

HORATIO ALGER

ANDY GORDON

Horatio Alger

Andy Gordon

«Public Domain»

Alger H.

Andy Gordon / H. Alger — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	8
CHAPTER III.	11
CHAPTER IV.	14
CHAPTER V.	17
CHAPTER VI.	19
CHAPTER VII.	21
CHAPTER VIII.	22
CHAPTER IX.	25
CHAPTER X.	28
CHAPTER XI.	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	32

Horatio Alger

Andy Gordon / The Fortunes of A Young Janitor

CHAPTER I. THE YOUNG JANITOR

The Hamilton Academy, under the charge of Rev. Dr. Euclid, stands on an eminence about ten rods back from the street, in the town of the same name. It is a two-story building, surmounted by a cupola, or belfry, and, being neatly painted brown and well cared for, is, on the whole, an ornament to the village.

It was a quarter of nine, when a boy of sixteen, rather showily dressed, ascended the academy hill and entered the front door, which was already open. He swung a small light cane in his hand – rather an unusual article for a schoolboy to carry – and it was clear, from his general appearance and bearing, that he had a high opinion of himself.

“I am early,” he said to himself. “I shall have a chance to look over my Latin before Dr. Euclid comes.”

It may be supposed from this speech that Herbert Ross was an earnest student, but this would be altogether a mistake. The fact is, he had been playing with some companions till a late hour the previous evening, and this had prevented his paying the necessary attention to his lessons in Virgil.

As Dr. Euclid was strict in his requirements, and very slow to accept excuses, Herbert, to avoid trouble, wished to have, at any rate, a superficial acquaintance with the lesson.

As he entered the schoolroom he was met by a cloud of dust. A boy of about his own age was sweeping the floor. He had nearly completed his task, and was just about to sweep the pile of accumulated dust into the entry when Herbert Ross presented himself. The boy who was wielding the broom, the young janitor of the academy, being our hero, we may as well stop here and describe him.

His name was Andrew Gordon, commonly changed by his friends to Andy. He was a stout, well-made boy, with a face not exactly handsome, but bold, frank and good-humored; but about the mouth there were lines indicating firmness and resolution. He was evidently a boy who had a respect for himself.

It may be said, further, that Andy received his tuition free and a dollar a week for his services in taking care of the schoolhouse. He was the son of a widow, who was in receipt of a pension of twenty dollars a month from the government, as the widow of an officer who had surrendered his life during the Civil War on the field of Gettysburg. This, with what Andy could earn, was nearly all she and he had to live upon.

It may easily be supposed, therefore, that the dollar a week which Andy received from Dr. Euclid, or, rather, from the trustees of the academy, was an appreciable help in their frugal household.

Herbert Ross was the only son of the village lawyer, a man of private fortune, who lived in a style quite beyond the average mode of living among his neighbors. Herbert was impressed, as many boys are under such circumstances, with an idea of his consequence, and this made itself felt in his intercourse with his school fellows.

In particular he looked down upon Andy Gordon, the first in rank in his class, because he was poor and filled the position of school janitor, which he regarded as menial.

Andy knew very well how his proud classmate regarded him, but it did not materially diminish his happiness or cause him to lose even a minute's sleep.

“What are you kicking up such a dust for, Andrew Gordon?” asked Herbert, considerably ruffled in temper, for some of the dust had settled upon his clothing.

“I am sweeping the schoolroom, Herbert,” said Andy, “as you see.”

“You needn’t cover me with your confounded dust,” said Herbert, testily.

“I didn’t see you coming in,” said Andy, good-naturedly, “or I would have stopped a minute. The fact is, I am rather late this morning, or my job would be over.”

“I’ll give you a lesson to teach you to be more careful next time,” said Herbert, who was getting more and more ill-natured, and, as is usual with young bullies, got more impudent on account of Andy’s good nature.

As he spoke, he drew back his foot and kicked at the pile of dust which Andy had carefully swept to the doorway, spreading it over a considerable portion of the floor.

Good-humored as he was, Andy’s eye grew stern, and his voice was quick and imperative, as he demanded:

“What did you do that for, Herbert Ross?”

“I told you already,” said Herbert. “I am a gentleman, and I don’t mean to let a servant cover me with dust.”

“I am the janitor of this academy,” said Andy, “and if that is being a servant, then I am one. But there is one thing I tell you, Herbert. I won’t allow any boy, gentleman or not, to interfere with my work.”

“How can you help yourself?” asked Herbert, with a sneer.

“Take this broom and sweep up the pile of dust you have scattered,” said the young janitor.

As he spoke he tendered the broom to Herbert.

“What do you mean?” demanded the young aristocrat, his dark face growing darker still with anger.

“I mean what I say,” responded Andy, resolutely. “You must repair the mischief you have done.”

“Must? You low-lived servant!” Herbert burst forth. “Do you know who you are talking to?”

This was rather ungrammatical, but it is a common mistake, and Herbert was too angry to think of grammar.

“I am talking to a boy who has done a mean action,” retorted Andy. “Take that broom and sweep up the dust you have scattered.”

Herbert by this time was at white heat. He seized the broom which was extended toward him, but instead of using it as he was requested, he brought it down upon Andy’s shoulders.

It was not the handle, but the broom end which touched the young janitor, and he was not hurt; but it is needless to say that he considered himself insulted. Under such circumstances, though far from quarrelsome, it was his habit to act promptly, and he did so now.

First he wrested the broom from Herbert; then he seized that young gentleman around the waist, and, despite his struggles, deposited him forcibly on the floor, which was thick with dust.

“Two can play at your game, Herbert,” he said.

“What do you mean? you low hound!” screamed Herbert, as he rose from the floor.

“I think you can tell, without any explanation,” said Andy, calmly.

Herbert looked as if he would like to annihilate the young janitor, but there was something in the strong grasp which he had just felt which convinced him that Andy was stronger than himself, and he hesitated.

“Do you know that my father is one of the trustees of the academy?” he shouted, shaking his fist. “I’ll get you discharged from your place.”

“You can do what you like,” answered Andy, “but you’d better get out of the way, for I’m going to sweep. I’ll let you off from sweeping up, as you have had a lesson already.”

“You’ll let me off!” exclaimed Herbert, passionately. “You – a servant – give me a lesson! You don’t know your place, you young beggar!”

“No more talk like that, Herbert Ross, for I won’t stand it!” said Andy, firmly.

“I’ll call you what I please!” retorted Herbert.

“If you call me another name, I’ll lay you down in the dirt again!” said Andy.

Just then, at the open door, appeared the tall, dignified figure of Dr. Euclid, who was in time to hear the last words spoken.

“What’s the matter, boys?” he asked, looking keenly from Andy to Herbert.

CHAPTER II. HERBERT CONSIDERS HIMSELF INSULTED

Both boys were surprised to see Dr. Euclid, for it was ten minutes before his usual hour of coming.

It happened, however, that he had had occasion to go to the post office to deposit an important letter, and as it was so near the hour for commencing school, he had not thought it worth his while to go home again.

“What’s the matter, boys?” repeated the doctor.

Herbert Ross, who was still fuming with anger, saw a chance to get the janitor into trouble, and answered, spitefully:

“That boy has insulted me!”

“How did he insult you?” inquired Dr. Euclid, rather surprised.

“He seized me, when I wasn’t looking, and laid me down on the dirty floor!” exploded Herbert, looking at Andy as if he would like to wither him with a glance.

Dr. Euclid knew something of the character and disposition of Herbert, and reserved his judgment.

“What have you to say to this charge, Andrew?” he asked, mildly.

“It is true,” said Andy – “all except my taking him unawares.”

“What could induce you to make such an assault upon your fellow-student?” said the doctor.

In reply, Andy made a correct statement of the transaction, in mild and temperate language.

“Is this correct, Herbert?” asked the doctor. “Did you interfere with Andrew in the discharge of his duties?”

“I kicked the pile of dirt,” Herbert admitted.

“Why did you do that?”

“Because I wanted to teach him a lesson.”

“What lesson?”

“Not to cover a gentleman with dust when he entered the room,” replied Herbert, in a pompous tone.

“By the word ‘gentleman’ you mean to designate yourself, I presume,” said Dr. Euclid.

Herbert colored, for though the doctor’s words were plain and unemphasized, they seemed to him to imply sarcasm.

“Certainly, sir,” he answered.

“Those who claim to be gentlemen must behave as such,” said Dr. Euclid, calmly. “It is clear that your being covered with dust was accidental, and you had no occasion to resent it.”

“Had he any right to throw me down?” asked Herbert, biting his lips.

“Did you not strike him first?”

“Well, yes.”

“Then it appears to me that you are quits. I don’t approve of fighting, but I hold to the right of self-defense. I don’t think this affair calls for any interference on my part,” and the doctor passed on to his desk.

Herbert Ross was very much mortified. He had confidently expected that Andy would get into trouble, and perhaps receive a punishment, certainly a reprimand, from the preceptor. As it was, he alone had incurred censure.

He nodded his head viciously, reflecting:

“This isn’t the last of it. The doctor is partial to that young beggar, but the doctor isn’t everybody. He’s responsible to the trustees, and my father is the most important one. He’ll find he’s made a mistake.”

Herbert was not at all improved in temper by a sharp reprimand from the doctor, when he came to recite his lesson, on the shabby character of his recitation.

When recess came, he stalked up to Andy, and said, menacingly:

“You look out, Andy Gordon! You’ll get into trouble before you know it!”

“Thank you for telling me!” said Andy, calmly. “What sort of trouble will I get into?”

“You think you’re all right because Dr. Euclid took your part this morning!” continued Herbert, not answering the question; “but that isn’t the end of the matter, by a long shot! The doctor isn’t so great a man as he thinks he is.”

“I never knew that he considered himself a great man,” answered Andy.

“Well, he does. He doesn’t know how to treat a gentleman.”

“Why don’t he?”

“He upholds you in what you did.”

“He thinks it right to act in self-defense.”

“He may have to act in self-defense himself. My father is one of the trustees of this academy.”

“You said that this morning.”

“He can turn the doctor out of office, and put in another teacher,” continued Herbert.

“That isn’t anything to me,” said Andy. “Still, I have one thing to say.”

“What is that?” asked Herbert, suspiciously.

“That he will have a big job on his hands when he undertakes it,” said Andy.

“He can do it,” repeated Herbert, jerking his head emphatically; “but he won’t begin with that.”

“Won’t he?” said Andy, indifferently.

“No; he’ll begin with you. I’m going to tell him to-night all that has happened, and he’ll have you discharged. You can make up your mind to that.”

If Herbert expected to see Andy exhibit fear or alarm, he was not gratified. Our hero, on the other hand, looked provokingly indifferent.

“Don’t you think you could get me off, Herbert?” asked Andy, with a smile, which the young aristocrat did not quite understand.

“If you will beg my pardon before the boys for what you did,” he said, magnanimously, “I won’t do anything about it.”

“That is very kind. I suppose you will be willing to ask my pardon first for striking me with the broom and calling me bad names.”

“No, I won’t. I only did and said what was proper.”

“Then you won’t get any apology out of me,” returned Andy.

“You will lose your place, and have to leave school.”

“I don’t think I shall.”

“My father will have you turned out, and another janitor appointed.”

“The janitor is not appointed by the trustees. Dr. Euclid always appoints the janitor.”

This was news to Herbert. He had rather a vague idea of the powers of the trustees, and fancied that their authority extended to the appointment of so subordinate a person as the janitor.

“It doesn’t make any difference,” he declared, recovering himself. “The doctor will have to dismiss you, whether he wants to or not.”

“You speak very positively,” rejoined Andy, with a contemptuous smile, which Herbert resented.

“You’ll find it’s no laughing matter,” said Herbert, hotly. “For a poor boy, you put on altogether too many airs.”

Andy’s manner changed.

“Herbert Ross,” he said, “I’ve listened to your talk because it amused me, but I’ve heard enough of it. The only boy in school who puts on airs is yourself, and I, for one, don’t mean to stand your impudence. Your father may be a very important person, but you are not. All your talk about Dr. Euclid’s losing his place is ridiculous. You can go and talk to the doctor on the subject if you think it best.”

Here Andy turned on his heel, and called out to Frank Cooper:

“Have a catch, Frank?”

“Yes, Andy.”

The two boys began to throw a ball to each other, by way of improving their practice, for both belonged to a baseball club, and Andy’s special and favorite position was that of catcher.

“You seem to have considerable business with Herbert Ross,” said Frank. “I thought we should have no time for practice.”

Andy smiled.

“Herbert thinks he has business with me,” he said.

“I shouldn’t think it was very pleasant business, by the way he looks,” said Frank.

Andy smiled, but said nothing.

None of the boys had been present when the little difficulty of the morning took place, and he thought it not worth mentioning.

When Herbert left school at the close of the afternoon session, he was fully resolved to make it hot for the young janitor, and for Dr. Euclid, whose censure he had again incurred for a faulty Greek recitation.

CHAPTER III. DR. EUCLID RECEIVES A CALL

Dr. Euclid lived in a comfortable dwelling-house not far from the Presbyterian Church. His family was small, consisting only of his wife and himself. Having no children, he devoted himself solely to the interests of the academy, of which he had been the principal for a space of fifteen years.

The doctor was an unusually learned man for the preceptor of an academy. He by no means confined his attention to the studies pursued in the institution, but devoted his leisure hours to reading classic authors, such as are read in our best colleges. He had published a carefully annotated edition of Greek tragedy, which had gained him a great deal of credit in the eyes of scholars. Indeed, he had received, only a short time previous, an invitation to the chair of Latin and Greek in a well-known college, and had been strongly tempted to accept, but had finally declined it, not being willing to leave the Hamilton Academy, to which he had become much attached, and his friends and neighbors in the village, by whom he was held in high esteem.

Dr. Euclid was seated in his library, examining a new classical book which had been sent him by the publishers, when the maid-servant opened the door, and said:

“Please, Dr. Euclid, there’s a gentleman wants to see you.”

“Do you know who it is, Mary?” asked the doctor, laying aside his book, with a look of regret.

“I think it’s the lyyer man, sir.”

“Oh, you mean the lawyer,” said Dr. Euclid, smiling.

“That’s what I said, sir.”

“Well, show him up.”

Almost immediately Brandon Ross, Esq., rather a pompous-looking individual, who tried to make himself look taller by brushing up his reddish hair till it stood up like a hedge above his forehead, entered the room.

“Good-evening, Mr. Ross!” said Dr. Euclid, politely.

He wondered why the lawyer had favored him with a call. It did not occur to him that it had any connection with the little difficulty of the morning between Herbert Ross and his young janitor.

“Ahem! Doctor, I am very well,” said the lawyer.

“Take a seat, if you please.”

“Thank you, sir. I can’t stay long. I am occupied with some very important legal business just now.”

Mr. Ross said this with an air of satisfaction. He always represented that he was occupied with important business.

“Then he won’t stay long,” thought the doctor. “Well, I am glad of that, for I want to get back to my book.”

“You probably expected I would call,” Squire Ross began.

“No; I can’t say I did,” answered the doctor, regarding his visitor with surprise.

“Surely, sir, after that outrageous assault upon my son this morning, an assault, sir, committed almost in your very presence, you could hardly suppose I, as Herbert’s father, would remain calmly at home and ignore the affair?”

Mr. Ross said this in the tone in which he usually addressed juries, and he looked to see it produce an effect upon Dr. Euclid. But he was disappointed. An amused smile played over the face of the dignified scholar, as he answered:

“I certainly didn’t connect your visit with the little matter you refer to.”

“Little matter!” repeated the lawyer, indignantly. “Do I understand, Dr. Euclid, that you speak of a ruffianly assault upon my son Herbert as a little matter?”

Dr. Euclid wanted to laugh. He had a vivid sense of the ridiculous, and the lawyer's way of speaking seemed so disproportioned to the boyish quarrel to which he referred, that it seemed to him rather ludicrous.

"I was not aware, Mr. Ross, that such an assault had been made upon your son," he replied.

"Surely you know, Dr. Euclid," said the lawyer, warmly, "that your janitor, Andrew Gordon, had assaulted Herbert?"

"I knew the boys had had a little difficulty," returned the doctor, quietly. "Your son struck Andrew with a broom. Did he tell you that?"

Mr. Ross was surprised, for Herbert had not told him that.

"It was a proper return for the violent attack which the boy made upon him. I am glad that my son showed proper resentment."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ross, but your son's attack preceded Andrew's. It was Andrew who acted in self-defense, or, if you choose to call it so, in retaliation."

"I presume your account comes from your janitor," said the lawyer, a little disconcerted.

"On the contrary, it comes from your son. Herbert admitted to me this morning what I have just stated to you."

"But," said Ross, after a pause, "Andrew had previously covered him with dust, from malicious motives."

"I deny the malicious motives," said the doctor. "Your son entered the schoolroom hurriedly, just as Andrew was sweeping out. Accidentally, his clothes were covered with dust."

"It suits you to consider it an accident," said the lawyer, rudely. "I view it in quite a different light. Your janitor is well known to be a rude, ill-mannered boy –"

"Stop there, Mr. Ross!" said Dr. Euclid, in a dignified tone. "I don't know where you got your information on this subject, but you are entirely mistaken. Andrew is neither rough nor ill-mannered. I considered him very gentlemanly, and, what I consider of quite as much importance, a thoroughly manly boy."

"Then, sir, I understand that you uphold him in his assault upon my son," said the lawyer, fiercely.

"I consider," said the doctor, in a dignified tone, "that he was entirely justified in what he did."

"Then, sir, allow me to say that I am utterly astounded to hear such sentiments from a man in your position. I do not propose to allow my son to be ill-treated by a boy so much his inferior."

"If you mean inferior in scholarship," said the doctor, "you are under a misapprehension. Andrew is in your son's class in Latin and Greek, but he is quite superior to him in both of these languages."

This was far from agreeable information for the proud lawyer, though he could not help being aware that his son was not a good scholar.

"I referred to social position," he said, stiffly.

"Social position doesn't count for much in America," said Dr. Euclid, smiling. "Of course, Mr. Ross, you recall Pope's well-known lines:

" 'Honor and shame from no condition rise.
Act well your part – there all the honor lies.' "

"I don't agree with Pope, then. His lines are foolish. But I won't waste my time in arguing. I have come here this evening, Dr. Euclid, as one of the trustees of the Hamilton Academy, to insist upon Andrew Gordon's discharge from the position of janitor."

"I must decline to comply with your request, Mr. Ross. Andrew is a capable and efficient janitor, and I prefer to retain him."

"Dr. Euclid, you don't seem to remember that I am a trustee of the academy!" said the lawyer, pompously.

"Oh, yes, I do! But the trustees have nothing to do with the appointment of a janitor."

“You will admit, sir, that they have something to do with the appointment of a principal,” said Brandon Ross, significantly.

“Oh, yes!” answered the doctor, smiling.

“And that it is wise for the principal to consult the wishes of those trustees.”

“I presume I understand you, Mr. Ross,” said Dr. Euclid, in a dignified tone, “and I have to reply that you are only one out of six trustees, and, furthermore, that as long as I retain the position which I have held for fifteen years, I shall preserve my independence as a man.”

“Very well, sir! very well, sir!” exclaimed the lawyer, intensely mortified at the ignominious failure of his trump card, as he had regarded it. “I shall be under the necessity of withdrawing my son from the academy, since he cannot otherwise be secure from such outrages as that of this morning.”

“If your son will respect the rights of others, he will stand in no danger of having his own violated. As to withdrawing him from school, you must do as you please. Such a step will injure him much more than any one else.”

“I am the best judge of that!” said the lawyer, stiffly. “Good-evening, sir!”

“Good-evening!”

The troublesome visitor went out, and with a sigh of relief, Dr. Euclid returned to his book.

CHAPTER IV. TROUBLE PREPARING FOR ANDY

When Lawyer Ross returned to his showy dwelling, he found Herbert eagerly waiting to hear an account of his mission.

Herbert was firmly of the opinion that his father and himself were the two most important persons in Hamilton, and he confidently anticipated that Dr. Euclid would be overawed by his father's visit, and meekly accede to his demand. He thought, with a pleasant sense of triumph, how it would be in his power to "crow over" the janitor, who had so audaciously ventured to lay a finger upon his sacred person.

He looked up eagerly when his father entered the room.

"Well, father, did you see Dr. Euclid?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the lawyer, in a tone by no means pleasant.

"Did he agree to discharge Andy Gordon?"

"No, he didn't."

Herbert looked perplexed.

"Did you ask him to?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't understand."

"There are a good many things you don't understand," said his father, giving a kick to the unoffending cat which lay on the rug before the fire, and forcing the astonished animal to vacate her comfortable quarters.

"I should think," Herbert ventured to say, "that Dr. Euclid wouldn't dare to disobey you, as you are a trustee."

"Dr. Euclid is an obstinate fool!" exploded the lawyer.

"It would serve him right if you kicked him out and appointed a new principal," insinuated Herbert.

Mr. Ross felt in the mood to do as his son advised, but he felt very doubtful of his ability to accomplish the displacement of so popular and highly esteemed a teacher. He was pretty sure that he could not talk over the other trustees to agree to so decided a step, but he was unwilling to confess it, even to his son. Therefore he spoke diplomatically.

"I cannot tell what I may do," he said. "It will depend upon circumstances. All I can say is that Dr. Euclid will sooner or later be sorry for upholding Andrew Gordon in his lawless acts."

"Does he uphold him?"

"Yes. He says that Andrew was perfectly justified in what he did."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself!" said Herbert, provoked.

"He says," continued Mr. Ross, who took a perverse pleasure in mortifying his son, as he had himself been mortified, "that Andrew is your superior."

"My superior!" exclaimed Herbert, more than ever exasperated. "That young beggar my superior!"

"He says Andrew is a better scholar than you!"

"Then I don't want to go to his confounded school any more. He doesn't seem to know how to treat a gentleman."

"You needn't go, Herbert, if you don't care to," said his father, more mildly.

"May I leave the academy?" asked Herbert, eagerly.

"Yes. After the course which Dr. Euclid has seen fit to adopt, I shall not force a son of mine to remain under his instruction. I told him so this evening."

“What did he say to that?” queried Herbert, who could not help thinking that Dr. Euclid would be very sorry to lose a pupil of his social importance.

“He didn’t say much,” said the lawyer, who was not disposed to repeat what the doctor actually did say.

“Then,” said Herbert, “there is no use for me to study my Latin lesson for to-morrow.”

“You may omit it this evening, but of course I cannot have you give up study. I may obtain a private tutor for you, or send you to some school out of town.”

The lawyer hoped that this step, though personally inconvenient, and much more expensive, might injure Dr. Euclid by implying that one of the trustees lacked confidence in him as a teacher.

Herbert left the room, well pleased on the whole with the upshot of the affair.

Half an hour later an old man, Joshua Starr by name, was ushered into the lawyer’s presence. He was a man bordering upon seventy, with pinched and wizened features, which bore the stamp of meanness plainly stamped upon them. By one method and another he had managed to scrape together a considerable property, not wholly in a creditable manner.

He had cheated his own brother out of three thousand dollars, but in a way that did not make him amenable to the law. He had lent money to his neighbors on usurious terms, showing no mercy when they were unable to make payment. Such was the man who came to the squire for help.

“Good-evening, Squire Ross!” he said. “I’ve come to you on a little matter of business.”

“Well, Mr. Starr, state your case.”

“I’ve got a note agin’ a party in town, which I want you to collect.”

“Who is the party, Mr. Starr?”

“Waal, it’s the Widder Gordon.”

Squire Ross pricked up his ears.

“Go on,” he said, beginning to feel interested.

“You see, I’ve got a note agin’ her husband for a hundred dollars, with interest.”

“But her husband is dead.”

“Jes’ so, jes’ so! But he borrowed the money when he was alive, in the year 1862.”

“And now it is 1866.”

“Jes’ so! You see it isn’t outlawed. The note is good.”

“Show me the note.”

The lawyer took and scanned it carefully.

“It was to run for three months,” he said.

“Jes’ so!”

“Why didn’t you present it for payment?”

“I did,” said Starr. “But it wan’t convenient for him to pay it.”

“You don’t usually give so much time to your creditors, Mr. Starr,” said the lawyer, keenly.

“I didn’t want to be hard on him,” whined Starr.

“There’s something under this,” the lawyer thought.

“Have you presented it for payment to the widow?” asked Ross.

“Yes; and what do you think? She says her husband paid it. It’s ridikilus!”

“In that case you would have surrendered the note or given a receipt.”

“Jes’ so, jes’ so!” said Mr. Starr, eagerly. “You understand the case, square. Let her show the receipt, as I’ve got the note.”

“How does she explain your having the note?”

“She says I had mislaid the note, and her husband agreed to take a receipt instead.”

“But she don’t show the receipt.”

“No; that’s where I’ve got her,” chuckled the old man. “I say, square, ain’t my claim good?”

“Certainly, if she can’t show any receipt from you.”

“Then you can collect it for me?”

“I can try; but I don’t suppose she has any property.”

“There’s her furnitoor,” suggested the old man.

“Well, you may leave the note, and I will see what I can do. Good-night!”

“Good-night, square!”

When the lawyer was left alone, there was a look of malicious satisfaction on his face.

“Now, Master Andrew Gordon,” he said to himself, “I think I can make you rue the day when you assaulted my son. But for that, I wouldn’t have meddled in this business, for Starr is an old rascal; but now it suits me to do it. The Widow Gordon and her precious son shall hear from me to-morrow!”

CHAPTER V. A MESSENGER OF BAD TIDINGS

The next day was Friday – the last day of the school week. Andy went to school as usual, wondering how Herbert would treat him after their little difficulty of the day before; not that he cared particularly, but he felt some curiosity on the subject.

But Herbert was absent. We know that his father had agreed to take him away from school, but this was not suspected by Andy, nor, indeed, by Dr. Euclid, notwithstanding the threat of Mr. Ross.

The doctor could hardly believe the lawyer would be so foolish as to deprive his son of school privileges merely on account of a boyish difficulty with one of his fellow students.

Herbert was often absent for a single day. Sometimes he had a convenient headache in the morning, when he felt indisposed to go, and neither his father nor mother interfered with him on such occasions.

Mr. Ross left his son quite independent, as long as Herbert did not contravene his own plans, and Mrs. Ross was foolishly indulgent.

“I suppose Herbert is sulking at home,” thought Andy. “Well, he can do it, if he wants to. I shan’t allow him to interfere with my work, even if he is a rich man’s son and I am only a janitor.”

Andy felt gratified at Dr. Euclid’s evident approval of his conduct. The principal was strict, but just, and thus gained the respect of all his students.

There is nothing boys more strongly resent than injustice and undeserved reproof, and no teacher who expects to retain his influence will permit himself to indulge in either.

It is hardly necessary to say that Squire Ross had communicated to Herbert the business which Mr. Starr had intrusted to him, and that Herbert was very much pleased to hear it.

“That’s good!” he said, emphatically. “Won’t you let me go with you when you call on the Gordons?”

“No, Herbert. I can’t do that.”

“What harm will it do?” pleaded Herbert, disappointed.

“It wouldn’t look well, and the neighbors would be sure to criticise.”

“It won’t make any difference if they do. You are a rich man, and can laugh at them.”

“Still, I don’t want to become unpopular. I think of running for office by and by. I stand a good chance of being nominated for State senator next fall, and it won’t do to give people a chance to talk against me.”

“Why don’t you run for member of Congress, pa?”

“So I may, in good time. The State senatorship would be a good stepping-stone to it.”

“When are you going to call on Mrs. Gordon?”

“To-night, probably.”

“I hope Andrew will be at home. It will make him feel blue.”

Herbert carefully abstained from calling our hero Andy, as everyone else did. He was afraid this familiarity would be interpreted into an admission of his social equality, and this he was far from being willing to concede.

When Herbert stayed home from school on an ordinary week day, he found it rather hard to pass the time, having no companions to play with, and not being especially fond of reading.

It struck him that it might be a very good idea to be sauntering along the road between the academy and the Widow Gordon’s, and, intercepting Andy, give him a hint that something disagreeable awaited him.

He proceeded to carry this plan into effect, and so it happened that Andy encountered Herbert, as he supposed, by accident.

Now Andy was not a boy to bear malice, and he accordingly accosted Herbert in his usual pleasant tone.

“Why weren’t you at school to-day, Herbert?” he asked. “Were you sick?”

“No, I’m well enough,” answered the young aristocrat.

“Got up late, I suppose?” said Andy.

“No, I didn’t. I don’t think I shall go to the academy any more.”

“Why not?” inquired Andy, considerably surprised.

“Dr. Euclid’s an old fogy.”

“Dr. Euclid is an excellent teacher,” said Andy, warmly.

“He don’t know how to treat a gentleman,” said Herbert.

“How do you make that out?”

“I’ll tell you. He ought to have given you a thrashing for insulting me,” said Herbert, darting a look of anger and hostility at his schoolfellow.

“Oh, that’s what you mean!” said Andy, laughing. “I don’t think that would be treating a gentleman properly.”

“Do you mean yourself?” demanded Herbert.

“Of course.”

“Do you call yourself a gentleman?”

This was asked with such insulting emphasis that Andy, good-natured as he was, flushed with indignation.

Still he answered, calmly:

“I mean to behave like a gentleman, and, as long as I do that, I call myself one.”

Herbert laughed scornfully.

“Perhaps when you are living in the poorhouse you will call yourself a gentleman,” he said.

“What have I got to do with the poorhouse?” Andy asked, looking Herbert steadily in the eye.

“I refer you to my father,” said Herbert, mockingly.

“Explain yourself, or perhaps I may not treat you like a gentleman,” said Andy, in a tone which caused Herbert to draw back involuntarily.

“My father has gone to see your mother on business,” said Herbert. “If you care to know what sort of business, you had better go home and find out.”

Andy was taken by surprise. He could not conceive what business the lawyer could have with his mother, but he was oppressed by a presentiment of evil. He left Herbert and hurried home.

CHAPTER VI. A LAWYER'S VISIT

Mrs. Gordon was sitting at her sewing machine when a knock was heard at her humble door. She kept no servant, and, as usual, answered the knock in person.

"Mr. Ross!" she said, in surprise, as she recognized in her caller the wealthy village lawyer.

"Yes, Mrs. Gordon," said Mr. Ross, blandly, for he had determined in this business to figure simply as the agent of another and carefully to conceal that he felt any personal interest in an affair which was likely to give the poor widow considerable trouble. "Yes, Mrs. Gordon. I call upon a little matter of business."

"Won't you come in?" said the widow, not forgetting her politeness in her surprise.

"I believe I will trespass on your hospitality for a brief space," said the lawyer. "Are you quite well?"

"Thank you, sir – quite so." And she led the way into the little sitting-room. "Take the rocking-chair, Mr. Ross," said the widow, pointing to the best chair which the plainly furnished apartment contained.

"You are very kind," said the lawyer, seating himself gingerly in the chair referred to.

"Your son is at school, I suppose?" continued the lawyer.

"Yes, sir. It is nearly time for Andy to be home." And the mother's voice showed something of the pride she felt in her boy. "I believe your son is in his class, Mr. Ross."

"Yes, very likely," responded the lawyer, indifferently.

"You said you came on business?" inquired the widow.

"Yes, Mrs. Gordon. I fear the business may prove unpleasant for you, but you will remember that I am only an agent in the matter."

"Unpleasant!" repeated Mrs. Gordon, apprehensively.

"Yes. Mr. Joshua Starr has placed in my hands, for collection, a note for one hundred dollars, executed by your late husband. With arrears of interest, it will amount to one hundred and thirty dollars, or thereabouts. I suppose you know something about it."

"Yes, Mr. Ross, I do know something about it. The note was paid by my husband during his life – in fact, just before he set out for the war – and Mr. Starr knows it perfectly well."

"You surprise me, Mrs. Gordon," said the lawyer, raising his eyebrows.

In fact, he was not at all surprised, knowing that Starr was an unprincipled man and not too honest to take advantage of any loss or omission on the part of his debtor.

"Didn't Mr. Starr say that we disputed his claim?" asked the widow.

"The fact is, Mrs. Gordon, I had very little conversation with Mr. Starr on the subject. He called at my house last evening and put the note into my hand for collection. I believe he said you had refused to pay it, or something of the kind."

"I refused to pay what had been paid already," said Mrs. Gordon, indignantly. "I regard Mr. Starr as a swindler."

"Softly, Mrs. Gordon! You must be cautious how you speak of an old and respected citizen."

"He may be old," admitted the widow; "but I deny that he is respected."

"Well, that is a matter of opinion," said the lawyer, diplomatically. "Meanwhile, he has the law on his side."

"How do you make that out, sir?"

"I have in my hands the note signed by your husband. If he paid it, why was it not given up?"

"I will tell you, sir. My husband was not a suspicious man, and he had confidence in others, crediting them with as much honesty as he himself possessed. When the note came due, he paid it;

but Mr. Starr pretended that he had mislaid the note and couldn't lay hands on it. He told my husband he would give him a receipt for the money, and that would be all the same. He was laying a trap for him all the time."

"I don't see that. The proposal was perfectly regular."

"He thought, in case my husband lost the receipt, he would have the note and could demand payment over again. Oh, it was a rascally plot!"

"But," said the lawyer, "I suppose you have the receipt, and, in that case, you have only to show it."

"I am sorry to say that I have not been able to find it anywhere. I have hunted high and low, and I am afraid my poor husband must have carried it away in his wallet when he went South with his regiment. The note was paid only the day before he left, out of the bounty money he received from the State."

"That would certainly be unfortunate," said Lawyer Ross, veiling the satisfaction he felt, "for you will, in that case, have to pay the money over again."

"Can the law be so unjust?" asked Mrs. Gordon, in dismay.

"You cannot call it unjust. As you cannot prove the payment of the money, you will have to bear the consequences."

"But I have no money. I cannot pay!"

"You have your pension," said the lawyer. "You can pay out of that. My client may be willing to accept quarterly installments."

"I need all I have for the support of Andy and myself."

"Then I am afraid – I am really afraid – my client will levy upon your furniture."

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed the poor woman, in agitation. "Can such things be allowed in a civilized country?"

"I don't think you look upon the affair in the right light, Mrs. Gordon," said Lawyer Ross, rising from the rocking-chair in which he had been seated. "It is a common thing, and quite regular, I can assure you. I will venture to give you a week to find the receipt, though not authorized by my client to do so. Good-afternoon!"

As he was going out he met, on the threshold, Andy, excited and out of breath.

The boy just caught a glimpse of his mother in tears, through the open door of the sitting room, and said to Mr. Ross, whom he judged to be responsible for his mother's grief:

"What have you been saying to my mother, to make her cry?"

"Stand aside, boy! It's none of your business," said the lawyer, who lost all his blandness when he saw the boy who had assaulted his son.

"My mother's business is mine," said Andy, firmly.

"You will have enough to do to attend to your own affairs," said the lawyer, with a sneer. "You made a great mistake when you made a brutal assault upon my son."

"And you have come to revenge yourself upon my mother?" demanded Andy, in a tone indicating so much scorn that the lawyer, case-hardened as he was, couldn't help winking.

"You are mistaken," he said, remembering his determination to appear only as agent. "I came on business of my client, Mr. Starr. I shall take a future opportunity to settle with you."

He walked away, and Andy entered the cottage to learn from his mother what had passed between her and the lawyer.

This was soon communicated, and gave our hero considerable anxiety, for he felt that Mr. Starr, though his claim was a dishonest one, might nevertheless be able to enforce it.

"How did Mr. Ross treat you, mother?" he asked, fearing that the lawyer might have made his errand unnecessarily unpleasant.

CHAPTER VII. THE LOST RECEIPT

“Mr. Ross was very polite, Andy,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Then he didn’t say anything rude or insulting?”

“No; far from it. He was very pleasant. He is acting only as the agent of Mr. Starr.”

Andy was puzzled.

“Did he say anything about a quarrel between his son Herbert and myself?” he inquired.

“Not a word. I didn’t know there had been one.”

Thereupon Andy told the story with which we are already familiar.

“I thought he had come about that,” he said.

“I wish he had. It wouldn’t give us as much trouble as this note. He says we will have to pay it if we can’t find the receipt.”

“I wish old Starr was choked with one of his own turnips,” said Andy, indignantly.

“Don’t speak so, Andy!”

“I mean it, mother. Why, the old swindler knows that the note has been paid, but he means to get a second payment because we can’t prove that it has been paid once.”

“It is very dishonorable, Andy, I admit.”

“Dishonorable! I should say it was. He knows that we are poor, and have nothing except your pension, while he is rich. He was too mean to marry, and has no one to leave his money to, and he can’t live many years.”

“That is all true, Andy.”

“I would like to disappoint the old skinflint.”

“The only way is to find the receipt, and I am afraid we can’t do that.”

“I’ll hunt all the evening,” said Andy, resolutely. “It may come to light somewhere.”

“I have hunted everywhere that I could think of, and I am afraid it must be as I have long thought, that your poor father carried it away with him when he left for the army.”

“If that is the case,” said Andy, seriously, “we can never find it.”

“No; in that case Mr. Starr has us at his mercy.”

“What can we do?”

“Mr. Ross says he may agree to receive payment by installments from my pension.”

“He shan’t get a cent of your pension, mother!” said Andy, indignantly.

“Or else,” continued the widow, “he may levy on our furniture.”

“Did Mr. Ross say that?” asked Andy.

“Yes.”

“I begin to think,” thought Andy, “that Mr. Ross himself is interested in this matter. In spite of what he says, I believe he means to punish us for what passed between Herbert and myself.”

If this was the case, Andy felt that matters were getting serious. All the more diligently he hunted for the lost receipt, leaving not a nook or cranny of the little cottage unexplored, but his search was in vain. The receipt could not be found.

“Mother,” said he, as he took the candle to go to bed, “there’s only one thing left to do. Tomorrow is Saturday, and I shan’t need to go to school. I’ll call on Mr. Starr, and see if I can’t shame him into giving up his claim on us.”

“There’s no hope of that,” said Mrs. Gordon. “You don’t know the man.”

“Yes, I do! I know he is a mean skinflint, but I can’t do any worse than fail. I will try it.”

CHAPTER VIII. MR. STARR'S INVOLUNTARY RIDE

The farmhouse of Mr. Joshua Starr was situated about a mile from the village. It was a dilapidated old building, standing very much in need of paint and repairs, but the owner felt too poor to provide either.

Mr. Starr had never married. From early manhood to the age of sixty-nine he had lived in the same old house, using the same furniture, part of the time cooking for himself.

At one time he employed a young girl of fourteen, whom he had taken from the poorhouse to do his household work. She was not an accomplished cook, but that was unnecessary, for Mr. Starr had never desired a liberal table. She could cook well enough to suit him, but he finally dismissed her for two reasons. First, he begrudged paying her seventy-five cents a week, which he had agreed with the selectmen to do, in order to give the girl the means of supplying herself with decent clothes; and, secondly, he was appalled by her appetite, which, though no greater than might be expected of a growing girl, seemed to him enormous.

At the time of which we speak, Mr. Starr was living alone. He had to employ some help outside, but in the house he took care of himself.

It was certainly a miserable way of living for a man who, besides his farm, had accumulated, by dint of meanness, not far from ten thousand dollars, in money and securities, and owned his farm clear, in addition.

Andy went up to the front door, and used the old brass knocker vigorously, but there was no response.

"I suppose Mr. Starr is somewhere about the place," he said to himself, and bent his steps toward the barn.

There he found the man of whom he was in search.

Joshua Starr was attired in a much-patched suit, which might have been new thirty years before. Certainly he did not set the rising generation a wasteful example in the matter of dress.

The old man espied Andy just before he got within hearing distance, and guessed his errand.

"Howdy do, Andy Gordon?" he said, in a quavering voice.

"All right!" answered Andy, coolly.

If it had been anyone else, he would have added, "thank you," but he did not feel like being ordinarily polite to the man who was conspiring to defraud his mother.

"I'm tollable myself," said Joshua, though Andy had not inquired. "The rheumatiz catches me sometimes and hurts me a sight."

"You ought to expect it at your age," said Andy.

"I ain't so very old," said Mr. Starr, uneasily.

"How old are you?"

"Sixty-nine."

"That seems pretty old to me."

"My father lived to be nigh on to eighty," said Joshua. "He wa'n't no healthier than I be, as I know of."

"You might live to be as old, if you would eat nourishing food."

"So I do! Who says I don't?"

"Nancy Gray, the girl that worked for you, says you didn't allow yourself enough to eat."

"That girl!" groaned the old man. "It's well I got red on her, or she'd have eaten me out of house and home. She eat three times as much as I did, and I'm a hardworking man and need more than she does."

“I suppose you know what I’ve come to speak to you about, Mr. Starr,” said Andy, thinking it time to come to business.

“Have you come to pay that note I hold agin’ your mother?” asked the old man, with suppressed eagerness.

“My mother owes you nothing,” said Andy, firmly.

“You’re mistaken, Andy. She owes me a hundred dollars and interest, and I’ve got the dockymment to prove it.”

“You know very well, Mr. Starr, that my father paid you that money long ago.”

“When did he pay it?”

“Just before he started for the war. You needn’t ask, for you know better than I do.”

“Yes, I do know better’n you do,” said the old man. “Ef he paid it, why didn’t he get the note? I’d like to know that, Andy Gordon.”

“That’s easily answered. It was because you pretended you had mislaid it, and you asked him to take a receipt instead.”

“That ain’t a very likely story, Andy. Still, ef you’ve got the receipt to show, it may make a difference.”

“We haven’t been able to find the receipt,” said Andy.

“Of course you ain’t, and a good reason why. There never was any receipt. You don’t expect I’d give a receipt when the note wasn’t paid.”

“No, I don’t; but we both know the note was paid.”

“Then, all I can say is you was mighty shif’less to lose it,” said the old man, chuckling.

“An honorable man wouldn’t take advantage of such a loss, Mr. Starr. He wouldn’t be willing to defraud a poor widow, even if he had the power to do it.”

“You’re wandering from the p’int, Andrew. Ef the money was paid, you can show the receipt, and then I won’t have another word to say.”

“I am afraid my father must have taken the receipt with him when he went to the war.”

“Jes’ so – jes’ so!” chuckled Mr. Starr, his chuckle bringing on a fit of coughing.

“What do you mean to do?” asked Andy, a little anxiously.

“Waal, I want to collect my money. A hundred dollars is a good deal of money. I can’t afford to lose it.”

“We don’t owe it.”

“The law says you do.”

“At any rate, we can’t pay it. We have no money.”

“Ain’t your mother got her pension, Andrew?”

“Yes, she has, and she will keep it! Not a cent will you get out of it!”

“Then I’ll have to take your furniture,” said Mr. Starr, placidly.

“I believe you are the meanest man in town!” said Andy, indignantly.

“I want my own property,” said the old man, doggedly, “and you may tell your mother so.”

While the two had been conversing, the old man, shovel in hand, had led the way into the barnyard, where there were three cows.

One of them, unseen by Mr. Starr, being out of humor, probably, lowered her head and, approaching the old man from behind, fairly lifted him up to a sitting position on her head. Mechanically he grasped her horns, and in this position was carried rapidly round the yard, much to his own dismay and Andy’s amusement.

“Take her off, Andy!” exclaimed the frightened and bewildered old man. “She’ll kill me!”

“If I touch her, she’ll throw you on the ground,” said Andy, between paroxysms of laughter.

“Do somethin’ to help me, or I’m a dead man!” shrieked Joshua, clinging tighter to the cow’s horns. “If you’ll help me, I’ll take off a dollar from the note.”

Andy knew that the old man was in no real danger, and stood still, while the triumphant cow ran about the yard with her terrified master between her horns.

“Oh, dear! Will nobody help me?” howled Joshua. “Is the cow crazy?”

“I think she must be, Mr. Starr,” said Andy, gravely.

“I shall be killed, and I’m only sixty-nine!” wailed the old man, who by this time had lost his hat.

“Shall I shoot her?” asked Andy, displaying a toy pistol, which was quite harmless.

“No, don’t!” exclaimed the old man, turning pale. “You might hit me! Besides, I gave thirty dollars for her. Oh, I never expected to die this way,” he added, dismally.

But the cow was by this time tired of her burden, and, with a jerk of her head, dislodged her proprietor, who fell prostrate in a pile of manure.

Andy ran to pick him up, and helped him into the house.

“Do you think any of my bones is broken?” asked Joshua, anxiously.

“I don’t see how they can be. You fell in a soft place,” said Andy, wanting to laugh.

“I’ll sell that cow as quick as I get a chance,” said Joshua. “Don’t you tell anybody what’s happened, or you may spile the sale.”

Andy tried to introduce the subject of the note again, but Joshua was too full of the accident to talk about it. Finally, discouraged by his poor success, he went home.

On the way he met Louis Schick, a schoolfellow, of German extraction, who hailed him.

“You’d better go to the post office, Andy. There’s a big parcel there for your mother.”

“A parcel?”

“Yes; it’s too big for a letter.”

Wondering what it could be, Andy went to the post office.

The parcel he found there was of great importance.

CHAPTER IX. A GIFT FROM THE DEAD

The village post office was located in a drug store, and the druggist had plenty of time to attend to the duties of the office, as well as the calls of his regular customers.

Hamilton was so healthy a village that it hardly furnished a sufficient demand for drugs and medicines to support a man of the most moderate tastes. But, with the addition of his salary as postmaster, Mr. Bolus was able to maintain a small family in comfort.

“I suppose you want some pills, Andy?” said Mr. Bolus, as our hero entered the office.

“No, sir,” answered Andy. “I hope I shan’t want any of them for a long time to come. Louis Schick told me there was something in the office for mother.”

“So there is – and a large parcel, too.”

He went into the post-office corner and produced a large, thick parcel, wrapped in a long, yellow envelope.

“Here it is, Andy,” said Mr. Bolus. “I hope it’s something valuable.”

Andy took the package and looked eagerly at the address.

His mother’s name and address were on the envelope, and it seemed to be postmarked at some town in Pennsylvania.

“Do you know anybody in the place where the package comes from?” asked the postmaster.

“No,” answered Andy. “That is, I don’t – perhaps mother may. It feels like a wallet,” added Andy, thoughtfully.

“So it does. I hope, for your mother’s sake, the wallet is full of money.”

“I am afraid there isn’t much chance of that,” replied Andy. “Well, I’ll go home and carry it to mother.”

Andy put the parcel in his inside coat pocket and took the nearest way home.

As he entered the house he did not immediately speak of the parcel, his thoughts being diverted by his mother’s question:

“Well, Andy, did you see Mr. Starr?”

“Yes, mother, I saw him,” answered Andy, soberly.

“Well, what does he say?” Mrs. Gordon inquired, anxiously.

“Nothing that’s encouraging. Mother, I believe he is one of the meanest men I ever knew.”

“He must know that your father paid that note.”

“Of course he knows it. A man doesn’t often forget such a thing as that. At any rate, Mr. Starr isn’t that kind of man.”

“What did he say when you told him the note had been paid?”

“That, of course, we could show the receipt.”

“It was a cunningly laid plot,” said Mrs. Gordon, indignantly. “He kept back the note, in the hope that your father would mislay the receipt. Perhaps he was even wicked enough to hope that he would be killed, and so clear the way for carrying out his fraudulent scheme.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if it were so, mother. I believe the old man would sell himself for money.”

Then, chancing to think of Mr. Starr’s involuntary ride on one of his own cows, Andy began to laugh heartily, considerably to the surprise of his mother.

“I can’t see anything to laugh at, Andy,” she said, wondering.

“You would have laughed if you had seen what happened while I was talking to Mr. Starr.”

And Andy proceeded to give an account of the scene.

Mrs. Gordon smiled, but she was too much impressed by the serious position in which they were placed to feel as much amusement as Andy.

“I am afraid, Andy,” she said, “that Mr. Starr will deprive us of our furniture, unless something unexpected turns up in our favor.”

This recalled to Andy’s mind the packet which he had just brought from the post office.

“That reminds me, mother,” he said, quickly. “I got a letter, or package, from the post office just now, for you. Perhaps there is something in it that may help us.”

He drew from his pocket the package and handed it to his mother.

Mrs. Gordon received it with undisguised amazement.

“Erie, Pennsylvania,” she read, looking at the postmark. “I don’t know anybody there.”

“Open it, mother. Here are the scissors.”

Mrs. Gordon cut the string which helped confine the parcel, and then cut open the envelope.

“It is your father’s wallet, Andy,” she said, in a voice of strong emotion, removing the contents.

“Father’s wallet? How can it be sent you from Erie at this late day?” asked Andy, in surprise equal to his mother’s.

“Here is a note. Perhaps that will tell,” said his mother, drawing from the envelope a folded sheet of note paper. “I will read it.”

The note was as follows:

“Dear Madam: I have to apologize to you for retaining so long in my possession an article which properly belongs to you, and ought long ago to have been sent to you. Before explaining the delay, let me tell you how this wallet came into my possession.

“Like your lamented husband, I was a soldier in the late war. We belonged to different regiments and different States, but accident made us acquainted. Toward the close of a great battle I found him lying upon the ground, bleeding freely from a terrible wound in the breast. Though nearly gone, he recognized me, and he said, as his face brightened:

“ ‘Ramsay, I believe I am dying. Will you do me a favor?’

“ ‘You have only to ask,’ I said, saddened by the thought that my friend was about to leave me.

“ ‘You’ll find a wallet in my pocket. Its contents are important to my family. Will you take it and send it to my wife?’

“Of course I agreed to do it, and your husband, I have reason to know, died with a burden lifted from his mind in that conviction. But before the action was over I, too, was stricken by one of the enemy’s bullets. My wound was not a dangerous one, but it rendered me incapable of thought or action. I was sent to the hospital, and my personal effects were forwarded to my family.

“Well, in course of time I recovered, and, remembering your husband’s commission, I searched for the wallet – but searched in vain. I feared it had been taken by some dishonest person. The war closed and I returned home. I ought to have written to you about the matter, but I feared to excite vain regrets. Perhaps I decided wrongly, but I resolved to say nothing about the wallet, since it seemed to be irretrievably lost.

“Yesterday, however, in examining an old trunk, I, to my great joy, discovered the long-missing wallet. I have taken the liberty to look into it, but cannot judge whether the contents, apart from the money, are of importance. My duty, however, is plain – to forward you the article at once. I do so, therefore, and beg you to relieve my anxiety by apprising me as soon as you receive it.

“Once more let me express my regret that there has been so great a delay, and permit me to subscribe myself your husband’s friend,

“Benjamin Ramsay.”

It is needless to say that both Andy and his mother were deeply interested in a letter which threw light upon the closing scene in the life of one so dear to them.

“Andy,” said his mother, “open the wallet. I cannot.”

The sight of it naturally aroused painful recollections in the heart of the bereaved wife. Andy was not slow in obeying his mother’s directions.

The first, and most prominent in the list of contents, was a roll of greenbacks. The bills were of various denominations, and they aggregated the sum of forty-five dollars.

“Money saved by your poor father from his salary,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“He will be glad that it has come into our hands, mother.”

“Yes; he was always thinking of those he left behind.”

“Here are some papers, too, mother,” said Andy. “They seem to be receipted bills.”

“I wish,” sighed the widow, “that the receipt from Mr. Starr might be found among them.”

One by one Andy opened the papers, hoping, but not much expecting, that the missing receipt might be found.

“Here it is, mother!” he exclaimed at last, triumphantly, flourishing a slip of paper.

“Let me see it, Andy,” said his mother, hurriedly.

“Don’t you see, mother? Here is his signature – Joshua Starr. I wonder what the old rascal will say to that?”

“The Lord has listened to my prayer, Andy. He has brought us out of our trouble.”

“Don’t say anything about it, mother,” said Andy. “I want to see how far the old swindler will go. I wonder what he will say when we show him the receipt?”

CHAPTER X. THE FATE OF A BULLY

The next day, Herbert Ross reappeared at school. As we know, it had been his intention not to go back unless Dr. Euclid would dismiss Andy from the post of janitor.

Now, however, he and his father saw a way of getting even with our hero, by the help of Mr. Starr, and the note which he had placed in the lawyer's hands for collection.

The prospect of distressing the family of his poor schoolmate was exceedingly pleasant to Herbert, who from time to time cast glances of triumph at Andy, which the latter well understood. But, with the means at hand to foil his ungenerous foe, Andy, too, could afford to be in good spirits, and his face showed that he was so.

This puzzled Herbert not a little. He had expected that Andy would be cast down, and was annoyed because he seemed so far from despondent.

"Of course they can't pay the note," thought Herbert, with momentary apprehension. "But of course they can't! I don't suppose they have got ten dollars in the house. I mean to go round when the sheriff seizes the furniture. Andy won't look quite so happy then, I am thinking!"

Herbert recited his Latin lesson as poorly as usual – perhaps even more so, for his mind had been occupied with other things – and Dr. Euclid, who never flattered or condoned the shortcomings of a pupil on account of his social position, sharply reprimanded him.

"Herbert Ross," he said, "how do you expect to get into college if you recite so disgracefully?"

"The lesson was hard," said Herbert, coolly, shrugging his shoulders.

"Hard, was it?" retorted the doctor. "There are some of your classmates who succeeded in learning it. Andrew Gordon, did you find the lesson very hard?"

"No, sir," answered Andy, promptly.

Herbert looked at his successful classmate with a sneer.

"I can't expect to compete with a janitor!" he said, slowly.

"Then," said the doctor, provoked, "the sooner you obtain the position of a janitor the better, if that is going to improve the character of your recitations!"

"I wouldn't accept such a position!" said Herbert, coloring with anger.

"You are not likely to have one offered you," said the doctor. "A boy who neglects his lessons is not likely to discharge well the duties of any position."

Herbert bit his lips in annoyance, but he did not dare to say anything more, for he saw, by the ominous flashing of Dr. Euclid's eyes, that he was in no mood to suffer impertinence.

He began to regret that he had been induced to return to school. He felt that it was very reprehensible in Dr. Euclid to treat the son of his most important patron with so little deference, or, indeed, respect.

"But never mind!" thought Herbert. "I will soon have my revenge. Father has given Mrs. Gordon a week's grace, and then she will have to pay the note or lose her furniture."

Two days later an incident occurred which incensed Herbert still more against Andy, and, as usual, the fault was Herbert's.

The young aristocrat was a natural bully. Like most bullies he was deficient in courage, and preferred to cope with a boy smaller than himself. For this reason he was both hated and feared by the young boys of the village, as he seldom lost an opportunity to annoy and tease them.

On Saturday there was no session of the Hamilton Academy. Teacher and scholars enjoyed a season of rest which was welcome to both.

After getting through a late breakfast, Herbert Ross took his hat, and sauntered through the village in search of something to amuse him or while away his time. Though he was glad to stay at home from school, he found Saturday rather a dull day.

There was a young clerk with whom he used sometimes to play billiards in the evening, but during the day it was difficult to find anyone who was not employed.

"I wish father would move to New York or Philadelphia," thought Herbert, yawning. "Hamilton is a dull hole, and there's absolutely nothing to do. If we lived in a city, there wouldn't be any difficulty in finding company and enjoying myself."

There was a vacant field, unfenced, near the engine house, which was used as a sort of common by the village boys, and in the course of his walk Herbert Ross came to it.

Two boys of ten were playing marbles in one corner of the field. Their names were Harry Parker and John Grant.

"I'll have some fun with them," thought Herbert.

He stood watching the boys for a minute or two, then, stooping suddenly, seized the marbles with which they were playing.

"Give me those marbles, Herbert Ross," cried Johnny Grant.

"What'll you give to get them back?" asked Herbert.

"It's mean to break up our game," said Harry.

"Here, then, come and get them," said Herbert.

Harry approached, and extended his hand to receive the marbles, but Herbert, with a taunting laugh, drew back his own hands, and put them into his pocket.

Johnny had a spirit of his own, though he was a small boy, and he doubled up his small fists, and said, angrily:

"You have no business to keep our marbles."

"What are you going to do about it?" demanded Herbert, provokingly.

"I know what I'd do if I was as big as you," said Johnny, hotly.

"Well, what would you do, you little bantam?"

"I'd give you a licking and make you cry."

"Hear the small boy talk!" said Herbert, bursting into a laugh.

"It's because we are small boys that you interfere with us," said Harry. "You don't dare to take one of your size."

"Look here, you little rascal, you are getting impudent," said Herbert, who was sensitive to an imputation that he knew to be well founded. "If you ain't careful, I'll do something worse than take your marbles."

"What will you do?" asked Johnny, spiritedly.

"What will I do? Come here and I'll show you."

Johnny, in no way frightened, approached, and Herbert, seizing him by the collar, tripped him up, depositing him upon the ground.

"That's the way I punish impudence," said Herbert.

There had been a witness to his cowardly act.

"What are you doing there, Herbert Ross?" demanded Andy, who had just come up.

"None of your business!" retorted Herbert; but he looked disturbed.

"Harry, what has he been doing to you?" asked Andy.

Harry and Johnny both told their story.

Andy turned to Herbert, with eyes full of contempt.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Herbert Ross, to tease little boys. Give them back their marbles."

"I will give them back when I get ready," said Herbert, doggedly.

"Give them up now, or you will be sorry for it."

“Mind your business!” retorted Herbert, and turned to walk away.

Before he well knew what was going to happen, the young bully found himself lying on his back, in the very spot where he had deposited Johnny a minute before, with Andy bending over him.

“Let me up, you brute!” he screamed.

“So I will, when you have given up the marbles.”

Herbert struggled, but in the end was obliged to surrender the marbles.

As he rose from the ground he shook his fist at Andy, and shouted, with passion:

“You’ll repent this, Andrew Gordon! You’ll be a beggar inside of a week, and in State’s prison before the year’s out!”

“Thank you for your good wishes!” said Andy, coolly. “I’ll take the risk of both.”

As Herbert slunk home discomfited, he felt that he hated Andy Gordon more than any one in the world, and vowed to be revenged.

CHAPTER XI. ANDY IS ENGAGED FOR POLICE DUTY

“I wonder how it is,” said Andy to himself, as he walked home, “that I am always getting into a quarrel with Herbert Ross? I don’t think it’s my fault. I couldn’t stand by and see those two little boys imposed upon without interfering. I suppose Herbert is angrier with me than ever, and that he will report this to his father, and get him to proceed against us at once. No matter; we shall be prepared to see him.”

Andy was more than ever thankful that the all-important receipt was in his mother’s possession. Whatever the lawyer might say, he believed that he was intending to punish them in the interest of his son.

In one respect, however, Andy made a mistake. Herbert did not report this last difficulty at home.

He was aware that he had not figured to advantage in his treatment of the two little boys, and any investigation of the matter would reveal this fact.

It would not be long now before he would have the satisfaction of seeing Andy and his mother in serious trouble, and, though impatient, he decided to wait for that. Then the triumph would be his.

When Andy reached home, he found that his mother had callers.

In a lonely situation, about a quarter of a mile beyond the farmhouse of Mr. Joshua Starr, lived two maiden ladies – Susan and Sally Peabody – both over fifty years of age.

Their father had died thirty years before, leaving them a cottage, with an acre of land, and some twelve thousand dollars in stocks and bonds.

Living economically, this sum had materially increased, and they were considered in the village rich ladies, as, indeed, they were, since their income amounted to more than twice their expenditures, and they were laying up probably five hundred dollars annually.

They were very good and kind, simple-hearted old ladies, and very much respected in the village.

The elder of these ladies, Miss Sally Peabody, Andy found in his mother’s plain sitting-room.

As he entered, he heard Miss Peabody say:

“I should like to borrow your Andy to-night, Mrs. Gordon, if you have no objection.”

Mrs. Gordon supposed that her visitor had some work which she wished Andy to do, and as the latter was always glad of a job, she answered:

“I am sure, Miss Sally, that Andy will be glad to do anything that you require.”

“I don’t want him to do anything,” answered Miss Peabody. “I want him to sleep at our house to-night.”

Mrs. Gordon looked a little puzzled, but Miss Sally went on to explain.

“You see, Mrs. Gordon, we had a sum of five hundred dollars paid in unexpectedly this morning, and we can’t get it to the bank till Monday. Now, it makes my sister nervous to think of having such a sum of money in the house. I was reading in the papers of a burglar entering a house at night in Thebes – the next village – and it might happen to us. I don’t know what we should do, as we have no man in the house.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.