him altogether, and he was determined he should never know how he missed him.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

Tom sauntered into Halliday's now and then, as he always had, but Thorndyke saw something, he couldn't tell what, that worried him more and more; at all events Tom looked more hopeless and forlorn every time.

"What a man you're making, Thorndyke!" he said one day; "it was in you, I suppose, and it wasn't in me; that's the difference. But you don't know what a chance you've had. Did Aleck ever badger you or crowd you in all the time you were together?"

"*Aleck!* Why, you know him, Tom!"

"Yes, I suppose so; only I can't imagine anybody's leaving you in peace and quiet all the time. Well, I might have made something, perhaps, if I'd been here, though not much, probably. I always was a stupid, blundering fellow, and never should have been of much account, anyhow. I'm none at all now, though, and I'd give up and let everything go to the bottom, if there was nobody that thought he could hold on to me if I didn't. They'll find out their mistake some day; but I suppose I ought to hold on till they do."

"You wouldn't like any one else to say that," said Thorndyke, greatly troubled.

"Well, it's not very amusing, but I do hear it every day of my life, and so I suppose it must be the truth, even if there *are* some people kind enough not to tell me so."

A customer came before Thorndyke had time to answer, and Tom left the store with a slow, listless step. Work was waiting for him, however, and lively enough to stir him up and make him forget whether he could do it well or not, and when this happened, he was sure to do it well. If he had known how often the other partners thought so, it would have changed everything; but he came almost altogether in Hal's way, and by the time he had done with him, he couldn't believe that any kind word he had from the others was more than out of charity, and he never had a summons into the counting-room without expecting to be told what a stupid fellow he was, and wondering that it did not come.

But this time "stupid" certainly wasn't the word. Tom was getting more and

more on his mettle as buyers came thicker and faster, and he “was making things fly,” as Aleck would have called it, in a way that Hal almost looked on with envy. Business hours were just coming to a close when his run was over, and he stood near the door having a word with his last customer, and with a record of sales that made him feel as if he *was* somebody, for a few minutes at least.

“Oh, by the way,” said the customer, “I want a drygoods-box. What is that one worth, and can I have it?”

“Yes,” said Tom, “you can have it; about fifty cents will cover it, I suppose.”

He handed him the amount, and Tom put it in his vest-pocket, and went on laughing and chatting a few moments, feeling his extra spirits a luxury he was tempted to extend over as much ground as possible, and in fact they lasted him fairly home, and even the ghost of them came back with him to business hours in the morning.

But the sound of Hal’s voice calling for the hoosier general dispelled all that was left in a minute; there was nothing that tormented Tom like that nickname, and it seemed as if it never would be done with. Even if it was dropped once in a while, until he began to flatter himself it had really gone under, up it came again, always at a moment when he felt least like bearing it, and he was sure to see some of the younger clerks daring to grin; and what could he say if they did? Hadn’t he made a blunder that almost any of them would have been disgraced for; and if the junior partner chose to remind him of it, he supposed they had a *right* to grin.

He got through with what Hal wanted, but it seemed to him Hal gave him a peculiar look now and then. There was no mistake about it, and it came oftener and oftener as the day went on. What did it mean? It followed him home after hours, and worried him every time he knew where he was through the night. What had he done now, and how many people would hear of it as soon as he did? He should hear of it soon, he was sure, for the same look was there when he came in the next morning.

“Sent in your accounts, since Thursday’s sales, general?” asked Hal.

“Why, yes, of course,” said Tom.

“Oh, very good,” and the look was more significant than ever.

Poor Tom was miserable again. Should he ever get through life, and be done

with it? Unluckily he had to get through to-day first, and it dragged miserably enough, but the next promised no better. There was the look again, and the same question: "Sent in your accounts, general?"

What did it mean? He couldn't get Hal to say that it meant anything, but the same look and the same question came every day, until it seemed to Tom he should go distracted, and he was divided between thankfulness and agony when he heard Mr. Vickery, the next partner, ask suddenly,

"What do you mean, Fenimore? I've heard you ask Haggarty that same thing every day for a week; doesn't he send in his accounts as a matter of course?"

"I don't know that he doesn't," said Hal, "but I've noticed a little deficiency, and I've been waiting to see it made up."

"Deficiency!" exclaimed Tom; "what do you mean?"

"Perhaps you thought the item too trifling for a place in the books," said Hal, with the old intolerable taunt in his tone; "there *are* people who don't like to trouble themselves about trifles."

"Not business people," said Mr. Vickery, "and Haggarty knows that well enough; if there is anything wrong, it had better be set right as soon as possible," and he looked searchingly in Tom's face.

Tom's desperation gave him boldness for once, as he stepped in front of Hal.

"Tell me what you mean!" he exclaimed. "Wait a moment, Mr. Vickery, if you please, and hear what he means."

"Oh, nothing of any consequence, only that I saw you make a sale the other day and put the money in your pocket, and I've seen no return of it in your accounts."

Mr. Vickery's look was piercing now; Tom stood bewildered for a moment, and then thrust his finger into his vest-pocket with a sharp exclamation such as no one in the store had ever heard him use before.

"I sold a drygoods-box the other day," he said, "and upon my word and honor I have never thought of it from that moment to this! You know how we had been worked that day, Fenimore, and I had two hours to come after that though it was past time to close then. There is the money, and there it might have been till next



year, if you had not reminded me of it, but I think it is the first time my memory has defrauded the house of even such a sum as fifty cents.”

“Possibly,” said Hal, with the sneer still on his face; “but it may be well to look out for it in the future;” and he turned to his books without another word.

“Let it pass, Haggarty,” said the other partner gravely; “it was a trifle to be sure, but the world is built on trifles, and that is one of the first things to be remembered in business.”

Tom turned away with tight-shut lips and a white face. How many had overheard the conversation? There were plenty within reach of it, at any rate, and he might be called a thief all through the store before night! And even if he escaped that, he did not believe Mr. Vickery would ever feel sure of him again. Hal *knew* better, but he had come very little in the second partner’s way.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

All the rest of that day, Tom went about his work like a wooden thing; he answered questions and handled things that came in his way, but his thoughts were running heavily back and forth over the long dreary years since Mr. Willoughby picked him up in his chaise, and always coming round to the same miserable point at last. How brave and patient he had meant to be, how faithful he had tried to be, through it all, for the sake of those at home, and how he had meant to deserve all the promotion he should ever get, and let the firm feel he had repaid them well for all they did for him. And who had ever taken the slightest notice whether he did or not, who had ever been the wiser for it all? And now that it was almost over, now that he thought such recompense as money could give was just before him, to be shunned and sneered at for a thief!

Who had even noticed? He remembered suddenly what Aleck had said to him, that dark terrible time, about *One* who *always* did, and was always ready to help.

“Yes,” he said, “I know it. I lived on that all the next year, and I never felt so much like a man in my life; but since I came here, that, and everything else that had any life in it, seems to have been driven out of me. If I *could* have hung on to it, it might have helped me through everything. It’s my own fault that I didn’t, I suppose, but after a fellow gets to feeling so horridly as I have from one year’s end to another, he lets go of everything sometimes. If I could only have gone somewhere else! There’s Thorndyke now, he never’ll know what a chance he had there, with Aleck always next to him! But there’s an end to everything, and I’ll—”

But up came once more the thought of “the rest at home.” If he left the store, and went out into the world, how many more years might it be before he could be worth anything to them! And where could he go, and what could he do, if he went out from Fenimore’s with such whisperings as were likely to follow him! And yet, it seemed to him another day there would be worse than a thousand deaths. *That* day was done, at last, at all events, and Tom, as he passed out into the dark, saw no one, and scarcely knew where he was. But a familiar voice sounded in his ears.

“I say, Haggarty, what a hurry you’re in!”

He turned and saw Davis, his old schoolfellow at the professor's. He had not seen him from that time, until a few days before. He only knew that he went abroad directly after graduating, and had returned within a fortnight, "for a visit."

"Why, man alive," he said, as a gaslight fell on Tom's face, "what's the matter with you? How white you are! Are you sick?"

"I wish I were," said Tom, "and sick enough to have an end come to it all," and then shocked at having said so much to Davis, he stopped suddenly.

"Hallo!" said Davis, "what's the matter? Is luck bad to-day?"

"I don't know," said Tom, "some people never have any, you know. How are you?"

"Look here," said Davis, drawing Tom's arm through his, "come along and let's understand about this. We're old friends you know. There's no use in being down about the way the game goes; take heart and throw again, that's all."

They walked away, and Davis began to talk of old times and of the changes that had come. "And to think of you being left head of the family and going to business! I was expecting you over there every year for a while, till I found out how things were. Tell me how you like it;" and he went on with one question after another, until before Tom could believe it himself, he had drawn from him a pretty good idea of how matters stood.

"I wouldn't stay there," said Davis; "I'd clear out and be found missing some bright morning."

"Perhaps you would," said Tom, "with nobody looking to you to be anything to them, and more money than you know what to do with."

"Oh, is that the difficulty? I didn't know that was the case; but it isn't the worst thing in the world to be got over. I can tell you a way to ease matters off and get a start on your own feet before a very long time;" and drawing Tom's arm closer, he dropped into a low, confidential tone.

"But I can't!" exclaimed Tom, starting back in horror, as Davis came to his point at last.

"Hold on," said Davis, and went on talking rapidly in the same low whisper

without giving Tom a chance for another word.

“Look here!” said Tom, stopping in his walk, and turning on Davis like some desperate creature driven to bay at last; “what do you take me for? Do you mean to insult me?”

“Pooh!” said Davis, in the most imperturbable tone, regaining his hold on Tom’s arm and drawing him into step again; “don’t fly out with a fellow for trying to befriend you. There are slow ways of getting on in the world, and quicker ones for those who can’t afford to wait, that’s all; and I thought you were in a hurry. If you agree, I’ll introduce you to as gentlemanly a set of fellows as you know, and I’ll warrant you a welcome, for the truth is we want one more, of just your measure too, to make our set complete. Don’t make up your mind in a hurry; it’s early yet. Meet me here again at nine o’clock.”

“But I tell you I wont,” began Tom. “I don’t want to hear any such—”

“Pooh!” interrupted Davis again; “what’s the use of toiling a dozen years under somebody’s thumb when you might make enough to stand on your own feet in as many months? The world owes us a living, anyhow, and I don’t see why handling a bit of paper skilfully isn’t quite as much the gentlemanly thing as measuring away with a yardstick half a lifetime. Just come up like a man, and I’ll be responsible for the rest.”

It was seven o’clock, and for an hour and a half Tom pushed drearily up and down the streets through a drizzling mist, but the fog lay thicker and darker in his own brain. What should he say; what should he do? He must do something, for he would rather die than have another year like the last. Rather die? Of course he would; but people don’t always die for the wishing, and who would there be to take his father’s place if he should?

These thoughts crowded and whirled, and then came Aleck’s words, those words spoken so long ago, but never forgotten, “Some One that always notices.”

“I can’t help it,” he cried; “I believe I’m desperate. I’ve tried to do my best all these years, and what’s the use? as Davis says. Oh, if I only had one friend that really cared for me that I could go to and tell everything! I *should* have, I suppose, if I was worth it, and Hal would have respected me if I’d been worth it; but he never did, and of course nobody else did, only they were kind enough to keep it out of sight.”

If Tom could only have seen Thorndyke at that moment, and known what he was thinking of as he sat at his desk, with papers pushed away and his eyes fixed somewhere a good way beyond, with a pained and troubled look!

“Hoosier general!” he was saying to himself; “I wonder what that means? Something that Tom winced under, that was plain enough. I don’t see how Fenimore finds it in his heart to worry him so, and I’m sure there’s more of it going on than Tom knows how to get along with. I wish I could do something to help him out of it. I wish I could get him over here; it would be such a comfort now that Aleck is out of the way so much! But he’s doing so well there, and he’s worked his way almost to the top of the ladder, I could never ask him. I heard Fenimore praising him to the rest of the firm the other day, and I don’t wonder.”

But Tom didn’t hear; he plodded up and down without knowing that he was tired, and that he had eaten not a mouthful since morning, and that the drizzling mist had penetrated and chilled him through. He was only thinking of the store and of the hour of going back, and that if he did not soon find some way of escape by which he could still hold on to his duty at home, he was afraid he should let go of it! Oh, why was he left so? Why could not his father have lived? The city bell struck eight, and the echo of Davis’ voice seemed to repeat his words.

“Come up like a man!”

“Like a man!” echoed Tom again. “Like a counterfeiter and forger! What did he want me to bring him Fenimore & Co.’s signature for? He thinks there’s nothing decent in me, like the rest of the world, I suppose. But no one ever thought I could quite make a thief yet!”

He started with a sudden stab of recollection.

“Yes, they have, too! Hal called me a thief, and tried his best to show me off for one! What difference does it make if I go with Davis? And who cares, whatever I do?”

Nine o’clock struck at last, and as he reached the lamppost Davis had marked as a rendezvous, a figure stepped from behind it.

“Oh, here you are! That’s the right kind of a fellow!” whispered Davis, slipping a hand into Tom’s arm. “Now come along and I’ll introduce you to some of my friends.”

“Stop!” said Tom, squaring himself, “I’ll tell you in the outset, I want nothing to do with any black work you may have going on; but if you can take me somewhere where it’s warm and bright, let’s go. I can’t walk here all night, and I can’t go home and talk to people, to save my life.”



## CHAPTER XXVII.

The Cumbermede was ploughing her way merrily under a favoring breeze; her home run was half made, and everything had prospered as if Captain Carter were making his first voyage under a propitious star. His dream was realized at last, and he stood commander on his own quarter-deck. And commander he was indeed; every one on board found that out very speedily, for Carter had aimed at perfection from the day he shipped as a raw hand, and the eight years of holding fast to his motto hadn't made him less devoted to it. Perfect order, perfect discipline, perfect action, nothing less was accepted; but somehow, instead of the thankless working, like wooden things, that most of them had always found a sailor's life to mean, every one sprang to his duty with a will, and the ropes were pulled to a merry tune, instead of the unearthly guttural groan that served just as well to keep the time on many a ship.

Almost all were new hands this voyage. Penfield had disappeared long ago, and only the first mate and one of the crew had ever seen the vessel before. But that one stood by like one of her own timbers, "long-limbed Jake." His name had been on the ship's papers ever since the voyage when Carter had transferred him to his own watch, and restless as sailors are, always believing the last vessel they sail in the worst that ever ploughed the sea, no departing ship's company could ever tempt him away with them. He reappeared as regularly as repairs were made and cargo entered, and his only restless times were before Carter came aboard; as soon as his voice was heard, all right, and Jake was himself again, and the best man in the ship's crew, all officers agreed.

It was rather hard times for Jake, this voyage. It seemed to him life would never be anything again, now that Carter no longer had the watch. But the something, Jake couldn't have told what, that reached his heart, and kindled a spark of life there, with that first "Belay there, my hearty!" had kept its hold ever since, and did not need many words to help it. The "Take care of yourself, Jake, and there's a berth for you next voyage if you want it," as Carter went ashore, and the "On hand again, my man?—that's all right," as he came aboard for another voyage, set Jake about his business with a new glow, and the spark grew brighter, and the bit of life warmer, as every trip went on. He had been restless, this time, dreading lest he shouldn't get his greeting now that Carter came as captain. But there it was, just the same, and with the same hearty tone and friendly look, and

with that and his pride in seeing him take command, Jake had enough to live on, though the distance was doubled between them, and orders could never come direct from him again; he should hear his voice at any rate, and could watch for his coming on deck. What it had all been to Jake, Carter could never know, for he couldn't know all the deadly blackness that had filled his heart that night of Penfield's watch; and he couldn't see all the thoughts and memories that crowded the murderous hatred out, as Jake lay in his bunk that night, sobbing like a baby.

They had come back so many times since, that it seemed as if the very bunk would know them.

"It may be true after all," they began that night, "it may be true after all, what she always taught me, that I've got a soul of my own, and the One that made it cares what becomes of it. If He cares for me, mayhap it would be a pity not to care for myself. I might even think of what the old woman at home is always saying, and wonder if it could be true. I can remember the day when it did seem as if I was something more than a dog, and it's not so many years aback, either; but I've been told I wasn't, till I began to think other folks were right. It's a hard feeling, though, and goes against a man, if he is a man. And he wouldn't have looked at me like that if he hadn't thought I was one!"

It was the same thing over and over many a night, only stronger and clearer as time went on, until Jake's thoughts ventured a little farther still.

"And if it should be true, that there's a man in me after all, mayhap there's something in more of what she had to say. She said the One that made me was looking for something from me; but if he is, he sees plain enough I've made a poor cruise of it so far. I'm a good many points out of my course, there's no mistake about that; the only question is how I'm to get back again. She used to say he'd help me; that he died to bring my reckoning right, and he was ready to head me towards port again. Maybe it's true. I wouldn't have believed it once, but they say he's better than the best of us, and if he's got more the heart of a man in him than the mate has, he must be ready to lend a hand. Maybe he could bring me to my bearings again, if he'd take the wheel; and I'd set my sails square to the wind, if he would, for it comes rough on a man when he really believes he might make port, and knows he's drifting on the rocks. And as for anything he wants of me, if there's more pleasure in bearing a hand or shifting a course for him than there is for the mate, I should draw my pay in advance a hundred times over."



Out from that dark, comfortless bunk, out from that heart so lately full of bitterness and revenge, went the first upreachings of faith and loyalty towards Him who was waiting and watching for them—the first faint “ay, ay, sir,” to orders that were to save him from going down a wreck. Jake did not know they were the first yielding to whispers he would never listen to before; but the Whisperer knew and cherished them as only He knows how to do. And many a night, as the voyages went on, He drew nearer and said more; and as Jake listened, the lonely heart reached out more strongly towards the Voice, and fell nearer and nearer into its course, the homeward track of a soul that God has called.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Cumbermede had passed the line of gentle winds, and had struck a point where strong ones and even storms might be looked for. Still the sailors took no notice of the clouds; they believed too strongly in luck, and the new captain had been running in a "streak" of it ever since he hoisted anchor for the outward trip; he would get in all safe, no fear of that. But the captain had less faith in his star, and more in watchfulness, and was more frequently on deck as every day went by.

"I don't like those clouds there to starboard, Morton," he said to his first officer one afternoon; "they look a little ugly to me."

The mate took a sharp look towards them.

"I don't believe there's much in them," he said, "and they're to leeward of us, too, or have been, rather; the wind's getting round a trifle, I see."

"That's just it," said the captain; "and if it gets round a little farther we may find out what's in them before night. Keep a good lookout, and I'll be on deck again in half an hour."

Before the half hour had passed the wind had shifted decidedly, and was blowing very brisk from where the clouds lay.

"Reef the topsails," said the captain the moment he came up.

"Ay, ay, sir," said the mate, and passed the order to the men. But the winds worked faster than the men could, and before the order was fairly executed it was time to issue another, and still another followed. All hands were called, and in another half hour the vessel was driving, close-reefed, before a constantly increasing gale. "A half a gale," as the sailors called it at first, then "a gale of wind," and by the time the darkness gathered, "a living gale of wind."

The captain's voice could be heard clear and sharp above the tempest for some time, but at last it was almost impossible for either his or the mate's to be distinguished, though there was little to do by that time but to let the vessel drive.

“I don’t know what’s coming of this, Morton,” said the captain during a moment’s lull; “but, however we come out, we’ve done all we can.”

“I’m afraid we have, sir; but I can’t think this will last much longer. It seems to be holding off a little just now; and it would be hard to see anything go wrong so near home, and after such a run as we have had.”

But the momentary lull seemed only to have redoubled the strength of the tempest; the beating and the roar increased until it seemed as if every sail, close-reefed as it was, would be carried away. At last, through all the commotion, a sharp, tearing crash and a heavy fall announced that the foretopmast had yielded to the strain.

“Clear away there!” shouted the captain, and the men sprang forward with their axes. It was almost impossible to do anything, with the vessel pitching as if she would go under with every wave, but the work must be done, and the captain’s voice was heard now above everything.

But something else was not heard: a broken spar, just above the captain’s head, was swaying back and forth, crackling and snapping for one instant before it should come down. Only Jake’s eye, raised for one instant, caught sight of it. To shout or to gesture through the roar and darkness would have been vain; only a momentary flash of lightning had shown the danger to Jake. In one instant, almost like the lightning itself, he was at the captain’s side.

“Stand from under!” he shouted, and pointed upward. The captain sprang aside, Jake turned to do the same, but a pitch of the vessel destroyed his balance. The one second taken to recover it, was the one second too late. With a crash near enough now to be heard over all, the spar was down, and Jake—? Where was he? Overboard? For one moment it seemed so, but another flash showed him lying senseless against the windlass. If he could but have known that it was the captain himself who sprang toward him, lifted him up, and drew him to a place of safety?

In another half hour, as if the storm with this last cruel blow had wreaked its vengeance, it had passed away, a fine steady breeze was all that remained of its force, and the clouds were breaking in rifts along the sky. And with just such a momentary uncertain light as the moon was sending through them, Jake’s consciousness was returning; enough, though to show him that the captain was standing by his bunk and holding water to his lips. That moment repaid Jake for all the bygone years that had made his life a wretchedness.

“On hand again, my man? That’s all right! I was afraid you had shipped for another voyage, and all for my sake too!”

If Jake could only have told him what was in his heart! He would have given worlds to do it, but he could not speak.

“You saved my life, my hearty, and I shall remember that I owe it to you,” said the captain again.

Jake made a tremendous effort. He *would* speak! “No, captain,” he said, “I owed it to you before! Ever since the night you took me into your watch. I did not know I *had* a soul, before that, or that anybody cared for it if I had, but when I found *you* did, I believed Another might. I’ve lived for you ever since, and have tried to live a little for Him, if He’d accept it, and I’d have died for you any day. If I do now, it’s all right, and more than I ever thought He’d grant me. It’s only shipping for another voyage, as you say, and if he takes me safe to port, you’ll follow.”

When the morning sun rose over a calm blue sea, Jake’s voyage was ended, and the Divine hand he had reached out to grasp, in the loneliness of his comfortless bunk, that night so long ago, had steered him safely home!

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

At the moment Carter was listening to the few words Jake could summon strength to utter, Thorndyke sat in a little office Aleck had enclosed for him at one side of the store, where he could slip away for a little rest now and then without really leaving his new responsibilities, and once more Tom and his fortunes came uppermost in his thoughts.

“I wonder what has become of Haggarty,” he was saying to himself. “I can’t remember when he has been in here. And he didn’t look right, the last time he came. There was a while he seemed quite himself again, but he went down lower than ever before long. I wish I could find out what is going wrong with him. It can’t be anything at the store, for Hal’s making a trip abroad for the firm, and won’t be back for another month, and I know the senior partners think well of Tom. Indeed, I suppose he’ll go in himself before long, and yet something is certainly dragging on him. He looks worried and keeps out of the way. I’ve a great mind to go up to the house and see if I can get hold of him.”

Thorndyke got up from his easy chair, a very different affair from the piece of workmanship old Enoch had been so proud of years ago, and went out into the darkness.

“So tired to-day,” was the entry he had made that morning in his pocket journal, the only visible friend that ever heard a word about the pain, or how the battle went; only the great Captain himself heard the rest. “So tired to-day! Should give out utterly if I could leave the store.” But he wanted to find Tom! It was a long walk from the store, but that did not signify; he could rest when he reached there.

No, Tom was not at home and no one could tell him where he might be found. So he turned and retraced his steps—it is a great thing to be used to being tired! It was after midnight when Tom passed Halliday’s and took the same way Thorndyke had gone so wearily over a few hours ago.

“Good night, Haggarty,” Davis’ voice was saying, “don’t be so down, man! What can you expect after letting you share our good times so long, but that we should want a little work out of you some day? All play and no work makes Jack a poor boy, and you’ll just have to let us have that signature. If we make a

handsome thing out of it, you go halves, and you certainly couldn't ask anything more. Perhaps you don't realize that you're a little mixed up with us already, one of us, to all intents and purposes, and we could make that plain enough if we chose. We have a claim upon you, mind that."

Tom plunged on into the darkness hardly knowing or caring which way he took; not a star was to be seen, not a footstep stirred the stillness after Davis' tread had died away.

Suddenly that echo of Aleck's words came again, ringing in his ears, "Some One who always sees; who never thinks it beneath him to notice."

Tom pressed his hands to his forehead. No, no, he could not think of that! He dared not think of it now! If he had only held on to it once! If he could only think, now, that he had one friend who cared for him!

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## CHAPTER XXX.

The clouds that had made the night so dark were all gone the next morning, and the sun shone brightly as Aleck called at the doctor's to get Thorndyke over to the store early; he wanted to look over some papers preparatory to the new business arrangement, and he knew evening was no time for Thorndyke to undertake extra work.

Old Joan's face glowed with pride and delight at what was going on, but she tried her best to conceal it.

"It's no favorin' the wee bairn," she said, "to fling a' the doors wide, and tak him into the very heart o' the establishment. Ilka customer that casts a shadow inside kens he has been the heart and soul o' it a' for years, an' it's only acknowledging the truth before the world, to put his name where a' can read it. And I'm persuaded it is ower muckle to bring upon a pair o' shoulders like his the whole burden o' sic a house, wi' the lives and health o' half the city, and a' the wisest o' the doctors dependin' on him to fill their needs, and Mr. Aleck steppin' aside, and offerin' nae muir help, whatever the pinch may be!"

"Well, well, Joan, his head will make up for his shoulders, you know that very well, and he must have all the help he needs, let Aleck go when he will. Perhaps he'll be picking up a junior partner for himself after he comes to be owner of the whole thing, and that wont take so many years either, eh, little man?" and the doctor gave Thorndyke a look that wasn't at all ashamed to show how he felt about the matter, at least.

Business hours were early at the Fenimores', too, and Tom was at his post as usual, other people would have said, but for himself, he could hardly have been sure whether he was there or not; he seemed to be walking in a maze, some terrible dream of perplexity and desperate resolve, and it grew darker and heavier as the hours wore on.

"Mixed up" with Davis and his associates? One of them to all intents and purposes? Did Davis dare say that? And if Davis could pretend to a claim on him he would push it to the utmost, Tom knew.

Then why shouldn't he let them have the signature if they wanted it, and if that

was the only way out of trouble on every side? A whole life in that store was worse than a hundred deaths, and if Davis should give him shares in a “handsome thing,” as he called it, he might go to the ends of the earth, and have money to send back to those that needed it. And after all, could a real thief feel much more miserable and low than Hal had always kept him since they first came together?

He passed heavily by the counting-room as the hours drew to a close, and started as he heard the senior Fenimore’s voice calling “Haggarty!”

Was the truth discovered? Was there any way in which Davis would dare play him false and betray him as “mixed up” with his own companions?

“Why, what is the matter with you?” asked Mr. Fenimore, as Tom’s white face answered the summons. “Are you sick to-day?”

“No, I am not sick,” said Tom. “I was up rather late last night, it is true.”

“Well, take care of yourself to-night, then; you don’t look right; but just step in here a moment, if you please. I want to be out for perhaps a quarter of an hour, if you can remain here. Perhaps you can finish looking over these letters, and make some minutes of them.”

Tom sat down and leaned his head upon his hands. What was the matter with it? It throbbed and whirled strangely.

“Yes, I can do it,” he said drearily, as if trying to rouse himself. “I should despise myself for ever; but I have always had somebody to despise me. I wonder if it would be a very different thing.”

He glanced at a scrap of paper fallen near him, on which “Fenimore & Co.” had been trying a new pen half a dozen times. He looked at it again, and then started wildly to his feet.

“Yes, it would be a different thing! They cannot make me do it, Hal Fenimore and the whole set of them together! I haven’t the stuff to make a man of in me, of course, or Hal would never have twitted and crowded me all my life as he has; but I’ve always been able to declare to myself he lied when he said I did not do my best, and I always will! But oh, why do I have to fight like a man, and a brave one too, if I never was given the soul of one to begin with?”

He seized the letters and began to look them over. Black, white, or gray were



they? He could not tell. He only saw one question written all over them. Would Davis dare, would he be able to get him into trouble? He had meant that ugly phrase “mixed up” as a threat, Tom knew very well; could he manage to bring it to the ears of Fenimore & Co.? It would be an end to the partnership, drawing pretty near now, if he should. And what then?

A sudden thought flashed into his mind. If any mercy, even in a dark disguise, should set him free from Fenimore’s, there was Carter! He had heard Aleck talk of what Carter was to the meanest man he had on board. He would go before the mast with him, if he could but find him. Thorndyke always knew when he came in. He would ask Thorndyke.

“I wont keep you any longer, Haggarty,” said Mr. Fenimore’s voice behind him; “and indeed I would advise you to call hours ended and take care of yourself. You’re not well to-day, I am sure.”

Tom turned and left the store. He would go to Halliday’s. The sooner he got a promise from Thorndyke to let him know when Carter came in, the better.

Halliday’s was a place where every one seemed to like an excuse to drop in; there was always some one there enjoying the light and warmth and comfortable feeling he could hardly have explained to himself.

The early twilight had fallen, and the outside air was bitterly cold as Tom opened the door, and the feeling of comfort reached even his heavy heart for an instant, as he stepped inside.

Thorndyke was busy with a solitary customer, and two heavy-coated policemen stood with their backs to Tom, taking a moment’s respite from the cold outside, and “warming up” for the next hour’s duty.

“Anything lively in your beat to-day?” asked one of them listlessly, as he stretched his hands toward the glowing fire.

“Well, not a great deal,” replied the other. “We came down on a nest of pretty dark-feathered birds, up in —— street, but we’ve had an eye on them for some time.”

“Do they belong here?” asked the first.

“No, not more than one of them at least, but there’s a young shoot of one of the best houses in the city that I’ve had my suspicions they were trying to make

friends with, of late. Can't quite vouch for it, though, and wouldn't if I could, for I don't think they've got any harm out of him yet, and doubt if they ever would."

The policemen left the fire, and passed out by an opposite door, the customer followed, and Thorndyke looked up at Tom. One look was enough. Tom's face had told Thorndyke the secret, and Tom knew he had read it.

"For heaven's sake, Tom," said Thorndyke, "don't stand there looking like that! There will be some one in in another moment. Here, come into my office, there's some one coming this instant. See if this glass of water will make you look like a live man again, and wait there till I come."

The customer wanted a prescription that took time; hours the minutes seemed to Tom, and then Thorndyke came. Tom looked up at him with a white, hopeless face.

"*You* will despise me now," he said slowly. "Of course you never thought much of me; you couldn't, kind as you were, though I *did* mean to do as well as I could. But you *were* kind, and I had rather all the world knew I had disgraced myself, than that you should have found it out."

"Tom," said Thorndyke, in a low pitying tone that thrilled him through, "tell me what is the matter here! Are you in trouble about money?"

"No," said Tom, "or at least, not much; it is worse than that! Those fellows seemed to be friends, they wanted me with them, and I wanted friends so much! They never let me see any harm, and it always seemed so light-hearted and gay when they were; but I knew there *was* harm, and I ought to have loathed it all, as I really did in my soul all the time! They wanted me to forge Fenimore & Co.'s name for them; that was all their friendliness was aimed at from the beginning, I suppose. They did not get it, thank Heaven, but they came too near it, nearer than I ever dreamed they could. And now, if they've got into trouble themselves, and my name is going to be whispered along with theirs, who is ever going to know how far I went with them? Who's going to believe that they kept me half-blinded till the last moment, and that then I had determined to refuse what they wanted, though I couldn't see a bright spot before me for half my life in any other track!"

"Oh why didn't you come to me?" cried Thorndyke bitterly, and then, with a sudden check upon himself—"but, Tom, you never would have turned to friends like these if you hadn't been in trouble to begin with. Something has gone wrong

with you longer than that, for I have seen it.”

Tom looked in his face with a troubled cry.

“Hal Fenimore drove me desperate!” he said. “Of course he wouldn’t have dared if I had had the man in me the rest of you had. I suppose I hadn’t. I don’t know, but I *had* to stand up like one, and try to fill my father’s place, and he never could say I didn’t before; but now he will know this, and all the rest of the world will hear it from him.”

“How will he know this?” said Thorndyke, a sharp look of pain passing over his face. “Do you think I would tell him or any other one on the face of the earth?”

“You wont?” and Tom looked wonderingly but still drearily at him.

“Get into that easy chair,” said Thorndyke. “Don’t stand leaning against the wall as if a blow had struck you.”

Tom stepped mechanically towards the chair, and sat down in it. Thorndyke stood before him a moment, and then came closer and put his arms round his shoulders with a yearning tenderness that sent another thrill through Tom’s heart.

“Tom,” he said, “Come into my store to-morrow! I want you, and have wanted you a long time, but I couldn’t say so before. I’ve seen how things were going with you and Hal, and have longed to put something between you, if I only could. Of course I couldn’t, so long as you were with him, but it is time for you to leave there now. Come to me, and you shall find out whether you are a man! I tell you, Tom, there isn’t one in a thousand who would have stuck to the ship, and fought as you have, all these years; and not one in all the thousands I know who could help me as you can. I need you, and the Fenimores have enough without you. It will be hard for you to begin all over again, but if you learn as fast as you did at the professor’s, you shall have your share in the business at the end of the year. And I’ll see that you have all you need to keep things easy at home, from the day you come. Only Tom, why, oh why, couldn’t you have trusted me long ago?”

Changes seem very rapid to passers who only give a glance now and then, as they hurry by, and the customers at Halliday’s remarked that “the young people seemed to be rushing things a little,” as they saw Aleck less and less in the store and Tom behind the counter; then Aleck sent sometimes in Dr. Thorndyke’s

place to a patient, and at last the name of “Dr. Halliday” making its appearance just below the bell handle over which “Dr. Thorndyke” had been read so long, and the sign of Halliday & Thorndyke, which they still considered new, coming down to make room for “Halliday, Thorndyke & Co.”

“Rushing things!” repeated Tom to Thorndyke one day with a laugh. “Why it seems to me as if my life at Fenimore’s was somewhere away back in the dark ages! There’s been more peace and comfort, in these later days, more steady standing up with the feeling that I was a man, in every one of them, than I’d had in my whole life together before. But even peace and comfort don’t tell the whole of it. There’s more blessedness than that, by a long shot, in feeling that I have got a close hold on a fellow like you and another like Aleck. There’s no use saying much about it, though. Words don’t seem to do the business.”

No, they do not. And Thorndyke only gave Tom a look in reply; but that said “God bless you, old fellow, as you’ve blessed us a thousand times;” and then Thorndyke himself said, “There goes Aleck again with that fine turnout of his. He’s getting more practice than he knows how to turn his hand to, already!”

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