WILLIAM BOWEN

THE OLD TOBACCO SHOP

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Bowen W.

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Содержание

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The Old Tobacco Shop A True Account of What Befell a Little Boy in Search of Adventure

CHAPTER I
MR. PUNCH AND THE CLOCK-TOWER

When the Little Boy first went to the Old Tobacco Shop, he stood a long while before going in, to look at the wooden figure which stood beside the door.

His father was sitting at home in his carpet-slippers, waiting for tobacco for his pipe, but when the Little Boy saw the wooden figure he forgot all about hurrying, – "Now don't be long," his mother had said, and his father had said "Hurry back," – but he forgot all about hurrying, and stood and looked at the wooden figure a long time: a little hunchbacked man, not so very much taller than himself, on a low wooden box, holding out in one hand a packet of black wooden cigars. His back was terribly humped up between his shoulders, his face was square and bony, if wood can be said to be bony, he was bareheaded and bald-headed, he had a wide mouth, and his high nose curved down over it and his pointed chin curved up under it; and his breast stuck out in front almost as much as his shoulders stuck out behind.

The Little Boy's name was Freddie; his mother called him that, and his father usually called him Fred; but sometimes his father called him Frederick, in fact whenever he didn't come back after he had been told to hurry, and then his father looked at him – you know that look – and said "Frederick!" just like that. But his mother never called him anything but Freddie, even when he was late.

He grasped his money tight in his hand, as he had been told to do, and stood and looked at the little hunchbacked wooden man holding out his packet of black wooden cigars. "I wonder," thought Freddie, "what makes him so crooked?" He walked around him and looked at his back. He walked around in front of him again and wondered if the black cigars in his hand would smoke; he decided he would ask about it. The little man wore blue knee breeches and black stockings and buckled shoes, and his coat was cut away in front over his stomach and had two tails behind, down to his knees. It was easy to see that he wasn't a boy, though, even if he did wear knee breeches; you only had to look at his face, for he had the kind of hard boniness in his face that grown-ups have. Freddie made up his mind that he liked him, anyway; and it must have been hard to have to stand out there all day without moving, rain or shine, and offer that bunch of cigars to all the people who went by, and never get a single soul to take them. Freddie put out his other hand (not the one with the money in it) towards the cigars, but he quickly drew it back, for he looked at the little man's face at the same time, and there was something about his eyes – anyhow, he stood back a little.

"Better be careful o' Mr. Punch, young feller," said a deep voice from the shop door.

Freddie looked, and in the doorway, leaning against the doorpost, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and one foot crossed over the other, stood a little man, not so very much taller than himself, and certainly no taller than the figure on the stand, who stared at Freddie as if he knew all about human boys and did not trust them out of his sight. Freddie looked at him and then at the wooden figure beside the door; they might have been brothers. The little man had a hump on his back, and his breast stuck out in front; his head was big and square, and he had high cheek-bones; his face was bony and his mouth wide, and his big nose curved down and his chin curved up; but he did not wear knee breeches; his trousers were the trousers of grown-ups, and his coat was a square coat, buttoned tight over his chest from top to bottom. He was bareheaded, and he had plenty of hair, brushed from

the top of his head down towards his forehead. He looked as if he belonged to the tobacco shop; or perhaps the tobacco shop belonged to him.

He stared at Freddie without blinking, and there was something in his eyes – anyway, Freddie stepped back, and held his money tighter in his hand behind him.

"You'd *better* stand away from Mr. Punch," said the hunchbacked man, without moving.

"Yes, sir," said Freddie.

"Did you say 'why'? Because you know I'm terrible deef, and can't never hear boys when they talk down in their stomicks. I'll *tell* you why, as long as you ast me. Do you see that clock on the church-tower over there?" He nodded his big wooden head up the street, without taking his hands from his pockets. Freddie looked, and there the clock was, plain enough. "Well," said the hunchbacked man, "I'll tell you, seeing as you insist upon it, and won't take no for an answer: but you mustn't never tell it to no one. Do you promise me that? Cross your heart?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie.

"Done," said the hunchback. "Mr. Punch's father lives up there behind that clock. And sometimes, just exactly when the two hands of that clock come together, one on top of the other, mind you, like you lay one stick along another, Mr. Punch's father comes out and stands on that there sill under the clock; he's a little old man with a long white beard; and he stands there and puts his hand to his mouth and calls down here to Mr. Punch, and Mr. Punch climbs down off his little perch and goes over to that church, and climbs up the inside of that tower to the very top and meets his father! And I've heard tell that they have regular high jinks up there all by theirselves, and vittles! more vittles and drink than you ever seen at one time; yes, sir; a regular feast, as sure as you're born; and they don't only eat vittles; no, sir; if they can only get hold of a nice plump little boy or two, with plenty o' meat to him, that's what they like best; and if it happens to be night-time, there's a lot of queer ones with 'em up there, and all sorts of queer noises – you ask the sextant over there about it —*he's* heard 'em; and if you should just happen to be around when Mr. Punch climbs down off of this here perch, you'd better look out; for he's just as likely as not to snatch you up and carry you off with him up there into that church-tower to his father, and if he does *that*, that's the last of you; and your ma and your pa could cry their eyes out, and it wouldn't be no use; you'd be *gone*! And never come back no more. They say there's many a boy been took up into that tower by Mr. Punch here when his father comes out and calls him. But he don't *always* come out when the hands of the clock come together; nobody ever knows when he's going to do it, no sirree; Mr. Punch himself never knows when his father's going to call him. Lord bless us!" cried the little hunchback, looking up again in alarm at the clock in the church-tower. "Lord bless us, look at that!"

Freddie stared at the clock. It was twenty-five minutes past five. He knew how to tell twelve o'clock and ten minutes to ten, but he had never got as far as twenty-five minutes past five; he could easily see, however, that the big hand was almost on top of the little hand. He edged away further from the wooden figure on the box; he was almost sure that the hand which held the cigars moved a little.

The hunchbacked man in the doorway stood up straight on his two feet and took his hands out of his pockets.

"Look alive, young feller!" he said. "It's pretty near time! In another minute! I can't help it if Mr. Punch's father comes out and – Quick, boy! Come here to me, before it's too late! I'll see if I can save you!"

Freddie gave another look at the clock; the hands were surely almost together, and quick as a flash he darted to the hunchback and hid behind him and held on to his coat, peeping around him through the doorway. The little man put his arm about Freddie and held him close; it was a strong muscular arm, and Freddie felt quite safe. The little man could not have been laughing, for his face was as solemn and wooden-looking as ever; but Freddie could feel his body shaking all over, he couldn't tell why.

"You'd better come in and see Aunt Amanda," he said, "before it's too late. You'll be safe in there."

He took Freddie by the hand and drew him into the shop.

The Old Tobacco Shop stands at the corner of two streets, as you surely must know if you have ever been in the city that lies on the river called Patapsco, which runs along ever so far out of a great bay where ships sail from all over the world, called Chesapeake Bay. It is an old brick house, and you go into the shop by the door that opens in the side just round the corner, not in the front, for there isn't any door at the front, but only a window with pipes and cigars and tobacco in it, and the stuffed head of a bull-dog with a pipe in his mouth. The house is only one story and a half high, and has a steep gabled roof, with two dormer windows in the slope of the roof above the side of the house, and one dormer window in the slope of the roof above the shop-window in front, where the bull-dog is. All the other houses fronting in the row are good high two-story houses; why this corner house never grew up like the others, no one knows.

When Freddie was standing at the corner of the street, before he had seen the wooden figure offering his bundle of wooden cigars there beside the door, he looked down the street that runs along the side of the shop, across the street that crosses it, and saw the masts of tall ships in the harbor beside the wharves; some with their sails up, some with their sails hanging most untidily, and some with their sails neatly rolled up and tied; and he would certainly have gone down there, only his father had told him to hurry.

Freddie lived in a fine two-story brick house in a row like this one, a long, long way off; three squares off (they say "squares" in that city when they mean a straight line between two streets and not a square at all) down the same street on which the Old Tobacco Shop fronts; and it really takes a good while to go all that way, for there is a boy half-way down, a big boy, who belongs to a Gang, and likes to bully little boys, and you have to watch your chance to get out of his way, and there is a place with a knot-hole in the fence where you can see all kinds of rusty springs and bed-rails and birdcages and barrel hoops piled up inside the yard, and a tin-can factory where you can pick up little round pieces of tin just as good as dollars, and a church (where the clock is) with a fat old man sitting on the pavement in a chair tilted back against the church wall smoking a long pipe, who doesn't mind being stared at from the curbstone, and a street-car track where you have to look out for the horse-car, which is very dangerous when the horse begins to trot, and – but Freddie hadn't lived long in his fine two-story house in that street, and these things were new to him and took time. But the newest and biggest thing he had yet found (not that it was really big, you know) was the wooden hunchback outside the door of the Old Tobacco Shop; and you have seen how much time *that* took.

Freddie found himself inside the shop, and his hand grasped tight by the big strong hand of the hunchback, so tight that he wriggled a little to get loose; but the hunchback only held him tighter. "Come along," he said, "you'd better come in here and see my Aunt Amanda, or Mr. Punch may step out and get you; and *then* where would you be?"

Freddie looked back out of doors over his shoulder, but it did not seem as if Mr. Punch meant to step out that time. He breathed easier. The shop was a very little shop, with shelves on the wall behind the counter, and a window in front where he saw the back of the bull-dog's head. The two show-cases on the counter were full of pipes of all kinds, and cigars and tobacco and cigarettes, and piled on the shelves were boxes of cigars and jars and tins of tobacco, and on the wooden top of the counter between the two show-cases stood a tobacco-cutter and a little pair of scales with a scoop lying beside it and little iron weights in a box. The counter ran from the front window lengthwise to the back of the shop, and at the back, on your left as you went in, was a closed door. A wooden chair with arms stood beside the front window. You could get behind the counter only by a swinging gate at the back end. There was a delightful warm odour about the place, very much the same odour Freddie liked to smell when his father opened his old tobacco-box on the mantel-piece in the sitting-room upstairs and filled his pipe, when he came home in the evening and put on his carpet-slippers

and spread out that everlasting newspaper that had no pictures in it. He never could understand why his mother opened all the windows the next morning.

"All right, young feller," said the hunchback, "we'll get on the other side of that door, and then we'll be safe. Here we are."

They reached the door at the back of the shop, and the hunchback opened it and pulled Freddie into the back room and closed the door behind them. Freddie hung back a little, but his hand was gripped tight, and he couldn't have got away if he had tugged with all his might. He was not so much afraid now of Mr. Punch and his father, but he didn't know what this little man was going to do with him; and besides, his father had told him to hurry.

In this back room, near a window which looked out on the street, sat a lady. The hunchback marched Freddie up to her and stopped there before her, and wagged his head sidewise towards the Little Boy. The hunchback and the Little Boy stood hand in hand, and the lady looked at them steadily.

CHAPTER II
AUNT AMANDA AND THE TWO OLD CODGERS

"Here's Aunt Amanda," said the hunchback, standing before the lady who was sitting near the window, and letting go of Freddie's hand, "and here's a boy that Mr. Punch pretty near got hold of, if I hadn't come along just in time and hustled him in here. Just look out of that window, Aunt Amanda, and see if Mr. Punch has moved yet."

The lady did not look out of the window, but stared at Freddie with her mouth shut tight. She had very thin lips and she pressed them tight together; and without opening them more than a wee mite she said to the hunchback, sternly:

"Obelilackyoomuptwonyerix."

Freddie could not understand this at all. He looked at her closely. She was very thin, and had a high beaked nose and reddish hair and a reddish skin, and on the left side of her chin was a mole, with three little reddish hairs sticking out of it; she wore a rusty black dress, very tight above the waist and very wide below, and in the bosom of this dress were sticking dozens, maybe hundreds, for all Freddie could tell, of pins and needles. She must have been very tall when she stood up. A cane leaned against the back of her chair; she was a little lame; not very lame, but enough to make her limp when she walked, and to make her cane useful in getting about. If she had had a stiff starched ruff about her neck and a lace thing on her head pointed in front, she would have done very well for Queen Elizabeth, the one you see the picture of in that history-book. There was a thimble on the second finger of her right hand, and a pair of scissors hung by a tape at her waist; and around her neck she wore a measuring tape. On the floor at her feet lay a pile of goods, and some of it was in her lap; the kind of goods that Mother has around her when she is turning and making over that old blue serge, and gathers up out of Father's way when she hears him coming in towards the sitting-room.

At Aunt Amanda's elbow stood an oval marble-topped table, and besides a work-basket there were several fascinating things on it. In the center was a glass dome, and under the glass dome was the most beautiful basket of wax flowers – calla lilies mostly, with a wonderful yellow spike like a finger sticking up out of each one. On one side of the wax flowers was a thick book with blue plush covers, and the word "Album" across it in slanting gold letters. On the other side was a kind of a – well, it had a handle under a piece of wood to hold it up by, and a frame at one end to stick up a picture in, and two pieces of thick glass in a frame at the other end to look through at the picture and make the picture look all —*you* know! – as if the people in the back of it were a long way behind, and the people in front right close up in front, and all that; Freddie's father had one.

The chairs in the room had thin curved legs and those slippery horse-hair seats which Freddie hated to sit on. On the walls were portraits in oval frames of men with chin-whiskers and no mustaches, and ladies in shawls and bonnets; but there was one square frame, and it had no picture under its glass, but a sheaf of real wheat, standing up as natural as life, with some kind of curly writing over it; it was simply beautiful. There was a clock on the marble mantel-piece, tall and square-cornered, with a clear circle in the glass below where you could see the round weight of the pendulum go back and forth, and a picture of the sun on the face, very red, with a big nose and eyes, and stiff red hair floating off from it.

Aunt Amanda stuck a pin in the goods in her lap and folded her hands. Freddie, after glancing around the room, looked at her again and wondered who she was; plain sewing she was, that was sure, also an aunt; and besides that, although Freddie did not know it, she was an old – I hate to say it, though it wasn't anything really against her, if you come to that, – an old – well, you know what you call them behind their backs, or shout after them as they go down the street and then whip around

the corner when they turn, just simply because they haven't ever been married, like Mother, – well, then, an Old Maid.

Being an Old Maid, she of course wore no wedding ring; but on her wedding-finger, the third finger of her left hand, there was a mark at the place where a wedding ring would have been; a kind of birth-mark, ruby red, in shape and size like the ruby stone of a ring. Freddie looked at it often afterwards.

"Now you look here, Aunt Amanda," said her nephew, taking hold of Freddie's hand again, "you know well enough I can't understand you with all them pins – "

Aunt Amanda put a hand to her lips and drew out of her mouth a pin and stuck it in the bosom of her dress. She put her hand to her lips again and drew forth another pin and stuck it in the bosom of her dress. She drew forth another and another, and stuck each one in her dress. Freddie's eyes opened wide; did this lady eat pins? Her mouth seemed to be full of them; didn't they hurt? It didn't seem possible she could eat them, and yet there they were. No wonder she couldn't talk plainly. There seemed to be no end to the pins, but there was, and at last her mouth was clear of them so that she could talk.

"Toby Littleback," said she, "you're up to one o' your tricks again. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" That was what she had meant by saying, "Obelilackyoomuptwonyerix," with her mouth full of pins.

Toby was quite crestfallen. "Well," he said, "I guess it ain't no hangin' matter. All I done was to bring the boy in to see you. 'N' this is what I get fer it every time. I ain't a-going to bring 'em in any more, that's flat."

"Let go o' the child," said Aunt Amanda, sharply. "Can't you see you're hurting his hand? Come here, boy."

Mr. Littleback dropped Freddie's hand and walked over to the table beside his aunt. Freddie came forward timidly and stood at Aunt Amanda's knee. She examined him carefully.

"It's the best one yet," she said. "Boy, do you know you're as pretty as a – Well, anyway, what is your name?"

If there was one thing Freddie loathed, it was to be called pretty; he had heard it before, in the parlor at home, when he had been trotted out to be inspected by female visitors, and he had tried many a time to scrub off the rosy redness from his cheeks, but he had found it only made it worse. He hung his head a little, and could not find his voice. Aunt Amanda took his chin in her hand and gently held up his head.

"It's all right, my dear," said she. "What is your name, now?"

"Fweddie," said the Little Boy.

"It ain't neither!" cried Mr. Littleback. "There ain't no such name. It's Freddie! Come on, now, say Freddie!"

"Fweddie," said the Little Boy.

"No, no!" cried Toby. "Try it again, now. Say Freddie!"

"Toby," said Aunt Amanda, "shut up. Freddie, I haven't any little boy, and I don't get out very much, and I'd like you to come and see me sometimes. Would you like to do that?"

Freddie stared at her, and said, "Yes'm."

"I hope you will, often. Be sure you do. I suppose you don't like gingerbread? Toby."

The little hunchback went out briskly through a back door and returned with a slice of gingerbread. "Baked today," said his aunt. "But what time is it? Quarter to six. Too near suppertime. You mustn't eat it now, Freddie. Toby, wrap it up."

Toby went into the shop and returned with a paper sack, and putting the gingerbread into it gave it to Freddie.

"Now," said Aunt Amanda, "take it home with you and eat it after supper. Will you come to see me?"

"Yes'm," said Freddie as if he meant it. You couldn't get gingerbread at home between meals every day in the week.

"That's a good boy. Now run away home."

"Please, sir," said Freddie, holding out the money in his hand, "my farver wants half a pound of Cage-Roach Mitchner."

"What? Oh!" said Toby. "I see. Half a pound of Stage-Coach Mixture. All right, young feller, come along into the shop."

"Good-bye, Freddie, and don't break the gingerbread before you get home," said Aunt Amanda, taking into her mouth a palmful of pins with a back toss of her head. Had she swallowed them? Freddie stared at her in alarm.

"Ain't you never comin' for the tobacco?" said Toby. "I can't keep all them customers in the shop waiting all day."

Freddie followed him into the shop.

"You'll have to wait your turn, young feller," said Toby. "I can't keep these customers waiting no longer. What'll you have, Mr. Applejohn?"

Freddie looked around for Mr. Applejohn, but so far as he could see there was no one in the shop but himself and Mr. Littleback. The hunchback went through the swinging gate and stood behind the counter, and looked over it (his head and shoulders just came over the top) at Mr. Applejohn.

"No," said Toby, "we're just out of it. Very sorry. But I have something just as good. No? Well, then, come around tomorrow; yes, sir; between ten and eleven. Now, then, Tom, it's your turn. You want what? No, sir, I won't sell no cigarettes to no boy, so you can clear out. You ought to be ashamed o' yourself, smoking cigarettes at your age. No use arguin', I won't do it. You can get right out o' here." The big wooden-looking head winked an eye at Freddie. "That's the way I treat 'em. Did you see how he skipped off in a hurry? You saw him go, didn't you?"

Freddie looked at the door. He hadn't seen anybody, but after all that talk there must have been somebody there; he couldn't be sure; probably he had been mistaken about it; grown-up people ought to know what they were talking about; perhaps he *had* seen somebody. He hesitated.

"I – I think so; I believe so; yes, sir."

"Don't you fool yourself, young man. You can't smoke cigarettes if you ever want to grow up. Look at me. Do you see this?" He turned his back and reached over his shoulder to his hump. "Cigarettes. That's what done it. Cigarettes. I smoked 'em along with my bottle of milk, regular, when I was a kid, and look at me now, not much bigger than Mr. Punch out there. Cigarettes. Maybe you might think it was the bottle o' milk done it, instead of the cigarettes, being as they was at the same time; but don't you never believe it. Cigarettes! You keep off of 'em. Now pipe-tobacco! That's a different thing. If I'd only stuck to a pipe, along with that bottle o' milk, look how high I'd 'a' been now! What kind o' tobacco did you say your farver wanted? Housewife's Favorite?"

"No, sir," said Freddie. "My farver he wants half a pound of Cage-Roach Mitchner."

"That's it," said Toby. "I don't see how I come to forget that name. Your father's a man o' good common sense. Nothing like Cage-Roach. Here it is." He turned to the shelf behind him and mounted a little ladder and took down a large tin. While he was scooping out the tobacco at the counter and weighing it on the scales and doing it up, he was singing to himself, and Freddie stared at him with rapt attention.

"Some day," said Mr. Littleback, without pausing in his work or looking at Freddie, "them eyes of yourn will pop right out of your head, if you ain't careful. Did you ever hear that song?"

"No, sir," said Freddie.

"Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie.

"It's about two old codgers – friends of mine; they come in here regular. One of 'em's a good customer and pays spot cash; the other one never buys nothing; and I can't say which one of 'em I like worse. Anyway, here's how it goes:

"Oh-h-h! There was an old codger, and he had a wooden leg,
And he never bought tobacco when tobacco he could beg."

"Don't you never let yourself get into that habit, young man. Always buy your tobacco fair and square. I've known 'em – this feller and many another one – never have a grain o' tobacco left in their pouch – just used up the very last bit two minutes before, and always a-beggin' a pipeful, and right here in my own shop too, where I *sell* tobacco, mind you – I'd like 'em better if they sneaked in and *stole* it, I would, any day. But the other one! I don't know that I'd want to be him neither, if I had to choose between 'em, – however —

"Another old codger, as sly as a fox!
And he always had tobacco in his old tobacco box.

"Count on him for that! *He* never begs no tobacco, nor gives away none either. However, he ain't such a general nuisance as the other one, and he pays spot cash. I'll have to say that much for him. But in spite o' everything and all, I can't seem to make myself care for him, much. Anyway —

"Said the one old codger, Won't ye gimme a chew?
Said the other old codger, I'll be hanged if I do!

"They're a fine pair now, ain't they? One of 'em a nuisance and the other one a grouch. You'll see 'em here both in my shop one o' these days, when you're a-visitin' Aunt Amanda, and one of them times – you see the way I bounced that boy that wanted cigarettes, didn't you? Well, that's what I'm goin' to do to them two old codgers one of these days, you watch and see if I don't; yes, sir; both of 'em, as sure as I've got a hump on my back. But it's pretty good advice, after all, what the song says, —

"So save up your pennies and put away your rocks,
And you'll always have tobacco in your old tobacco box!

"Here's your Cage-Roach. Gimme your money. There's your change; five, ten, fifteen, seventeen. Now run along. Come back again; what did you say your name was?"

"Fweddie."

"You mean Freddie, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why don't you say what you mean? Well, Freddie, there's plenty of tobacco left in this shop, so you can come in whenever the old tobacco box at home runs out. And don't forget to come in to see Aunt Amanda. Plenty of goods left in the shop whenever – you see all that?" He pointed up towards the shelves. "I'll tell you something I ain't told to but mighty few people before. There's a jar of smoking tobacco up there that's just plain magic. Magic! You know what that means?"

Freddie started, and looked up at the shelves in alarm. He nodded.

"It's that one, on the middle shelf; the Chinaman's head. Do you see it?"

He pointed to a white porcelain jar, shaped like a human head. Freddie could see that it was the head of some foreign kind of man, with a little round blue cap on top, which was probably the lid.

"That tobacco in that Chinaman's head is magic, as sure as you're alive. I wouldn't smoke it if you'd give me all the plum puddings in this city next Christmas; no, sir; and I wouldn't allow nobody

else to smoke it, neither: I just naturally wouldn't dare to. Do you know where that tobacco come from? A sailor off of one them ships down there in the harbor, that come all the way from China – yes, sir, *China!*– give it to me once for a quid of plug-cut; what you might call broke, he was, and it wasn't any use to him because he didn't smoke, but he did chew; and he told me all about it; he stole it from an old sorcerer in China, where he'd just come from. Don't you never touch it! I wouldn't want to be in your boots if you ever smoked that tobacco in that there Chinaman's head! You can steal anything else in this shop, and it wouldn't do much harm to anybody; but you keep your hands off of that Chinaman's tobacco, mind what I'm telling you!"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie. He had never thought about smoking before, in connection with himself, but now for the first time he began to wish that he knew how to smoke. It would be worth risking something to take a whiff or two of the magic tobacco in that Chinaman's head, just to see what would happen.

"Do you think you'd better go home now?" said Mr. Littleback.

"Yes, sir," said Freddie. "My farver told me to hurry."

"Oh, he did! Indeed!"

The hunchback followed Freddie to the door, and they looked up together at the clock in the church-tower.

"Ah!" said Toby. "You're safe. Just six o'clock. Mr. Punch's father can't come out for about half an hour yet."

Freddie looked back as he crossed the street, and saw the live hunchback leaning against the wooden hunchback, with one foot crossed over the other; he could hardly tell which was which, except for the coat and breeches. He went on up the street with his package of tobacco in one hand and his package of gingerbread in the other. As he passed the church, he lingered a moment to stare at the great fat man with spectacles, who was sitting on the pavement in a chair tilted back against the church-wall, smoking a long pipe and reading a newspaper; could this be the "sextant" of the church, whom Mr. Toby had mentioned, and who had heard the queer noises from the top of the tower when Mr. Punch and his father were up there having their high jinks? He tried to get up his courage to ask the fat man about it, but he could not get the words out. He stared so long that the fat man finally put down his paper and took the pipe from his mouth and looked over his spectacles and said:

"If you're considerin' making a bid for the property, young man, I'll see what the senior Churchwarden has to say about it. How much do you offer?"

"No, sir," said Freddie, blushing in confusion, and went on up the street. He understood nothing of what the fat man had said, but he caught the word "churchwarden," and remembered it.

He did not walk very fast, for he had a good deal to think about; so many things had never happened to him in one day before. He dwelt especially, in his mind, on the two old codgers who were friends of Mr. Toby, and he supposed that his own father never saved up his pennies, otherwise his old tobacco box would not be empty every now and then. However, he was glad that his father was a spendthrift, because it would give him a chance to go to the Old Tobacco Shop sometimes for more tobacco for the box; and apart from Aunt Amanda and her gingerbread, he was very anxious to look again at the Chinaman's head in which lay the magic tobacco which he must not touch. One thing was sure; he would never go without looking carefully first at the hands of the clock. He wished he knew how to smoke; only not cigarettes; he shivered when he thought of the terrible consequences.

When he came to the street-car track, the horse-car was going past; at least, it was coming down the street, and he did not want to be run over by that horse; he had better wait, for the horse was trotting; his mother had warned him about it; he sat down on the curb. He had quite a moment or two to wait, and there would be time to give a hasty glance at the gingerbread. He laid the tobacco-sack beside him on the curb, and opened the other package; the car-horse had dropped into a walk and his bell was hardly jingling; there was no hurry after all; it would never do to cross in front of that horse even though he was walking. He looked at the gingerbread; it was fresh and soft, and its

smell, when held close to the nose, was nothing less than heavenly; it was a pity it had to be hidden away again in the sack, but the horse was going by and the danger would soon be past. He held the gingerbread under his nose, merely to smell it; the edge of it touched his upper lip by chance, and there was something peculiar about the feel of it, he couldn't tell exactly what; it was very interesting; he touched it with the tip of his tongue, to see if it felt the same to his tongue as to his lip; it was just the same; perhaps teeth would be different; his teeth sank into it, just for a trial. The horse was going by now, and the driver was looking at him. He forgot what he was about, in watching the horse and his driver, as they went on past him; the gingerbread completely slipped his mind, and when he turned his head back from the horse-car and came to himself he found, to his amazement, that his mouth was full of gingerbread. He wondered at first how it got there, but there was no use in wondering; there it was, and it had to be swallowed; his mother would never approve of his spitting it out; and so, to please his mother, he swallowed it. The horse-car was nearly a square away; he could cross the track at any time now; there was no hurry.

When he came into the fine two-story brick house where he lived, with only one package in his hand, his mother threw up her hands and said:

"Why, Freddie! Where on earth have you been? Did you get lost? Are you hungry?"

"No'm. Yes'm," said Freddie.

"Frederick," said his father, looking at him with that look, "where have you been? Didn't I tell you to hurry?"

"Yes, sir, to Mr. Punch's, and I didn't see his farver at all, but the hands come'd right over on top of each other and he didn't get down off of his perch, he didn't, so Mr. Toby took me in to see Aunt Namanda and she eats pins, and it's cigarettes that gives you that hump on the back, only tobacco's all right 'cause you smoke it in a pipe and it doesn't do you any harm at all, and that's what Mr. Toby says and he ought to know 'cause he's got one on his back his own self, but you mustn't touch that tobacco in the head 'cause it's magic and the sailor said so, and here's the Cage-Roach Mitchner, and that's all."

You will notice that he said nothing about the gingerbread.

CHAPTER III
INTRODUCING THE CHURCHWARDEN

Every time Freddie visited the Old Tobacco Shop after that – and it was pretty often, whether the tobacco box at home needed tobacco or not, for there were a good many things that drew him there, and he hardly knew which was the most fascinating: there was always a chance of gingerbread, and you could usually depend on seeing Aunt Amanda eat pins, and you could look through the two pieces of glass at the double picture and make it all one picture with the people in it standing out as if they were real, and Mr. Toby would often sing about his friends the two old Codgers and talk about their mean ways, and Mr. Punch was always waiting for his father outside the door, so that you had to keep your eyes on the time, or at least the clock (which is different), and sometimes Mr. Toby would let you in behind the counter and let you scoop tobacco into a paper sack, and when his back was turned you could stand under the Chinaman's head with the magic tobacco in it, and look up at it and wonder what would happen if you took just one or two little teeny whiffs – But I forget what I started to tell you. Oh, yes. Every time Freddie visited the Old Tobacco Shop, Mr. Toby would ask him his name, in order to see if he was grown up yet.

"What's your name today?" Mr. Toby would say.

"Fweddie," would be the Little Boy's answer.

"Not yet," Mr. Toby would say, shaking his head sadly. "You ain't grown up yet. I'm very sorry to have to tell you, son, but you've got to wait a while before you're grown up. I'll tell you what; I'll give you six months more," said Mr. Toby on one occasion. "If you ain't grown up by that time, there's no hope for you; I hate to have to say it, but you might as well know it one time as another." And the very next time the Little Boy came he said his name was "Fweddie," and Mr. Toby said, "Well, never mind, you've got five months and twenty-eight days left, and there's hope yet. I suppose you wouldn't want to be a Little Boy *all* the time, and never grow up at all, would you?" Freddie looked up at him in alarm and said, "No, sir." "Then," said Mr. Toby, "you'd better mind your P's and Q's."

Freddie wanted to ask about these P's and Q's, but you may have noticed that he was shy, and he could not make up his mind to do so. He knew all about P's and Q's in the Alphabet Book at home, but he did not know how to mind them; he knew how to mind his mother, – sometimes, but how could you mind letters in a book, that couldn't ever say "Don't do that," like mother? He was very anxious on this point, for he knew that his time was growing short, and the idea of never growing up was simply terrifying; he might as well smoke cigarettes and be done with it. In point of fact, he now had only about a week left, and he wasn't grown up yet.

But one morning, when the hands of the church clock were wide apart, and all was safe, he passed by Mr. Punch and opened the shop door. Mr. Toby was standing behind the counter, tying up a parcel. He went on tying it up, and said:

"All right, young feller, it's your turn next. This here package is for the Sly Old Codger, and he'll be back for it pretty soon, and if it ain't ready, – whew! won't we get blown up, though? Now then, what'll you have? Pound o' Maiden's Prayer?"

"No, sir," said the Little Boy. "I don't want anything. I just came."

"Oh; you just came. By the way, young man, what is your name today?"

"Freddie!" said the Little Boy.

Mr. Toby dropped his package and leaned across the counter in amazement.

"What's that you say?"

"Freddie!" cried the Little Boy, bursting with pride.

"Well! Bless my soul! If I ever in my life! As sure as the world! Strike me dead if he didn't say it as plain as – ! Young man," said Mr. Toby, solemnly, and he walked to the end of the counter, opened

the swinging gate, came through, stood in front of Freddie, and shook him by the hand. "Young man, I congratulate you. It's all right now. But you had an almighty close shave, I can tell you that. Allow me to congratulate you, and accept the best wishes of your kind friend, Toby Littleback."

"Please, sir," said Freddie, opening his eyes wide, "am I grown up now?"

Mr. Toby stared without speaking, and then threw out both his arms, and for a moment it looked as if he were going to hug the Little Boy, but he evidently thought better of it.

"Are you – ? Why, of course you are! Ain't I been telling you? But don't you go and presume on it too much, young feller! You don't think you can go and smoke cigarettes now, just because you're grown up, do you?"

"Oh no, sir," said Freddie, earnestly.

"I should hope not. And that there Chinaman's head up there – you don't think you can go and smoke that magic tobacco now, do you? Because if you do!"

"No, sir," said Freddie; but he said this a little doubtfully, and he looked at the Chinaman's head with more interest than ever. What was the use of being grown up if you couldn't take a little risk now and then?

"All right, then!" cried Mr. Toby. "We've got to have a little celebration over this here event, and we'd better go in and see Aunt Amanda about it, right now!"

He grasped Freddie's hand again, and pulled him to the back door, and through into the back room where Aunt Amanda was sitting by the table with the wax flowers, sewing.

"Quick! quick! Tell Aunt Amanda your name now, quick! What's your name?" cried Mr. Toby.

"Freddie!" said the Little Boy, very distinctly, but looking down at the carpet, for fear he should seem proud.

"We're grown up today," cried Mr. Toby, "and we've got to celebrate!"

Aunt Amanda raised her eyebrows in astonishment, and said:

"Esheeraybysart!"

She put her hand to her mouth and somehow got out into her hand a good mouthful of pins. She laid them down on the table at her elbow, and said:

"Bless the dear baby's heart! And are you grown up now?"

"Yes'm," said Freddie, looking up and then down again, for he did not wish to seem too proud.

Aunt Amanda looked at him for a moment, and took out her handkerchief and blew her nose very loud.

"Toby," she said, "what did you mean by a celebration?"

"Tomorrow's Saturday," said he.

"Well, what of it?"

Freddie could not understand very well what they were saying after that, except that he was concerned in it somehow, until he heard Aunt Amanda say:

"You'd better ask his mother, then."

"Young man," said Mr. Toby, "if I write a letter to your ma, will you give it to her?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie, whereupon Mr. Toby sat down at the other side of the table, with pen and paper and ink, and commenced to write.

"First," said Aunt Amanda, "there's some of that fruit-cake from last Christmas still in the – "

"Right you are!" cried Toby, jumping up and going out into the kitchen.

Freddie ate the fruit-cake, sitting on a hassock at Aunt Amanda's feet, while Toby went on with his letter, but in the midst of it Toby went out again, and finally came back with a tall glass of ice-cold lemonade.

"Don't you go and spill it on the carpet," said he, as he sat down to his writing.

"No, sir," said Freddie.

Aunt Amanda looked at him, as he sat so seriously on his hassock at her feet, munching his fruit-cake and sipping his lemonade; and she pulled out her pocket-handkerchief and blew her nose

again, very loud. She appeared to have a cold. Toby paid no attention to her; his head was lying sidewise on his left arm on the table, and he was squinting at the sheet of paper, and every time his pen came down he closed his mouth tight, and every time his pen went up he opened his mouth wide. Freddie and Aunt Amanda had plenty of time to talk. Under the softening influence of fruit-cake and lemonade Freddie found his tongue.

"What's a Churchwarden?" he said suddenly into the lemonade-glass, which was just under his nose.

"Bless the baby!" said Aunt Amanda.

"It's a long clay pipe, young man," said Toby, chewing the end of his pen-holder, "like you've seen in the case out there in the shop."

"That ain't what he means," said Aunt Amanda. "You mean a man, don't you, Freddie?"

"Yes'm," said Freddie, looking at the cake just going into his mouth.

"It's a man," said Aunt Amanda, "it's a man that belongs to a church, and he stands guard over the church property, and sees to the repairs, and beats little boys with a cane when they make a noise during service, and takes care nobody don't run away with the collection money, and – "

"How do you spell 'respectfully'?" said Toby, scratching his head with the pen. "Yours respectfully."

"R-e – " began Aunt Amanda, "s-p-e-c-k – no, that ain't right, – r-e-s – "

"There's one over at that church," said Freddie, pointing towards the window, "and he smokes one, too."

"One what, Freddie?" said Aunt Amanda.

"A Churchwarden. There's a Churchwarden sits out on the pavement and he smokes a Churchwarden, he does." Freddie was rather proud that he had mastered that difficult word, and he liked to hear himself say it.

"Oh," said Toby, "I reckon he means the sextant over there. Well, 'Yours respectfully.' I don't give a – hum! – how you spell it. There she goes. Done. 'Yours respectfully, Toby Littleback.' It's blotted up some, by crackey, that's a fact; but I ain't a-goin' to write all that over again, not by a jugful." And he took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"He's a Churchwarden," insisted Freddie, swallowing the last of the lemonade after the last of the cake.

"All right," said Toby, "have it your own way. But a sextant's as good as a Churchwarden, in *my* opinion, any day of the week, – except Sunday, of course."

Aunt Amanda inspected the letter, and declared herself horrified by the blots; but Toby positively refused to go through that exhausting labor again, so she passed it grudgingly, and handed it to Freddie in an envelope, and told him to give it to his mother as soon as he got home.

"Do you want some more cake and lemonade?" said she.

"Yes'm," said he.

"Well, you won't get it, so trot along home."

In the shop Mr. Toby showed him the churchwarden pipes in the show-case. Freddie wondered how it would taste to smoke some of that magic tobacco in the Chinaman's head in a churchwarden pipe.

As he passed the church on his way home, he looked for the fat old man who usually sat in his chair tilted back against the wall, but he was not there. Freddie wished to ask him about those noises up in the tower when Mr. Punch and his father were having their high jinks; he had never been able to screw up his courage to the point of asking about this, but now that he was grown up he thought he might be able.

He gave the letter to his mother, and she read it; but she said nothing to him about it. When his father came home in the evening, she showed the letter to him, and they talked about it, and Freddie could not understand very well what they were saying. Finally his father said:

"Well, I don't think there would be any harm in it."

"I suppose not," said his mother. "I'll see them in the morning. He had better wear his Sunday suit and his new shoes."

This was bad, because it sounded like Sunday-school, and the shoes squeaked. Freddie thought he had better change the subject, so he said:

"I'm grown up. I can say Freddie. Mr. Toby says so."

His father laughed, but his mother took him up in her arms and hugged him close to her breast.

The next day was in fact Saturday, and after lunch Freddie's mother helped him, or rather forced him, into his Sunday suit and his new shoes, after a really outrageous piece of washing, which went not only behind the ears but actually into them. She put his cap on his head – he always had to move it a trifle afterwards, – looked at his finger-nails again, pulled down his jacket in front and buttoned every button, straightened out each of the four wings of his bow tie, took off his cap to see if his hair was mussed and put it on again, pulled down his jacket in front, straightened his tie, altered the position of his cap, put both her arms around him and kissed him, and told him it was nearly two o'clock and he had better hurry. As soon as she had gone in, after watching him go off down the street, he unbuttoned every button of his jacket, put his cap on the back of his head, and in crossing the street-car track deliberately walked his shiny squeaking shoes into a pile of street-sweepings; he then felt better, and went on towards the Old Tobacco Shop.

As he came to the church, he stopped to look at the hands of the clock; he was in luck; the hands would not be together for ever so long, for it was ten minutes to two. The Churchwarden was sitting in his chair tilted back against the wall, keeping guard over his church; and he was smoking his churchwarden pipe. Freddie walked by very slowly, and his shoes squeaked aloud on the brick pavement. The fat old man gazed at him solemnly, and Freddie looked at the fat old man. The Churchwarden's chair came down on the pavement with a thump.

"Look here!" he said. "This ain't Sunday! What's the meaning of all this? It's against the rules to wear them squeaking shoes of a Saturday! The Dean and Chapter has made that rule, by and with the advice and consent of the City Council, don't you know that? And all that big red necktie, too! Did you think it was Sunday?"

"No, sir," said Freddie, for he was always honest, even in the face of danger. "I couldn't help it. I didn't want to, but mother made me – "

"Ah! that's it. I thought maybe you'd made a mistake in the day; then it wouldn't 'a' been so bad. Look here; it's my duty to report this here violation of the Sunday law, but as long as – you're sure you ain't *particeps criminis*?"

"No, sir," said the Little Boy earnestly. "My name's Freddie."

"Well, that makes it different. I though you was another party; young party-ceps; but if you ain't, why – Here; you'll need something to show, in case you should meet the Archdeacon, and he'd want to know why I hadn't reported you – Show him this, and he'll know it's all right."

The fat Churchwarden fished in his vest pocket and drew out, between a fat thumb and a fat forefinger, a round shining piece of metal, and put it in Freddie's hand. Freddie saw that it was a bright new five-cent piece, commonly called a nickel. He felt better.

"If you don't meet the Archdeacon between here and Littleback's Tobacco Shop," went on the Churchwarden, "you don't need to keep it any longer; I don't care what you do with it then; only not pickles, mind you!"

"No sir," said Freddie.

This was his chance to inquire about Mr. Punch's father and the noises in the tower, but it was out of his power to stay longer; he was too glad to escape without being reported; and he accordingly went off down the street, squeaking worse than ever, and positively hurrying.

CHAPTER IV
IN WHICH MR. HANLON MAKES A GREAT IMPRESSION

Freddie found no one in the Tobacco Shop, so he knocked on the door of the back room, and it was instantly opened by Mr. Littleback himself; but a Mr. Littleback so resplendent that Freddie hardly knew him.

The suit of clothes which Mr. Littleback wore was beyond any doubt a brand new suit. The ground color of it was a rich mauve, if you know what that is; not exactly purple, nor violet, but somewhere in between; and up and down and across were stripes of brown, making good-sized squares all over him; it was extremely beautiful. His collar was a high white collar, very stiff, and it held up his chin in front like a whitewashed fence. His necktie was of a pale-blue satin, with little pink roses painted on it, yes sir, painted! mind you, by hand! It was not one of those troublesome things that come in a single long piece and take you hours before the glass to twist and turn over and under before you can get them to look like a necktie; no indeed; it was far better than that; it was tied already, by somebody who could do it better than you ever could, and when you bought it, all you had to do was to put it on; fasten those two rubber bands behind with a hook, and there you were; perfect. As to hair, the hand of the barber was yet upon him; his hair, parted on one side, was of a slickness which his own soap never could have accomplished; on the wide side, it lay flat down over his forehead, and there gave a sudden curl backward, like the curve of a hairpin, but much more graceful; it is only the most studious barbers who ever learn to do it just right. There were creases down the arms of Mr. Toby's coat and down the front of his trouser-legs. A yellow silk handkerchief showed itself, not boldly, but quietly, from his breast pocket.

As he let Freddie in, and in doing so turned his back to Aunt Amanda, she screamed and cried out:

"Toby! Look behind you! Merciful heavens!"

Freddie, in the midst of his admiration of the magnificent creature, saw him whirl about and look behind himself in alarm. His aunt pointed at his coat and said sternly, "Come here."

Freddie saw on the back of Mr. Toby's coat, near the bottom, as he whirled about, a little square white tag.

Mr. Toby backed up to his aunt, and stood before her, trying to look at his back over his shoulder, while she took her scissors and clipped the threads by which the white tag was sewed to the back of his coat. She held up the tag; it had numbers printed and written on it.

"Now ain't that just like you, Toby Littleback," she said, "going out with your tag on your back, with your size on it and your height and age, too, for all I know, for anybody to see that you've got on a splittin' brand new suit right out o' the shop. If you'd 'a' gone out with that on your back, I'd 'a' died with shame right here in this chair. Ain't you even able to dress yourself?"

"By crickets, that *would* 'a' been bad," said Toby, considerably upset. "However, you caught it in time, so there ain't no use cryin' over it. Good-bye, Aunt; come along, Freddie, or we'll be late."

"Ain't you goin' to wear a hat?" said Aunt Amanda. "I declare the man's so excited he don't know what he's doing."

"Blamed if I didn't come near going without a hat," said Toby. "Here she is."

He produced his hat from a cupboard in the room, and put it on. It would have been a pity indeed for him to have gone without it. It was a white derby; yes, a *white* derby. It was the kind of a hat which was known in that city as a "pinochle"; pronounced "pea-knuckle" by all well-informed boys. With the mauve suit and the hand-painted necktie and the whitewashed fence, the white derby set him off to perfection, especially as he wore it a little towards the back of his head, so as to show

the loveliest part of the plastered curl of his hair on the forehead. Aunt Amanda could not restrain her admiration.

"You'll do now," she said. "I don't know that I ever seen you look so genteel before."

Toby, in the embarrassment of being considered genteel, put his hands in his trousers pockets.

"Take them hands out of your pockets," said Aunt Amanda sharply, and he took them out in a hurry.

"Now, Freddie," she said, "come here a minute, and I'll set you to rights."

Freddie stood before her knee, not very willingly, and she buttoned his jacket from top to bottom, and put his cap squarely on his head.

"Now you'd better be off," she said.

"Good-bye, Aunt, and I wish you were going too," said Toby, his hand on the door-knob.

"Good-bye, Freddie," said she.

"Good-bye," said Freddie.

"Good-bye what?" said she.

"Aunt Amanda," said he.

When they were out in the street, and she heard Toby lock the shop door behind him, she took out her handkerchief and blew her nose; her cold was evidently worse, because she blew her nose several times; and then, tucking her handkerchief away in her dress, she put her head down on her arm on the table, and cried.

The first thing Freddie did, as they went up the street, was to put his cap back again on the back of his head, and the next thing he did was to unbutton every button of his jacket, from top to bottom.

The little hunchback was in a great hurry, and he dragged the Little Boy along by the hand so fast that he could hardly keep up. As they hurried along, several naughty boys, observing Mr. Toby's white derby hat, called after him, very rudely, "Pea-knuckle! pea-knuckle!" But Mr. Toby paid no attention, and dragged Freddie along faster than ever.

"We don't want to miss any of it," said Mr. Toby. "Hurry up, boy."

They did not have far to go; only four or five "squares." They stopped before a great grimy brick building with a great wide entrance-way.

"Here we are," said Toby.

"What does that say up there?" said Freddie.

"Gaunt Street Theatre," said Toby. "Hurry up."

Freddie hung back before a signboard on which was a picture of a slender man dressed up in white clothing, very tight, with red and black squares on it; he was leaning against a table; his head and face were a dead white, except for red eyebrows, and a red spot in each cheek, and he had no hair, but a smooth dead-white skin from his forehead to the back of his neck. The peculiar thing was, that his head was on the table beside him, and not on his neck. Freddie pointed to the writing underneath the picture, and said:

"What does that say?"

"Hanlon's Superba," said Toby, pulling him along. "Hurry up! We'll be late."

Mr. Littleback went to a little window in the wall, inside the entrance-way, and spoke to a man in there, and evidently asked permission to go in, and evidently got it; and they did go in, up a flight of stairs, and found themselves suddenly among thousands and thousands of people, as it seemed, all sitting in chairs facing the same way, in a vast house lit up by gas light so that it was almost as bright as day; and Toby and Freddie sat down in the very front row of these people, and looked down over a railing in front of them on the heads of thousands and thousands, as it seemed, of other people, all sitting in chairs facing the same way. Everybody was facing towards a straight wall at the other side of the house, which had pictures painted on it. At the foot of this wall, in a kind of trench, there was a man at a piano, and there were other men with fiddles big and little, and still others with brass

things, and they were all playing a tremendous tune together, but just after Toby and Freddie had sat down, they stopped playing and Toby nudged Freddie with his elbow, and said:

"Now, then, young feller, what do you think of this, eh? Just you wait! Keep your eye on that curtain!"

He had no sooner said this than somewhere in the house somebody gave a piercing whistle between his fingers, and in a minute there was such a racket that it was impossible to talk. There must have been people above them, and they must certainly have all been boys; for from up there Freddie heard a clapping of hands and a stamping of feet, all in a regular time, which spread to the whole house, and in the midst of it the boys up there began to shout and call and whistle, and in a few minutes there was such a hubbub as only boys could make, with whistling between the fingers leading the riot. Toby nudged Freddie again with his elbow, and to Freddie's surprise began to clap his hands and stamp his feet with the rest; and as Freddie thought he ought to be polite, he clapped his hands, too, though he did not know very well what it was all about.

Suddenly the men in the trench at the foot of the painted wall struck up again, and that quieted the other noise for a moment; but only for a moment; someone whistled through his fingers, and in an instant those fiddlers might as well have been sawing away at their fiddles out at the Park, for all you could hear them; and right in the midst of it all, while Freddie was trying to shout the word "Peanuts" into Toby's ear, suddenly the lights went out and you could have heard a pin drop.

"Now then! now then!" whispered Mr. Toby, in great excitement. "Now you'll see! Watch the curtain! It's going up!"

From down there in that dark trench came the sound of a soft twittery kind of music, and at the same time the painted wall that Freddie had been looking at was rising! going up! And it went on up and up out of sight into the ceiling, and there behind it, in a dim light, there behind it, mysterious and fearsome and delicious, – Well, there behind it was Fairyland. Just Fairyland.

I can't describe it to you. Freddie never forgot it. If you haven't seen Hanlon's Superba, in some old Gaunt Street Theatre or other, on a Saturday afternoon, with the galleries wild with boys, you have not lived. When Freddie tried to tell his mother and his father about it that night, it was such a whirling mass of wonders and glories that they could not make head nor tail of it. It is useless to speak of the Fairy Queen in her glittering white, coming to the rescue in the nick of time with her diamond sceptre, or of the horrible demons, or the trouble and excitement they made for everybody, or of the beautiful young lady who – and such leapings and twistings and climbings and tumblings as no mere human beings with bones in them could ever have performed – it is no use; it is best not to try to describe it. But there was one part which, although it may seem to you the most unlikely thing in the world, really had a good deal to do with Freddie afterwards. There was the same man whose picture he had seen outside on the signboard; and he could climb straight walls and leap through high windows and tumble across floors in a way which passed belief; but there was one thing he could not do; he could not talk; he never spoke a word from beginning to end. Once, after having escaped from a parcel of wicked red imps, he sat down, tired out and starved to death, before a table loaded with food, and he commenced to make a hearty meal; but just as he was about to sample each plate it disappeared, vanished, completely out of sight, right under his nose. His distress was pitiable, and Freddie thought it cruel of everybody to laugh, as everybody did. On his plate were sausages, and he nearly got them; but just as he thought he had them, they actually jumped off the table and ran along the floor and up the wall; and the poor man had to climb the wall after them, which he did like a cat, and even then he never came up with them; he was terribly disappointed; and to finish off his miseries, at last a wicked creature with a sword came up behind him, as he was leaning his head down on the table in despair, and cut off his head before your very eyes; really and truly cut it off; there was no doubt about it; the head was on the table and the poor man was in the chair; Freddie was terrified, and clutched Mr. Toby's arm. But when the wicked murderer had gone away, back popped the head onto the dead man's neck, his eyes opened, he grinned from ear to ear, and there he was on

his feet, skipping and tumbling, as lively as ever; and at that Freddie and all the others in the house roared and shouted and clapped their hands.

"Is that Mr. Hanlon?" whispered Freddie into Mr. Toby's ear.

"Reckon it is," said Toby, too excited himself to pay much attention to Freddie.

But it could not last forever. Even the peanuts, which Toby bought for Freddie between the first and second acts, were all gone, and the curtain was down for the last time, and the crowd crushed through the doors, and Mr. Toby put on his white derby hat.

They were in the street, and the speechless Mr. Hanlon was a thing of the past. Freddie did not believe that he would ever see that dumb and loose-headed man again; but in that he was mistaken, as you shall see.

Toby left him at the corner near his father's house.

"What I say is," said Toby, "three cheers for our growing-up party!"

"Yes," said Freddie, "and three cheers for Mr. Hanlon!"

CHAPTER V
THE CHINAMAN'S HEAD

For a long time afterwards, Freddie dreamed at night of a hunchbacked man whose head came off and popped on again, and wicked red demons who chased a poor man with a white face who tried to cry for help and could not speak a word, and of a Chinaman's head without a body, smoking a long clay pipe. In the daytime, he thought a good deal about the people he was now acquainted with: Mr. Toby with his white derby hat, Aunt Amanda swallowing pins, the sailorman from China, Mr. Punch and his father, Mr. Hanlon with his head on the table, the Churchwarden smoking his churchwarden pipe, and the two old Codgers, one so sly and the other so beggarly; but that which occupied his mind more than anything else was the Chinaman's head on Mr. Toby's shelf.

Freddie was older now, and as time went on it might be thought that he would have grown accustomed to all these strange things; but he had not; far from it; he thought about them more and more, and most of all about the Chinaman's head and the magic tobacco. He really could not get that Chinaman's head out of his mind. Here was magic just within reach of your hand, and you were told that you mustn't touch it. You might as well have Aladdin's lamp in your bureau drawer, and be told to keep away from the bureau; even parents ought to know better than to expect such a thing. Anyway, what harm could just one or two little whiffs do? You needn't smoke a whole pipeful, if you didn't want to. However, Mr. Toby would not be pleased, and Freddie did not intend to do anything to displease Mr. Toby. Still, it did seem a pity, with such a chance right over your head – Oh, well, he would think no more about it; he fixed his mind on other things; he thought especially about a hymn they sang nearly every Sunday in Sunday-school; it was a great help; he knew it by heart, and it went like this:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin,
Each vict'ry will help you
Some other to win."

He resolved he would never think about the magic tobacco again; he went to sleep saying over to himself, "Yield not to temptation," and dreamed all night about the Chinaman's head, and thought about it all the next day.

In order to get it out of his mind, he called on Aunt Amanda. It was late in the afternoon; he sat on his hassock and watched Aunt Amanda sewing. Mr. Toby was in the shop, waiting on customers. Freddie watched for a long time, and then said:

"What are you doing?"

"Basting," said Aunt Amanda.

"I thought that was what you did to a turkey," said Freddie.

"So it is," said Aunt Amanda.

"That isn't a turkey," said Freddie.

"No," said Aunt Amanda, "you baste a turkey with gravy."

"That isn't gravy," said Freddie.

"It's different," said Aunt Amanda. "You see, I have to sew this up with needle and thread, and – "

"You sew up a turkey with needle and thread, too," said Freddie.

"But that's different," said Aunt Amanda. "You couldn't baste a turkey with needle and thread, and you couldn't baste dress-goods with gravy – "

"Why not?" said Freddie.

"Well," said Aunt Amanda, "well, you see, they don't do it that way; it's *different*; it ain't the same thing at all; it's like this; when you baste a turkey – "

"Have you ever had any children?" said Freddie.

Aunt Amanda put her hand to her heart suddenly, as if she had received a shot there, and caught her breath; then she looked out of the window, and then round at the wax flowers on the table, and then at the door, and she really seemed to be thinking of running away. But she was too lame to do that, and she at last clasped her fingers together tight in her lap, and looked hard at Freddie. He was gazing at her calmly, waiting for information.

"No," said Aunt Amanda, "I have never – had – any – children."

"Why not?" said Freddie.

"I have – never – been married," said Aunt Amanda.

Freddie thought about this for a moment.

"Didn't anybody ever want you?" said he.

"No," said she, "nobody – ever – wanted – me."

Freddie was puzzled.

"But you're nice," said he.

"That ain't enough," said Aunt Amanda.

"What else do you have to be?"

"You have to be pretty."

"Weren't you ever pretty?"

"I thought – so – once, but – but – I must have been mistaken. I guess I never was."

Freddie thought it over, and announced his decision seriously.

"*I* would want you, anyway."

Aunt Amanda stretched out a trembling hand to him and ran her fingers through his hair; then she threw both her arms around him and pressed him against her knee. He was much annoyed. He was afraid she might be going to kiss him; but she did not; instead, she pulled out her handkerchief and blew her nose.

"How many children were there that you didn't have?" said Freddie, to change the subject. Aunt Amanda did not understand this at first, but she finally saw what he meant. What *did* he mean? you may say. What he meant was – well, it is perfectly clear, but it is hard to explain. Anyway, Aunt Amanda understood him. "Three," said she. "Bobby was the oldest, and Jenny next, and James was the littlest one."

"Did they all go to school?"

"Oh dear no. Only Bobby. And once he played hookey, and was gone all day, and didn't come home until after dark, all muddy. I was terribly worried. He was a very mischievous boy, but he was his – mother's – own – "

"Did he play marbles for keeps?"

"Yes, but he went to Sunday-school just as regular, and liked it, and – "

"He *liked* it?"

"Yes, of course, and he always took good care of Jenny – . She had little yellow curls. They went to Sunday-school together hand in hand, and he didn't even mind her carrying her dolly with her; she wouldn't go without it. He was so careful of her at street-crossings. She loved her dollies. She used to pretend that James was one of them."

"Did James like that?"

"Not very well, but he put up with it for quite a few minutes at a time. He couldn't be still very long. But he was pretty lonesome when Jenny had the measles."

"I've had the chicken-pox. Did Bobby know how to mind his P's and Q's?"

"He didn't mind anybody very well. Once I had a note from his teacher, and it said – "

But Freddie never learned what sin Bobby had committed in school; for at that moment the shop door opened, and Mr. Toby thrust in his head and said:

"Just got to get around to the barber-shop right away this minute; can't put it off no longer. Won't be gone twenty minutes. Freddie!"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie, standing up.

"Do you think you could look after the shop for twenty minutes, while I'm gone?"

Now Freddie did not know it, but this was in fact the most important question that had ever been put to him in his life. Everything depended on his answer; if he said no, we might as well stop this story right here; if he said yes —

"Yes, sir," said Freddie.

"All right. If anybody comes in, just tell 'em to wait."

Freddie left Aunt Amanda, sitting very still, and gazing out of the window, with her hands folded in her lap, and followed Mr. Toby into the shop.

"All right, sonny," said Mr. Toby, "make yourself comfortable. I'll be back in a jiffy. If anybody comes in, you tell 'em to wait." And with that he went out of the door and up the street. Freddie was left alone in the shop.

Everything was very quiet now, for it was beginning to be twilight, and all the people seemed to be indoors. He knew he ought to be going home, but he had promised to mind the shop, and it would never do to leave before Mr. Toby came back. The street door and the door to Aunt Amanda's room were both closed. He sat down on the chair by the front window and looked out across the bull-dog's head. He thought of Bobby and his little sister in Sunday-school, and that led him to think of the hymn that did him so much good:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin."

He sang that tune to himself for a while, and he found himself singing other tunes, and finally one which began:

"There was an old codger, and he had a wooden leg,
And he never bought tobacco when tobacco he could beg."

Tobacco! There was a world of tobacco on those shelves. Smoking tobacco, and churchwarden pipes. He strolled around behind the counter, and let down the back of the show-case. There were the churchwarden pipes; he selected one and took it out. It tasted cold and clammy when he put it in his mouth, and he wondered what it would taste like with tobacco in it. He brought the little ladder and got up on it, facing the shelves, and to his surprise he found himself looking directly into the slanting eyes of the porcelain Chinaman's head. He stood there gazing thoughtfully into those eyes, and singing to himself the verse which was always such a help to him:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin,
Each vict'ry will help you
Some other to win."

It was growing a little darker now, and he could not examine the Chinaman's head very well without bringing it closer. He took the head in his hands, lifted it from the shelf, got down off the ladder, and sat down on the floor with his back against the counter; and while he was doing this he hummed to himself the next part of his tune:

"Fight manfully onward,
Dark passions subdue."

He put the head on his knees, and took off the Chinaman's little round cap, which proved to be in fact a lid. He put his hand inside and drew out a good fistful of absolutely black tobacco, fine and powdery like coal-dust; he held it to his nose, and it smelt very sweet, in fact much like brown sugar. He wondered if it would taste like brown sugar through the pipe-stem; and humming quietly to himself, "Each vict'ry will help you," he poured the tobacco into the bowl of the pipe. He was disappointed, on sucking in through the pipe-stem, to find that there was no brown-sugar taste at all. Of course, the only way to give tobacco any taste was to light it; he reached up and got a match off the counter behind him, and sitting down again struck the match on the floor. It made a very pretty glow in the twilight, and he watched it as it burned away in his fingers; it would be burnt out in another second, so, humming to himself those ever-helpful words, "Yield not to temptation," he put the pipe in his mouth and touched the lighted match to the tobacco.

It is painful to have to tell these things, but it can't be helped; for the consequences were so strange, and so important to Freddie and his friends, that —

Anyway, he lit the pipe and drew in a long breath through the stem. He nearly choked to death. Smoke got into his nose and his eyes and his throat, and he coughed and coughed; but he remembered the words, "Fight manfully onward," and he determined that he would not give up so soon. He stopped coughing and pulled again at the pipe; this time he did not swallow the smoke, but blew it out of his mouth as he had seen it done a thousand times. He gave another pull, and blew the smoke out again; it did indeed taste like brown sugar; it was extremely pleasant; he puffed again and again. He was astonished that he could have produced so much smoke in a few whiffs; there was quite a cloud over his head. He gave another puff, and when he blew out the smoke the white cloud above him was so thick that he could not see through it. It began to settle down on him. He put the Chinaman's head on the floor, and looked up into this cloud.

It was growing thicker and thicker, and it was beginning to churn about as if in a whirlwind; it turned all sorts of colours, mostly yellow and green, and parts of it looked like barber's poles revolving at a terrific speed. He became dizzy as he gazed at it; his head began to swim; the cloud was coming down closer and closer upon him, and whirling about more and more wildly; he crouched down lower, and became dizzier and dizzier. The counter and the shelves began to go round and round, so that he had to put his hand on the floor to steady himself; in another moment the shop disappeared altogether, and there was nothing under him but a little square of floor, and nothing over him but the wild, churning cloud, now sparkling with jets of fire. He felt himself falling, falling, and as he came to the bottom with a crash, he heard the shop door open and close, and found himself sitting on the floor with his back to the counter as before, with no smoke anywhere to be seen; and he was aware that a hoarse voice was speaking on the other side of the counter, and it was saying these words, very loud and brisk:

"Avast, there! Belay that piping! All snug, sir, hatches battened down, makin' way under skysails and royals, hands piped to quarters, and here's your humble servant ready for orders! Shiver my timbers, where's the skipper? Piped me up with a 'baccy pipe, he did, and where's he gone? Skipper ahoy! Come for orders, I be, and ever yours to command, Lemuel Mizzen! That's me!"

Freddie put the pipe down on the floor, rose to his feet, and looked over the counter.

Leaning on his elbow on the other side of the counter was a Sailorman, with a wide blue collar open at the throat, a flat blue cap with a black ribbon on the back of his head, and a green patch over his right eye.

CHAPTER VI
LEMUEL MIZZEN, A.B

Freddie looked at the Sailorman, and the Sailorman straightened up and touched his cap. His face was brown as weathered oak, and creased like bark; his one eye was black and glittering; the hand which he raised to his cap was of the shape and nearly the size of a ham; and the chest and throat which emerged from his wide-open shirt-collar was as brown as his face, and big with muscles. There was a delicious odour of tar about him; you positively could not look at him without hearing wind whistling through ropes. He hitched up his trousers with his other hand and said:

"Ay, ay, skipper! Here I be as big as life, all ready fer orders!"

As Freddie gazed at him, the Little Boy slowly collected his wits, and a light began to dawn upon him.

"Have you been to China?" said he.

"Right-o!" cried the Sailorman. "To China I have been – " in a queer sing-song, as if he might have been marching in time to it round a capstan, hauling in an anchor: "To China I have been, and a many ports I've seen, near and far; I can sail before the mast or behind it just as fast, I'm a tar, I'm a tar, I'm a tar!"

Freddie continued to stare at him with increasing astonishment.

"Are you a sailor, sir?" said he.

"Wot, me? I'm Lemuel Mizzen, A.B., that's me, and I sail the deep blue sea from Maine to Afrikee, and round again on an even keel to Cochin China for cochineal, and back to Chili for Chili sauce, and home again to Banbury Cross – that's me! Lemuel Mizzen, able seaman! Fed on hard tack or soft tack, or a starboard tack or a port tack, it's all the same to me! Now then, skipper, you piped me up, wot's the orders?"

"Please, sir," said Freddie, "would you mind telling me what it is you would like to have?"

"*Me?* Douse my binnacle light, wot I want is a chew o' terbacker; but the question before the chart-house is, wot do *you* want, skipper?"

"I don't want anything," said Freddie.

"Wot? You piped me up, didn't you? Piped me up with a pipe?"

"No, sir," said Freddie.

"Sorry to entertain a different opinion from the skipper! Didn't you smoke the Chinaman's 'baccy, *in* a pipe?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie, hanging his head.

"Then you did pipe me up with a pipe, and I hope I knows better than to come aft without bein' piped. Didn't you know I've got to come when you smoke the pipe with the Chinaman's 'baccy in it?"

"No, sir," said Freddie.

The Able Seaman fixed his black eye on Freddie in amazement.

"Well, bust my locker if this ain't the – Beggin' your pardon, skipper, and no offense meant! Called me off from the China Sea, and don't want me after all! Didn't go fer to do it, not him! And me off in the China Sea amongst the Boxers, a-v'yaging hither and thither to pick up a cargo o' boxes to box compasses with! Ye've brought me a fair long journey fer nothin', skipper!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Freddie, "I didn't know you had to come when the Chinaman's tobacco was smoked. Are you the one that brought that tobacco here?"

"Ay, ay! That's me! Lemuel Mizzen, A.B.! And a fine long trip from the China Sea, to come to a lad in Amerikee when I hears in my ears the skipper's call, and all fer nothin' at all, at all! Ain't you got nothin' to offer in extenuation?"

Freddie did not know what "extenuation" meant, but he could see by the Sailorman's face that that gentleman was a good deal put out. He remembered that Mr. Mizzen wanted a chew of tobacco.

"Would a little tobacco make you feel better?" said he.

"Now you've got yer hand on the right rope!" said the Able Seaman, his face brightening. "I don't smoke. I chew. If you're goin' to offer a bit of a chew, why then, says I, I don't care if I do."

Freddie took a long plug of chewing tobacco from the shelf behind him. He knew that Mr. Toby would not mind making a little gift to the sailorman after his long journey. He put the plug under the cutter on the counter, and was about to press down the handle, to cut off a portion, when the Able Seaman hitched up his trousers and said:

"Belay there, skipper! Put the whole cargo aboard! This here craft needs ballast; hoist her over the side!" And he reached out his hand for the whole plug of tobacco and took it from Freddie, and gnawed off a corner with his teeth.

"Ah!" said he, his right cheek bulging out. "Too much ballast to starboard." And he gnawed off another corner, so that his left cheek bulged out like his right.

"All snug!" said he. "I'll just pay fer my cargo before I set sail, with a bit of a draft on the owners, in a manner of speakin'. Here y'are, sir. Stow that bit o' paper in yer sea-chest, and it'll come in handy one o' these days. Pay as you go, says I."

He placed in Freddie's hand a folded sheet of soiled paper. It was greasy with handling, and was evidently very old; it was folded small and tight, and was beginning to break with age at the creases. On the outside, it was blank; but there might have been writing inside.

"Got it in the Caribbean off a runaway sailor, fer a set of false whiskers and a tattoo needle. Will it do to pay fer the cargo with?"

"Yes, sir; thank you," said Freddie, holding the paper in his hand without unfolding it.

"Then all I got to say is, before I weighs anchor, – take good keer o' that there bit o' paper. Aloft and alow, don't ye never let go; round the yard take a bight and hold on to it tight; let the harricane blow till yer fingers is blue, but wotever you do, don't ye never let go. And skipper, mind wot I'm a-tellin' you; if you ever needs Lemuel Mizzen, A.B., fer to give him his orders, all you got to do is to smoke a couple o' whiffs of the Chinaman's 'baccy, and Lemuel Mizzen, A.B., he'll be on deck before the smoke's cleared away. That's clear?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddie, with eyes wide open.

"And now as I see there's no orders to give, I'm off to my tight little bark called The Sieve, and when I'm aboard I'll close all the shutters, and lock up the parrot that sneezes and stutters, and wake all the skippers, and put on my slippers, and get into bed while the mates overhead are swabbing the decks and heaving the lead and baling the bilge-water up with their dippers; and when they have gotten the vessel to going, and settled all down to their knitting and sewing, and the twenty-third mate, who is always so late, has learned what is meant by a third and last warning, I'll turn up the gas, take a look at the glass, and read me the Life of Old Chew until morning! – And so, sir," continued Mr. Mizzen, walking towards the street door, "I must give you a view of my little stern-light, and bid you, dear sir, a very good night."

So saying, he turned squarely towards Freddie, with one hand on the door-knob, and with the other hand touched his cap respectfully. Freddie saw that his trousers were very wide at the ankles and very tight at the hips, and that he rolled a little when he walked. Having touched his cap respectfully, he opened the door and went out, and disappeared in the darkness outside.

Freddie stood looking after him with his mouth wide open.

CHAPTER VII
THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK COME TOGETHER

It was some minutes before Freddie recovered from his astonishment. Certainly this was a strange Sailorman. And he had come all the way from the China Sea at a puff of the Chinaman's tobacco! Certainly magic tobacco, that! But it was a pity that Mr. Mizzen had been called away from the China Sea, all for nothing, while he was so busy gathering boxes to box compasses with! No wonder he had felt put out about it. And it must have been a queer sort of ship, with its shutters, and all those skippers and mates – did they really like to knit and sew after they had got the ship to going? It would be a wonderful thing to sail in a ship like that; he wished he had thought to ask Mr. Mizzen more about it. He must tell Aunt Amanda at once.

He ran to the back door and burst into the back room, crying out "Aunt Amanda!"

Aunt Amanda was sound asleep in her chair, with her head back and her mouth open; the gas was burning brightly overhead, and the clock was ticking away distinctly on the mantel-piece.

"Aunt Amanda!" cried Freddie.

She awoke with a jump, blinked her eyes, and said:

"Hah! Where's the – what's the – who said – Where's Toby? What's the matter?"

"It's me, Aunt Amanda," cried Freddie, breathlessly, "and the Sailorman's just been here and gone, and I called him with the pipe, and I can call him whenever I want him, and he gave me a piece of paper, and he talks like a singing-book, and there's a parrot that stutters, and they have to bale out the water with dippers because the ship's named The Sieve, and we mustn't lose the paper because the runaway sailor wore false whiskers, and he feeds on tacks instead of pins, and we have to hold on tight to the paper, and one of the men on the ship is always late, and we mustn't lose the paper, because – "

"Stop! Stop!" said Aunt Amanda. "What on earth is the child talking about? What's all this about a Sailorman and a paper?"

"He's the one that brought the Chinaman's tobacco from China, and he gave me a piece of paper, and here it is, and we mustn't lose it, because – "

"One minute, Freddie! Now you just stand right there, perfectly still, and tell me about it slowly. Now, then; what about this Sailorman? Slow, slow."

It was a long time before Freddie made her understand exactly what had happened, but at last she did understand, from beginning to end. She was grieved and horrified that he had smoked the tobacco, but there was no help for it now, and she was too much excited by his tale to scold him very long.

"What's the paper he give you?" said she, when he had told her everything.

Freddie put the paper in her hand, and she unfolded it carefully.

"Why," said she, "it's a map!"

"What kind of a map?" said Freddie.

"It's a map of an Island," said Aunt Amanda. "Where's Toby? I wish he would come home. It looks like an Island, and there's writing here on it. Looks like some sailorman might have drawn it, maybe; it's certainly pretty old. I wish Toby would come."

"What's the writing on it, Aunt Amanda?" said Freddie.

"Well, here at the top it says, 'Correction Island,' and under that it says, 'Spanish Main.' Bless me; that's where the pirates used to – "

"Pirates?" said Freddie, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes, pirates, of course. You've heard of the Spanish Main, haven't you?"

"Yes'm. It's a long way off. You have to go there in a ship. Have you ever been there?"

"Me? Me been to the Spanish Main? Mercy sakes, no, child! What would I be doing on the Spanish Main? I ain't been outside of this town since I was born."

"Wouldn't I like to go there! Pirates!" said Freddie. "Oh jiminy!"

"You mustn't use such dreadful language," said Aunt Amanda. "I wonder where Toby is? Just look at that clock! Why, bless me, it's twenty-seven minutes to seven."

Freddie looked, and saw that the hands of the clock were together, one on top of the other. It was the hour for Mr. Punch's father to call Mr. Punch from the church-tower.

"Toby's got to talkin' with that barber again, as sure as you live; when they once begin, they never know when to leave off. I wish he'd – "

As she said this, the door opened, and in walked Mr. Toby himself.

"Sorry I'm so late," he cried, "but the barber got to talking about – What, young feller, are you still here?" He turned and called through the open door to someone behind him in the shop. "Come in! Make you acquainted with my aunt and a young chap here – Don't be bashful, come right in! Nobody's goin' to eat you!"

Mr. Toby held the door wide open, and made way for a little gentleman who now advanced into the room. He was a hunchbacked man, of the same height as Toby, and he was holding out in one hand a bunch of black cigars; he was bareheaded and bald-headed; he had high cheek-bones and a big chin and a hooked nose; he wore blue knee breeches and black stockings and buckled shoes, and his coat was cut away in front over his stomach and had two tails behind, down to his knees. His joints creaked a little as he walked. He made a stiff bow to Aunt Amanda, and another one to Freddie.

"Come in, Mr. Punch," said Toby, "you don't need to hold them cigars any longer. Give 'em to me." And he took them from Mr. Punch and laid them on the table. He then went to Mr. Punch and linked his arm in his, and the two hunchbacks stepped forward together and stood before Aunt Amanda.

"Allow me to present my friend Mr. Punch," said Toby. "Just as I was coming in, I heard a voice sing out 'Punch!' from the church-tower, and Mr. Punch stepped down from his perch, and I invited him to come in, and here we are."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.