

ALGER HORATIO JR.

DRIVEN FROM HOME; OR,
CARL CRAWFORD'S
EXPERIENCE

Horatio Alger

**Driven from Home; Or,
Carl Crawford's Experience**

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Jr. Horatio Alger

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CHAPTER I

DRIVEN FROM HOME

A boy of sixteen, with a small gripsack in his hand, trudged along the country road. He was of good height for his age, strongly built, and had a frank, attractive face. He was naturally of a cheerful temperament, but at present his face was grave, and not without a shade of anxiety. This can hardly be a matter of surprise when we consider that he was thrown upon his own resources, and that his available capital consisted of thirty-seven cents in money, in addition to a good education and a rather unusual amount of physical strength. These last two items were certainly valuable, but they cannot always be exchanged for the necessities and comforts of life.

For some time his steps had been lagging, and from time to time he had to wipe the moisture from his brow with a fine linen handkerchief, which latter seemed hardly compatible with his almost destitute condition.

I hasten to introduce my hero, for such he is to be, as Carl Crawford, son of Dr. Paul Crawford, of Edgewood Center. Why he had set out to conquer fortune single-handed will soon appear.

A few rods ahead Carl's attention was drawn to a wide-spreading oak tree, with a carpet of verdure under its sturdy boughs.

"I will rest here for a little while," he said to himself, and suiting the action to the word, threw down his gripsack and flung himself on the turf.

"This is refreshing," he murmured, as, lying upon his back, he looked up through the leafy rifts to the sky above. "I don't know when I have ever been so tired. It's no joke walking a dozen miles under a hot sun, with a heavy gripsack in your hand. It's a good introduction to a life of labor, which I have reason to believe is before me. I wonder how I am coming out—at the big or the little end of the horn?"

He paused, and his face grew grave, for he understood well that for him life had become a serious matter. In his absorption he did not observe the rapid approach of a boy somewhat younger than himself, mounted on a bicycle.

The boy stopped short in surprise, and leaped from his iron steed.

"Why, Carl Crawford, is this you? Where in the world are you going with that gripsack?"

Carl looked up quickly.

"Going to seek my fortune," he answered, soberly.

"Well, I hope you'll find it. Don't chaff, though, but tell the honest truth."

"I have told you the truth, Gilbert."

With a puzzled look, Gilbert, first leaning his bicycle against the tree, seated himself on the ground by Carl's side.

"Has your father lost his property?" he asked, abruptly.

"No."

"Has he disinherited you?"

"Not exactly."

"Have you left home for good?"

"I have left home—I hope for good."

"Have you quarreled with the governor?"

"I hardly know what to say to that. There is a difference between us."

"He doesn't seem like a Roman father—one who rules his family with a rod of iron."

"No; he is quite the reverse. He hasn't backbone enough."

"So it seemed to me when I saw him at the exhibition of the academy. You ought to be able to get along with a father like that, Carl."

"So I could but for one thing."

"What is that?"

"I have a stepmother!" said Carl, with a significant glance at his companion.

"So have I, but she is the soul of kindness, and makes our home the dearest place in the world."

"Are there such stepmothers? I shouldn't have judged so from my own experience."

"I think I love her as much as if she were my own mother."

"You are lucky," said Carl, sighing.

"Tell me about yours."

"She was married to my father five years ago. Up to the time of her marriage I thought her amiable and sweet-tempered. But soon after the wedding she threw off the mask, and made it clear that she disliked me. One reason is that she has a son of her own about my age, a mean, sneaking fellow, who is the apple of her eye. She has been jealous of me, and tried to supplant me in the affection of my father, wishing Peter to be the favored son."

"How has she succeeded?"

"I don't think my father feels any love for Peter, but through my stepmother's influence he generally fares better than I do."

"Why wasn't he sent to school with you?"

"Because he is lazy and doesn't like study. Besides, his mother prefers to have him at home. During my absence she worked upon my father, by telling all sorts of malicious stories about me, till he became estranged from me, and little by little Peter has usurped my place as the favorite."

"Why didn't you deny the stories?" asked Gilbert.

"I did, but no credit was given to my denials. My stepmother was continually poisoning my father's mind against me."

"Did you give her cause? Did you behave disrespectfully to her?"

"No," answered Carl, warmly. "I was prepared to give her a warm welcome, and treat her as a friend, but my advances were so coldly received that my heart was chilled."

"Poor Carl! How long has this been so?"

"From the beginning—ever since Mrs. Crawford came into the house."

"What are your relations with your step-brother—what's his name?"

"Peter Cook. I despise the boy, for he is mean, and tyrannical where he dares to be."

"I don't think it would be safe for him to bully you, Carl."

"He tried it, and got a good thrashing. You can imagine what followed. He ran, crying to his mother, and his version of the story was believed. I was confined to my room for a week, and forced to live on bread and water."

"I shouldn't think your father was a man to inflict such a punishment."

"It wasn't he—it was my stepmother. She insisted upon it, and he yielded. I heard afterwards from one of the servants that he wanted me released at the end of twenty-four hours, but she would not consent."

"How long ago was this?"

"It happened when I was twelve."

"Was it ever repeated?"

"Yes, a month later; but the punishment lasted only for two days."

"And you submitted to it?"

“I had to, but as soon as I was released I gave Peter such a flogging, with the promise to repeat it, if I was ever punished in that manner again, that the boy himself was panic-stricken, and objected to my being imprisoned again.”

“He must be a charming fellow!”

“You would think so if you should see him. He has small, insignificant features, a turn-up nose, and an ugly scowl that appears whenever he is out of humor.”

“And yet your father likes him?”

“I don’t think he does, though Peter, by his mother’s orders, pays all sorts of small attentions—bringing him his slippers, running on errands, and so on, not because he likes it, but because he wants to supplant me, as he has succeeded in doing.”

“You have finally broken away, then?”

“Yes; I couldn’t stand it any longer. Home had become intolerable.”

“Pardon the question, but hasn’t your father got considerable property?”

“I have every reason to think so.”

“Won’t your leaving home give your step-mother and Peter the inside track, and lead, perhaps, to your disinheritance?”

“I suppose so,” answered Carl, wearily; “but no matter what happens, I can’t bear to stay at home any longer.”

“You’re badly fixed—that’s a fact!” said Gilbert, in a tone of sympathy. “What are your plans?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t had time to think.”

CHAPTER II

A FRIEND WORTH HAVING

Gilbert wrinkled up his forehead and set about trying to form some plans for Carl.

"It will be hard for you to support yourself," he said, after a pause; "that is, without help."

"There is no one to help me. I expect no help."

"I thought your father might be induced to give you an allowance, so that with what you can earn, you may get along comfortably."

"I think father would be willing to do this, but my stepmother would prevent him."

"Then she has a great deal of influence over him?"

"Yes, she can twist him round her little finger."

"I can't understand it."

"You see, father is an invalid, and is very nervous. If he were in perfect health he would have more force of character and firmness. He is under the impression that he has heart disease, and it makes him timid and vacillating."

"Still he ought to do something for you."

"I suppose he ought. Still, Gilbert, I think I can earn my living."

"What can you do?"

"Well, I have a fair education. I could be an entry clerk, or a salesman in some store, or, if the worst came to the worst, I could work on a farm. I believe farmers give boys who work for them their board and clothes."

"I don't think the clothes would suit you."

"I am pretty well supplied with clothing."

Gilbert looked significantly at the gripsack.

"Do you carry it all in there?" he asked, doubtfully.

Carl laughed.

"Well, no," he answered. "I have a trunkful of clothes at home, though."

"Why didn't you bring them with you?"

"I would if I were an elephant. Being only a boy, I would find it burdensome carrying a trunk with me. The gripsack is all I can very well manage."

"I tell you what," said Gilbert. "Come round to our house and stay overnight. We live only a mile from here, you know. The folks will be glad to see you, and while you are there I will go to your house, see the governor, and arrange for an allowance for you that will make you comparatively independent."

"Thank you, Gilbert; but I don't feel like asking favors from those who have ill-treated me."

"Nor would I—of strangers; but Dr. Crawford is your father. It isn't right that Peter, your stepbrother, should be supported in ease and luxury, while you, the real son, should be subjected to privation and want."

"I don't know but you are right," admitted Carl, slowly.

"Of course I am right. Now, will you make me your minister plenipotentiary, armed with full powers?"

"Yes, I believe I will."

"That's right. That shows you are a boy of sense. Now, as you are subject to my directions, just get on that bicycle and I will carry your gripsack, and we will seek Vance Villa, as we call it when we want to be high-toned, by the most direct route."

"No, no, Gilbert; I will carry my own gripsack. I won't burden you with it," said Carl, rising from his recumbent position.

“Look here, Carl, how far have you walked with it this morning?”

“About twelve miles.”

“Then, of course, you’re tired, and require rest. Just jump on that bicycle, and I’ll take the gripsack. If you have carried it twelve miles, I can surely carry it one.”

“You are very kind, Gilbert.”

“Why shouldn’t I be?”

“But it is imposing up on your good nature.”

But Gilbert had turned his head in a backward direction, and nodded in a satisfied way as he saw a light, open buggy rapidly approaching.

“There’s my sister in that carriage,” he said. “She comes in good time. I will put you and your gripsack in with her, and I’ll take to my bicycle again.”

“Your sister may not like such an arrangement.”

“Won’t she though! She’s very fond of beaux, and she will receive you very graciously.”

“You make me feel bashful, Gilbert.”

“You won’t be long. Julia will chat away to you as if she’d known you for fifty years.”

“I was very young fifty years ago,” said Carl, smiling.

“Hi, there, Jule!” called Gilbert, waving his hand.

Julia Vance stopped the horse, and looked inquiringly and rather admiringly at Carl, who was a boy of fine appearance.

“Let me introduce you to my friend and schoolmate, Carl Crawford.”

Carl took off his hat politely.

“I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Crawford,” said Julia, demurely; “I have often heard Gilbert speak of you.”

“I hope he said nothing bad about me, Miss Vance.”

“You may be sure he didn’t. If he should now—I wouldn’t believe him.”

“You’ve made a favorable impression, Carl,” said Gilbert, smiling.

“I am naturally prejudiced against boys—having such a brother,” said Julia; “but it is not fair to judge all boys by him.”

“That is outrageous injustice!” said Gilbert; “but then, sisters seldom appreciate their brothers.”

“Some other fellows’ sisters may,” said Carl.

“They do, they do!”

“Did you ever see such a vain, conceited boy, Mr. Crawford?”

“Of course you know him better than I do.”

“Come, Carl; it’s too bad for you, too, to join against me. However, I will forget and forgive. Jule, my friend, Carl, has accepted my invitation to make us a visit.”

“I am very glad, I am sure,” said Julia, sincerely.

“And I want you to take him in, bag and baggage, and convey him to our palace, while I speed thither on my wheel.”

“To be sure I will, and with great pleasure.”

“Can’t you get out and assist him into the carriage, Jule?”

“Thank you,” said Carl; “but though I am somewhat old and quite infirm, I think I can get in without troubling your sister. Are you sure, Miss Vance, you won’t be incommoded by my gripsack?”

“Not at all.”

“Then I will accept your kind offer.”

In a trice Carl was seated next to Julia, with his valise at his feet.

“Won’t you drive, Mr. Crawford?” said the young lady.

“Don’t let me take the reins from you.”

“I don’t think it looks well for a lady to drive when a gentleman is sitting beside her.”

Carl was glad to take the reins, for he liked driving.

“Now for a race!” said Gilbert, who was mounted on his bicycle.

“All right!” replied Carl. “Look out for us!”

They started, and the two kept neck and neck till they entered the driveway leading up to a handsome country mansion.

Carl followed them into the house, and was cordially received by Mr. and Mrs. Vance, who were very kind and hospitable, and were favorably impressed by the gentlemanly appearance of their son's friend.

Half an hour later dinner was announced, and Carl, having removed the stains of travel in his schoolmate's room, descended to the dining-room, and, it must be confessed, did ample justice to the bounteous repast spread before him.

In the afternoon Julia, Gilbert and he played tennis, and had a trial at archery. The hours glided away very rapidly, and six o'clock came before they were aware.

“Gilbert,” said Carl, as they were preparing for tea, “you have a charming home.”

“You have a nice house, too, Carl.”

“True; but it isn't a home—to me. There is no love there.”

“That makes a great difference.”

“If I had a father and mother like yours I should be happy.”

“You must stay here till day after tomorrow, and I will devote to-morrow to a visit in your interest to your home. I will beard the lion in his den—that is, your stepmother. Do you consent?”

“Yes, I consent; but it won't do any good.”

“We will see.”

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCES PETER COOK

Gilbert took the morning train to the town of Edgewood Center, the residence of the Crawfords. He had been there before, and knew that Carl's home was nearly a mile distant from the station. Though there was a hack in waiting, he preferred to walk, as it would give him a chance to think over what he proposed to say to Dr. Crawford in Carl's behalf.

He was within a quarter of a mile of his destination when his attention was drawn to a boy of about his own age, who was amusing himself and a smaller companion by firing stones at a cat that had taken refuge in a tree. Just as Gilbert came up, a stone took effect, and the poor cat moaned in affright, but did not dare to come down from her perch, as this would put her in the power of her assailant.

"That must be Carl's stepbrother, Peter," Gilbert decided, as he noted the boy's mean face and turn-up nose. "Stoning cats seems to be his idea of amusement. I shall take the liberty of interfering."

Peter Cook laughed heartily at his successful aim.

"I hit her, Simon," he said. "Doesn't she look seared?"

"You must have hurt her."

"I expect I did. I'll take a bigger stone next time."

He suited the action to the word, and picked up a rock which, should it hit the poor cat, would in all probability kill her, and prepared to fire.

"Put down that rock!" said Gilbert, indignantly.

Peter turned quickly, and eyed Gilbert insolently.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"No matter who I am. Put down that rock!"

"What business is it of yours?"

"I shall make it my business to protect that cat from your cruelty."

Peter, who was a natural coward, took courage from having a companion to back him up, and retorted: "You'd better clear out of here, or I may fire at you."

"Do it if you dare!" said Gilbert, quietly.

Peter concluded that it would be wiser not to carry out his threat, but was resolved to keep to his original purpose. He raised his arm again, and took aim; but Gilbert rushed in, and striking his arm forcibly, compelled him to drop it.

"What do you mean by that, you loafer?" demanded Peter, his eyes blazing with anger.

"To stop your fun, if that's what you call it."

"I've a good mind to give you a thrashing."

Gilbert put himself in a position of defense.

"Sail in, if you want to!" he responded.

"Help me, Simon!" said Peter. "You grab his legs, and I'll upset him."

Simon, who, though younger, was braver than Peter, without hesitation followed directions. He threw himself on the ground and grasped Gilbert by the legs, while Peter, doubling up his fists, made a rush at his enemy. But Gilbert, swiftly eluding Simon, struck out with his right arm, and Peter, unprepared for so forcible a defense, tumbled over on his back, and Simon ran to his assistance.

Gilbert put himself on guard, expecting a second attack; but Peter apparently thought it wiser to fight with his tongue.

"You rascal!" he shrieked, almost foaming at the mouth; "I'll have you arrested."

"What for?" asked Gilbert, coolly.

"For flying at me like a—a tiger, and trying to kill me."

Gilbert laughed at this curious version of things.

"I thought it was you who flew at me," he said.

"What business had you to interfere with me?"

"I'll do it again unless you give up firing stones at the cat."

"I'll do it as long as I like."

"She's gone!" said Simon.

The boys looked up into the tree, and could see nothing of puss. She had taken the opportunity, when her assailant was otherwise occupied, to make good her escape.

"I'm glad of it!" said Gilbert. "Good-morning, boys! When we meet again, I hope you will be more creditably employed."

"You don't get off so easy, you loafer," said Peter, who saw the village constable approaching. "Here, Mr. Rogers, I want you to arrest this boy."

Constable Rogers, who was a stout, broad-shouldered man, nearly six feet in height, turned from one to the other, and asked: "What has he done?"

"He knocked me over. I want him arrested for assault and battery."

"And what did you do?"

"I? I didn't do anything."

"That is rather strange. Young man, what is your name?"

"Gilbert Vance."

"You don't live in this town?"

"No; I live in Warren."

"What made you attack Peter?"

"Because he flew at me, and I had to defend myself."

"Is this so, Simon? You saw all that happened."

"Ye—es," admitted Simon, unwillingly.

"That puts a different face on the matter. I don't see how I can arrest this boy. He had a right to defend himself."

"He came up and abused me—the loafer," said Peter.

"That was the reason you went at him?"

"Yes."

"Have you anything to say?" asked the constable, addressing Gilbert.

"Yes, sir; when I came up I saw this boy firing stones at a cat, who had taken refuge in that tree over there. He had just hit her, and had picked up a larger stone to fire when I ordered him to drop it."

"It was no business of yours," muttered Peter.

"I made it my business, and will again."

"Did the cat have a white spot on her forehead?" asked the constable.

"Yes, sir."

"And was mouse colored?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, it's my little girl's cat. She would be heartbroken if the cat were seriously hurt. You young rascal!" he continued, turning suddenly upon Peter, and shaking him vigorously. "Let me catch you at this business again, and I'll give you such a warming that you'll never want to touch another cat."

"Let me go!" cried the terrified boy. "I didn't know it was your cat."

"It would have been just as bad if it had been somebody else's cat. I've a great mind to put you in the lockup."

"Oh, don't, please don't, Mr. Rogers!" implored Peter, quite panic-stricken.

"Will you promise never to stone another cat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go about your business."

Peter lost no time, but scuttled up the street with his companion.

"I am much obliged to you for protecting Flora's cat," then said the constable to Gilbert.

"You are quite welcome, sir. I won't see any animal abused if I can help it."

"You are right there."

"Wasn't that boy Peter Cook?"

"Yes. Don't you know him?"

"No; but I know his stepbrother, Carl."

"A different sort of boy! Have you come to visit him?"

"No; he is visiting me. In fact, he has left home, because he could not stand his step-mother's ill-treatment, and I have come to see his father in his behalf."

"He has had an uncomfortable home. Dr. Crawford is an invalid, and very much under the influence of his wife, who seems to have a spite against Carl, and is devoted to that young cub to whom you have given a lesson. Does Carl want to come back?"

"No; he wants to strike out for himself, but I told him it was no more than right that he should receive some help from his father."

"That is true enough. For nearly all the doctor's money came to him through Carl's mother."

"I am afraid Peter and his mother won't give me a very cordial welcome after what has happened this morning. I wish I could see the doctor alone."

"So you can, for there he is coming up the street."

Gilbert looked in the direction indicated, and his glance fell on a thin, fragile-looking man, evidently an invalid, with a weak, undecided face, who was slowly approaching.

The boy advanced to meet him, and, taking off his hat, asked politely: "Is this Dr. Crawford?"

CHAPTER IV

AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE

Dr. Crawford stopped short, and eyed Gilbert attentively.

"I don't know you," he said, in a querulous tone.

"I am a schoolmate of your son, Carl. My name is Gilbert Vance."

"If you have come to see my son you will be disappointed. He has treated me in a shameful manner. He left home yesterday morning, and I don't know where he is."

"I can tell you, sir. He is staying—for a day or two—at my father's house."

"Where is that?" asked Dr. Crawford, his manner showing that he was confused.

"In Warren, thirteen miles from here."

"I know the town. What induced him to go to your house? Have you encouraged him to leave home?" inquired Dr. Crawford, with a look of displeasure.

"No, sir. It was only by chance that I met him a mile from our home. I induced him to stay overnight."

"Did you bring me any message from him?" "No, sir, except that he is going to strike out for himself, as he thinks his home an unhappy one."

"That is his own fault. He has had enough to eat and enough to wear. He has had as comfortable a home as yourself."

"I don't doubt that, but he complains that his stepmother is continually finding fault with him, and scolding him."

"He provokes her to do it. He is a headstrong, obstinate boy."

"He never had that reputation at school, sir. We all liked him."

"I suppose you mean to imply that I am in fault?" said the doctor, warmly.

"I don't think you know how badly Mrs. Crawford treats Carl, sir."

"Of course, of course. That is always said of a stepmother."

"Not always, sir. I have a stepmother myself, and no own mother could treat me better."

"You are probably a better boy."

"I can't accept the compliment. I hope you'll excuse me saying it, Dr. Crawford, but if my stepmother treated me as Carl says Mrs. Crawford treats him I wouldn't stay in the house another day."

"Really, this is very annoying," said Dr. Crawford, irritably. "Have you come here from Warren to say this?"

"No, sir, not entirely."

"Perhaps Carl wants me to receive him back. I will do so if he promises to obey his stepmother."

"That he won't do, I am sure."

"Then what is the object of your visit?"

"To say that Carl wants and intends to earn his own living. But it is hard for a boy of his age, who has never worked, to earn enough at first to pay for his board and clothes. He asks, or, rather, I ask for him, that you will allow him a small sum, say three or four dollars a week, which is considerably less than he must cost you at home, for a time until he gets on his feet."

"I don't know," said Dr. Crawford, in a vacillating tone. "I don't think Mrs. Crawford would approve this."

"It seems to me you are the one to decide, as Carl is your own son. Peter must cost you a good deal more."

"Do you know Peter?"

"I have met him," answered Gilbert, with a slight smile.

"I don't know what to say. You may be right. Peter does cost me more."

“And Carl is entitled to be treated as well as he.”

“I think I ought to speak to Mrs. Crawford about it. And, by the way, I nearly forgot to say that she charges Carl with taking money from her bureau drawer before he went away. It was a large sum, too—twenty-five dollars.”

“That is false!” exclaimed Gilbert, indignantly. “I am surprised that you should believe such a thing of your own son.”

“Mrs. Crawford says she has proof,” said the doctor, hesitating.

“Then what has he done with the money? I know that he has but thirty-seven cents with him at this time, and he only left home yesterday. If the money has really been taken, I think I know who took it.”

“Who?”

“Peter Cook. He looks mean enough for anything.”

“What right have you to speak so of Peter?”

“Because I caught him stoning a cat this morning. He would have killed the poor thing if I had not interfered. I consider that worse than taking money.”

“I—I don’t know what to say. I can’t agree to anything till I have spoken with Mrs. Crawford. Did you say that Carl had but thirty seven cents?”

“Yes, sir; I presume you don’t want him to starve?”

“No, of course not. He is my son, though he has behaved badly. Here, give him that!” and Dr. Crawford drew a ten-dollar bill from his wallet, and handed it to Gilbert.

“Thank you, sir. This money will be very useful. Besides, it will show Carl that his father is not wholly indifferent to him.”

“Of course not. Who says that I am a bad father?” asked Dr. Crawford, peevishly.

“I don’t think, sir, there would be any difficulty between you and Carl if you had not married again.”

“Carl has no right to vex Mrs. Crawford. Besides, he can’t agree with Peter.”

“Is that his fault or Peter’s?” asked Gilbert, significantly.

“I am not acquainted with the circumstances, but Mrs. Crawford says that Carl is always bullying Peter.”

“He never bullied anyone at school.”

“Is there anything, else you want?”

“Yes, sir; Carl only took away a little underclothing in a gripsack. He would like his woollen clothes put in his trunk, and to have it sent—”

“Where?”

“Perhaps it had better be sent to my house. There are one or two things in his room also that he asked me to get.”

“Why didn’t he come himself?”

“Because he thought it would be unpleasant for him to meet Mrs. Crawford. They would be sure to quarrel.”

“Well, perhaps he is right,” said Dr. Crawford, with an air of relief. “About the allowance, I shall have to consult my wife. Will you come with me to the house?”

“Yes, sir; I should like to have the matter settled to-day, so that Carl will know what to depend upon.”

Gilbert rather dreaded the interview he was likely to have with Mrs. Crawford; but he was acting for Carl, and his feelings of friendship were strong.

So he walked beside Dr. Crawford till they reached the tasteful dwelling occupied as a residence by Carl and his father.

“How happy Carl could be here, if he had a stepmother like mine,” Gilbert thought.

They went up to the front door, which was opened for them by a servant.

“Jane, is Mrs. Crawford in?” asked the doctor.

“No, sir; not just now. She went to the village to do some shopping.”

“Is Peter in?”

“No, sir.”

“Then you will have to wait till they return.”

“Can’t I go up to Carl’s room and be packing his things?”

“Yes, I think you may. I don’t think Mrs. Crawford would object.”

“Good heavens! Hasn’t the man a mind of his own?” thought Gilbert.

“Jane, you may show this young gentleman up to Master Carl’s room, and give him the key of his trunk. He is going to pack his clothes.”

“When is Master Carl coming back?” asked Jane.

“I—I don’t know. I think he will be away for a time.”

“I wish it was Peter instead of him,” said Jane, in a low voice, only audible to Gilbert.

She showed Gilbert the way upstairs, while the doctor went to his study.

“Are you a friend of Master Carl’s?” asked Jane, as soon as they were alone.

“Yes, Jane.”

“And where is he?”

“At my house.”

“Is he goin’ to stay there?”

“For a short time. He wants to go out into the world and make his own living.”

“And no wonder—poor boy! It’s hard times he had here.”

“Didn’t Mrs. Crawford treat him well?” asked Gilbert, with curiosity

“Is it trate him well? She was a-jawin’ an’ a-jawin’ him from mornin’ till night. Ugh, but she’s an ugly cr’atur’!”

“How about Peter?”

“He’s just as bad—the m’anest bye I iver set eyes on. It would do me good to see him flogged.”

She chatted a little longer with Gilbert, helping him to find Carl’s clothes, when suddenly a shrill voice was heard calling her from below.

“Shure, it’s the madam!” said Jane, shrugging her shoulders. “I expect she’s in a temper;” and she rose from her knees and hurried downstairs.

CHAPTER V

CARL'S STEPMOTHER

Five minutes later, as Gilbert was closing the trunk, Jane reappeared.

"The doctor and Mrs. Crawford would like to see you downstairs," she said.

Gilbert followed Jane into the library, where Dr. Crawford and his wife were seated. He looked with interest at the woman who had made home so disagreeable to Carl, and was instantly prejudiced against her. She was light complexioned, with very light-brown hair, cold, gray eyes, and a disagreeable expression which seemed natural to her.

"My dear," said the doctor, "this is the young man who has come from Carl."

Mrs. Crawford surveyed Gilbert with an expression by no means friendly.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Gilbert Vance."

"Did Carl Crawford send you here?"

"No; I volunteered to come."

"Did he tell you that he was disobedient and disrespectful to me?"

"No; he told me that you treated him so badly that he was unwilling to live in the same house with you," answered Gilbert, boldly.

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Mrs. Crawford, fanning herself vigorously. "Dr. Crawford, did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Well, I think you may have been too hard upon Carl."

"Too hard? Why, then, did he not treat me respectfully? This boy seems inclined to be impertinent."

"I answered your questions, madam," said Gilbert, coldly.

"I suppose you side with your friend Carl?"

"I certainly do."

Mrs. Crawford bit her lip.

"What is the object of your coming? Does Carl wish to return?"

"I thought Dr. Crawford might have told you."

"Carl wants his clothes sent to him," said the doctor. "He only carried a few with him."

"I shall not consent to it. He deserves no favors at our hands."

This was too much even for Dr. Crawford.

"You go too far, Mrs. Crawford," he said. "I am sensible of the boy's faults, but I certainly will not allow his clothes to be withheld from him."

"Oh, well! spoil him if you choose!" said the lady, sullenly. "Take his part against your wife!"

"I have never done that, but I will not allow him to be defrauded of his clothes."

"I have no more to say," said Mrs. Crawford, her eyes snapping. She was clearly mortified at her failure to carry her point.

"Do you wish the trunk to be sent to your house?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir; I have packed the clothes and locked the trunk."

"I should like to examine it before it goes," put in Mrs. Crawford, spitefully.

"Why?"

"To make sure that nothing has been put in that does not belong to Carl."

"Do you mean to accuse me of stealing, madam?" demanded Gilbert, indignantly.

Mrs. Crawford tossed her head.

"I don't know anything about you," she replied.

"Dr. Crawford, am I to open the trunk?" asked Gilbert.

"No," answered the doctor, with unwonted decision.

"I hate that boy! He has twice subjected me to mortification," thought Mrs. Crawford.

"You know very well," she said, turning to her husband, "that I have grounds for my request. I blush to mention it, but I have reason to believe that your son took a wallet containing twenty-five dollars from my bureau drawer."

"I deny it!" said Gilbert.

"What do you know about it, I should like to ask?" sneered Mrs. Crawford.

"I know that Carl is an honorable boy, incapable of theft, and at this moment has but thirty-seven cents in his possession."

"So far as you know."

"If the money has really disappeared, madam, you had better ask your own boy about it."

"This is insufferable!" exclaimed Mrs. Crawford, her light eyes emitting angry flashes. "Who dares to say that Peter took the wallet?" she went on, rising to her feet.

There was an unexpected reply. Jane entered the room at this moment to ask a question.

"I say so, ma'am," she rejoined.

"What?" ejaculated Mrs. Crawford, with startling emphasis.

"I didn't mean to say anything about it till I found you were charging it on Master Carl. I saw Peter open your bureau drawer, take out the wallet, and put it in his pocket."

"It's a lie!" said Mrs. Crawford, hoarsely.

"It's the truth, though I suppose you don't want to believe it. If you want to know what he did with the money ask him how much he paid for the gold ring he bought of the jeweler down at the village."

"You are a spy—a base, dishonorable spy!" cried Mrs. Crawford.

"I won't say what you are, ma'am, to bring false charges against Master Carl, and I wonder the doctor will believe them."

"Leave the house directly, you hussy!" shrieked Mrs. Crawford.

"If I do, I wonder who'll get the dinner?" remarked Jane, not at all disturbed.

"I won't stay here to be insulted," said the angry lady. "Dr. Crawford, you might have spirit enough to defend your wife."

She flounced out of the room, not waiting for a reply, leaving the doctor dazed and flurried.

"I hope, sir, you are convinced now that Carl did not take Mrs. Crawford's money," said Gilbert. "I told you it was probably Peter."

"Are you sure of what you said, Jane?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir. I saw Peter take the wallet with my own eyes."

"It is his mother's money, and they must settle it between them I am glad Carl did not take it. Really, this has been a very unpleasant scene."

"I am sorry for my part in it. Carl is my friend, and I feel that I ought to stand up for his rights," remarked Gilbert.

"Certainly, certainly, that is right. But you see how I am placed."

"I see that this is no place for Carl. If you will allow me, I will send an expressman for the trunk, and take it with me to the station."

"Yes, I see no objection. I—I would invite you to dinner, but Mrs. Crawford seems to be suffering from a nervous attack, and it might not be pleasant."

"I agree with you, sir."

Just then Peter entered the room, and looked at Gilbert with surprise and wrath, remembering his recent discomfiture at the hands of the young visitor.

"My stepson, Peter," announced Dr. Crawford.

“Peter and I have met before,” said Gilbert, smiling.

“What are you here for?” asked Peter, rudely.

“Not to see you,” answered Gilbert, turning from him.

“My mother’ll have something to say to you,” went on Peter, significantly.

“She will have something to say to you,” retorted Gilbert. “She has found out who stole her money.”

Peter’s face turned scarlet instantly, and he left the room hurriedly.

“Perhaps I ought not to have said that, Dr Crawford,” added Gilbert, apologetically, “but I dislike that boy very much, and couldn’t help giving him as good as he sent.”

“It is all very unpleasant,” responded Dr. Crawford, peevishly. “I don’t see why I can’t live in peace and tranquility.”

“I won’t intrude upon you any longer,” said Gilbert, “if you will kindly tell me whether you will consent to make Carl a small weekly allowance.”

“I can’t say now. I want time to think. Give me your address, and I will write to Carl in your care.”

“Very well, sir.”

Gilbert left the house and made arrangements to have Carl’s trunk called for. It accompanied him on the next train to Warren.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. CRAWFORD'S LETTER

"How did you like my stepmother?" asked Carl, when Gilbert returned in the afternoon.

"She's a daisy!" answered Gilbert, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't think I ever saw a more disagreeable woman."

"Do you blame me for leaving home?"

"I only wonder you have been able to stay so long. I had a long conversation with your father."

"Mrs. Crawford has made a different man of him. I should have no trouble in getting along with him if there was no one to come between us."

"He gave me this for you," said Gilbert, producing the ten-dollar bill.

"Did my stepmother know of his sending it?"

"No; she was opposed to sending your trunk, but your father said emphatically you should have it."

"I am glad he showed that much spirit."

"I have some hopes that he will make you an allowance of a few dollars a week."

"That would make me all right, but I don't expect it."

"You will probably hear from your father to-morrow or next day, so you will have to make yourself contented a little longer."

"I hope you are not very homesick, Mr. Crawford?" said Julia, coquettishly.

"I would ask nothing better than to stay here permanently," rejoined Carl, earnestly. "This is a real home. I have met with more kindness here than in six months at my own home."

"You have one staunch friend at home," said Gilbert.

"You don't allude to Peter?"

"So far as I can judge, he hates you like poison. I mean Jane."

"Yes, Jane is a real friend. She has been in the family for ten years. She was a favorite with my own mother, and feels an interest in me."

"By the way, your stepmother's charge that you took a wallet containing money from her drawer has been disproved by Jane. She saw Peter abstracting the money, and so informed Mrs. Crawford."

"I am not at all surprised. Peter is mean enough to steal or do anything else. What did my stepmother say?"

"She was very angry, and threatened to discharge Jane; but, as no one would be left to attend to the dinner, I presume she is likely to stay."

"I ought to be forming some plan," said Carl, thoughtfully.

"Wait till you hear from home. Julia will see that your time is well filled up till then. Dismiss all care, and enjoy yourself while you may."

This seemed to be sensible advice, and Carl followed it. In the evening some young people were invited in, and there was a round of amusements that made Carl forget that he was an exile from home, with very dubious prospects.

"You are all spoiling me," he said, as Gilbert and he went upstairs to bed. "I am beginning to understand the charms of home. To go out into the world from here will be like taking a cold shower bath."

"Never forget, Carl, that you will be welcome back, whenever you feel like coming," said Gilbert, laying his hand affectionately on Carl's shoulder. "We all like you here."

"Thank you, old fellow! I appreciate the kindness I have received here; but I must strike out for myself."

"How do you feel about it, Carl?"

"I hope for the best. I am young, strong and willing to work. There must be an opening for me somewhere."

The next morning, just after breakfast, a letter arrived for Carl, mailed at Edgewood Center.

"Is it from your father?" asked Gilbert.

"No; it is in the handwriting of my stepmother. I can guess from that that it contains no good news."

He opened the letter, and as he read it his face expressed disgust and annoyance.

"Read it, Gilbert," he said, handing him the open sheet.

This was the missive:

"CARL CRAWFORD:—AS your father has a nervous attack, brought on by your misconduct, he has authorized me to write to you. As you are but sixteen, he could send for you and have you forcibly brought back, but deems it better for you to follow your own course and suffer the punishment of your obstinate and perverse conduct. The boy whom you sent here proved a fitting messenger. He seems, if possible, to be even worse than yourself. He was very impertinent to me, and made a brutal and unprovoked attack on my poor boy, Peter, whose devotion to your father and myself forms an agreeable contrast to your studied disregard of our wishes.

"Your friend had the assurance to ask for a weekly allowance for you while a voluntary exile from the home where you have been only too well treated. In other words, you want to be paid for your disobedience. Even if your father were weak enough to think of complying with this extraordinary request, I should do my best to dissuade him."

"Small doubt of that!" said Carl, bitterly.

"In my sorrow for your waywardness, I am comforted by the thought that Peter is too good and conscientious ever to follow your example. While you are away, he will do his utmost to make up to your father for his disappointment in you. That you may grow wise in time, and turn at length from the error of your ways, is the earnest hope of your stepmother,

"Anastasia Crawford."

"It makes me sick to read such a letter as that, Gilbert," said Carl. "And to have that sneak and thief—as he turned out to be—Peter, set up as a model for me, is a little too much."

"I never knew there were such women in the world!" returned Gilbert. "I can understand your feelings perfectly, after my interview of yesterday."

"She thinks even worse of you than of me," said Carl, with a faint smile.

"I have no doubt Peter shares her sentiments. I didn't make many friends in your family, it must be confessed."

"You did me a service, Gilbert, and I shall not soon forget it."

"Where did your stepmother come from?" asked Gilbert, thoughtfully.

"I don't know. My father met her at some summer resort. She was staying in the same boarding house, she and the angelic Peter. She lost no time in setting her cap for my father, who was doubtless reported to her as a man of property, and she succeeded in capturing him."

"I wonder at that. She doesn't seem very fascinating."

"She made herself very agreeable to my father, and was even affectionate in her manner to me, though I couldn't get to like her. The end was that she became Mrs. Crawford. Once installed in our house, she soon threw off the mask and showed herself in her true colors, a cold-hearted, selfish and disagreeable woman."

"I wonder your father doesn't recognize her for what she is."

"She is very artful, and is politic enough to treat him well. She has lost no opportunity of prejudicing him against me. If he were not an invalid she would find her task more difficult."

"Did she have any property when your father married her?"

"Not that I have been able to discover. She is scheming to have my father leave the lion's share of his property to her and Peter. I dare say she will succeed."

“Let us hope your father will live till you are a young man, at least, and better able to cope with her.”

“I earnestly hope so.”

“Your father is not an old man.”

“He is fifty-one, but he is not strong. I believe he has liver complaint. At any rate, I know that when, at my stepmother’s instigation, he applied to an insurance company to insure his life for her benefit, the application was rejected.”

“You don’t know anything of Mrs. Crawford’s antecedents?”

“No.”

“What was her name before she married your father?”

“She was a Mrs. Cook. That, as you know, is Peter’s name.”

“Perhaps, in your travels, you may learn something of her history.”

“I should like to do so.”

“You won’t leave us to-morrow?”

“I must go to-day. I know now that I must depend wholly upon my own exertions, and I must get to work as soon as possible.”

“You will write to me, Carl?”

“Yes, when I have anything agreeable to write.”

“Let us hope that will be soon.”

CHAPTER VII

ENDS IN A TRAGEDY

Carl obtained permission to leave his trunk at the Vance mansion, merely taking out what he absolutely needed for a change.

"When I am settled I will send for it," he said. "Now I shouldn't know what to do with it."

There were cordial good-bys, and Carl started once more on the tramp. He might, indeed, have traveled by rail, for he had ten dollars and thirty-seven cents; but it occurred to him that in walking he might meet with some one who would give him employment. Besides, he was not in a hurry to get on, nor had he any definite destination. The day was fine, there was a light breeze, and he experienced a hopeful exhilaration as he walked lightly on, with the world before him, and any number of possibilities in the way of fortunate adventures that might befall him.

He had walked five miles, when, to the left, he saw an elderly man hard at work in a hay field. He was leaning on his rake, and looking perplexed and troubled. Carl paused to rest, and as he looked over the rail fence, attracted the attention of the farmer.

"I say, young feller, where are you goin'?" he asked.

"I don't know—exactly."

"You don't know where you are goin'?" repeated the farmer, in surprise.

Carl laughed. "I am going out in the world to seek my fortune," he said.

"You be? Would you like a job?" asked the farmer, eagerly.

"What sort of a job?"

"I'd like to have you help me hayin'. My hired man is sick, and he's left me in a hole. It's goin' to rain, and—"

"Going to rain?" repeated Carl, in surprise, as he looked up at the nearly cloudless sky.

"Yes. It don't look like it, I know, but old Job Hagar say it'll rain before night, and what he don't know about the weather ain't worth knowin'. I want to get the hay on this meadow into the barn, and then I'll feel safe, rain or shine."

"And you want me to help you?"

"Yes; you look strong and hardy."

"Yes, I am pretty strong," said Carl, complacently.

"Well, what do you say?"

"All right. I'll help you."

Carl gave a spring and cleared the fence, landing in the hay field, having first thrown his valise over.

"You're pretty spry," said the farmer. "I couldn't do that."

"No, you're too heavy," said Carl, smiling, as he noted the clumsy figure of his employer. "Now, what shall I do?"

"Take that rake and rake up the hay. Then we'll go over to the barn and get the hay wagon."

"Where is your barn?"

The farmer pointed across the fields to a story-and-a-half farmhouse, and standing near it a good-sized barn, brown from want of paint and exposure to sun and rain. The buildings were perhaps twenty-five rods distant.

"Are you used to hayin'?" asked the farmer.

"Well, no, not exactly; though I've handled a rake before."

Carl's experience, however, had been very limited. He had, to be sure, had a rake in his hand, but probably he had not worked more than ten minutes at it. However, raking is easily learned, and his want of experience was not detected. He started off with great enthusiasm, but after a while thought

it best to adopt the more leisurely movements of the farmer. After two hours his hands began to blister, but still he kept on.

"I have got to make my living by hard work," he said to himself, "and it won't do to let such a little thing as a blister interfere."

When he had been working a couple of hours, he began to feel hungry. His walk, and the work he had been doing, sharpened his appetite till he really felt uncomfortable. It was at this time—just twelve o'clock—that the farmer's wife came to the front door and blew a fish horn so vigorously that it could probably have been heard half a mile.

"The old woman's got dinner ready," said the farmer. "If you don't mind takin' your pay in victuals, you can go along home with me, and take a bite."

"I think I could take two or three, sir."

"Ho, ho! that's a good joke! Money's scarce, and I'd rather pay in victuals, if it's all the same to you."

"Do you generally find people willing to work for their board?" asked Carl, who knew that he was being imposed upon.

"Well, I might pay a leetle more. You work for me till sundown, and I'll give you dinner and supper, and—fifteen cents."

Carl wanted to laugh. At this rate of compensation he felt that it would take a long time to make a fortune, but he was so hungry that he would have accepted board alone if it had been necessary.

"I agree," he said. "Shall I leave my rake here?"

"Yes; it'll be all right."

"I'll take along my valise, for I can't afford to run any risk of losing it."

"Jest as you say."

Five minutes brought them to the farmhouse.

"Can I wash my hands?" asked Carl.

"Yes, you can go right to the sink and wash in the tin basin. There's a roll towel behind the door. Mis' Perkins"—that was the way he addressed his wife—"this is a young chap that I've hired to help me hayin'. You can set a chair for him at the table."

"All right, Silas. He don't look very old, though."

"No, ma'am. I ain't twenty-one yet," answered Carl, who was really sixteen.

"I shouldn't say you was. You ain't no signs of a mustache."

"I keep it short, ma'am, in warm weather," said Carl.

"It don't dull a razor any to cut it in cold weather, does it?" asked the farmer, chuckling at his joke.

"Well, no, sir; I can't say it does."

It was a boiled dinner that the farmer's wife provided, corned beef and vegetables, but the plebeian meal seemed to Carl the best he ever ate. Afterwards there was apple pudding, to which he did equal justice.

"I never knew work improved a fellow's appetite so," reflected the young traveler. "I never ate with so much relish at home."

After dinner they went back to the field and worked till the supper hour, five o'clock. By that time all the hay had been put into the barn.

"We've done a good day's work," said the farmer, in a tone of satisfaction, "and only just in time. Do you see that dark cloud?"

"Yes, sir."

"In half an hour there'll be rain, or I'm mistaken. Old Job Hagar is right after all."

The farmer proved a true prophet. In half an hour, while they were at the supper table, the rain began to come down in large drops—forming pools in the hollows of the ground, and drenching all exposed objects with the largesse of the heavens.

“Where war you a-goin’ to-night?” asked the farmer.

“I don’t know, sir.”

“I was thinkin’ that I’d give you a night’s lodgin’ in place of the fifteen cents I agreed to pay you. Money’s very skeerce with me, and will be till I’ve sold off some of the crops.”

“I shall be glad to make that arrangement,” said Carl, who had been considering how much the farmer would ask for lodging, for there seemed small chance of continuing his journey. Fifteen cents was a lower price than he had calculated on.

“That’s a sensible idea!” said the farmer, rubbing his hands with satisfaction at the thought that he had secured valuable help at no money outlay whatever.

The next morning Carl continued his tramp, refusing the offer of continued employment on the same terms. He was bent on pursuing his journey, though he did not know exactly where he would fetch up in the end.

At twelve o’clock that day he found himself in the outskirts of a town, with the same uncomfortable appetite that he had felt the day before, but with no hotel or restaurant anywhere near. There was, however, a small house, the outer door of which stood conveniently open. Through the open window, Carl saw a table spread as if for dinner, and he thought it probable that he could arrange to become a boarder for a single meal. He knocked at the door, but no one came. He shouted out: “Is anybody at home?” and received no answer. He went to a small barn just outside and peered in, but no one was to be seen.

What should he do? He was terribly hungry, and the sight of the food on the table was tantalizing.

“I’ll go in, as the door is open,” he decided, “and sit down to the table and eat. Somebody will be along before I get through, and I’ll pay whatever is satisfactory, for eat I must.”

He entered, seated himself, and ate heartily. Still no one appeared.

“I don’t want to go off without paying,” thought Carl. “I’ll see if I can find somebody.”

He opened the door into the kitchen, but it was deserted. Then he opened that of a small bedroom, and started back in terror and dismay.

There suspended from a hook—a man of middle age was hanging, with his head bent forward, his eyes wide open, and his tongue protruding from his mouth!

CHAPTER VIII

CARL FALLS UNDER SUSPICION

To a person of any age such a sight as that described at the close of the last chapter might well have proved startling. To a boy like Carl it was simply overwhelming. It so happened that he had but twice seen a dead person, and never a victim of violence. The peculiar circumstances increased the effect upon his mind.

He placed his hand upon the man's face, and found that he was still warm. He could have been dead but a short time.

"What shall I do?" thought Carl, perplexed. "This is terrible!"

Then it flashed upon him that as he was alone with the dead man suspicion might fall upon him as being concerned in what might be called a murder.

"I had better leave here at once," he reflected. "I shall have to go away without paying for my meal."

He started to leave the house, but had scarcely reached the door when two persons—a man and a woman—entered. Both looked at Carl with suspicion.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man.

"I beg your pardon," answered Carl; "I was very hungry, and seeing no one about, took the liberty to sit down at the table and eat. I am willing to pay for my dinner if you will tell me how much it amounts to."

"Wasn't my husband here?" asked the woman.

"I—I am afraid something has happened to your husband," faltered Carl.

"What do you mean?"

Carl silently pointed to the chamber door. The woman opened it, and uttered a loud shriek.

"Look here, Walter!" she cried.

Her companion quickly came to her side.

"My husband is dead!" cried the woman; "basely murdered, and there," pointing fiercely to Carl, "there stands the murderer!"

"Madam, you cannot believe this!" said Carl, naturally agitated.

"What have you to say for yourself?" demanded the man, suspiciously.

"I only just saw—your husband," continued Carl, addressing himself to the woman. "I had finished my meal, when I began to search for some one whom I could pay, and so opened this door into the room beyond, when I saw—him hanging there!"

"Don't believe him, the red-handed murderer!" broke out the woman, fiercely. "He is probably a thief; he killed my poor husband, and then sat down like a cold-blooded villain that he is, and gorged himself."

Things began to look very serious for poor Carl.

"Your husband is larger and stronger than myself," he urged, desperately. "How could I overpower him?"

"It looks reasonable, Maria," said the man. "I don't see how the boy could have killed Mr. Brown, or lifted him upon the hook, even if he did not resist."

"He murdered him, I tell you, he murdered him!" shrieked the woman, who seemed bereft of reason. "I call upon you to arrest him."

"I am not a constable, Maria."

"Then tie him so he cannot get away, and go for a constable. I wouldn't feel safe with him in the house, unless he were tied fast. He might hang me!"

Terrible as the circumstances were, Carl felt an impulse to laugh. It seemed absurd to hear himself talked of in this way.

"Tie me if you like!" he said. "I am willing to wait here till some one comes who has a little common sense. Just remember that I am only a boy, and haven't the strength of a full-grown man!"

"The boy is right, Maria! It's a foolish idea of yours."

"I call upon you to tie the villain!" insisted the woman.

"Just as you say! Can you give me some rope?"

From a drawer Mrs. Brown drew a quantity of strong cord, and the man proceeded to tie Carl's hands.

"Tie his feet, too, Walter!"

"Even if you didn't tie me, I would promise to remain here. I don't want anybody to suspect me of such a thing," put in Carl.

"How artful he is!" said Mrs. Brown. "Tie him strong, Walter."

The two were left alone, Carl feeling decidedly uncomfortable. The newly-made widow laid her head upon the table and moaned, glancing occasionally at the body of her husband, as it still hung suspended from the hook.

"Oh, William, I little expected to find you dead!" she groaned. "I only went to the store to buy a pound of salt, and when I come back, I find you cold and still, the victim of a young ruffian! How could you be so wicked?" she demanded fiercely of Carl.

"I have told you that I had nothing to do with your husband's death, madam."

"Who killed him, then?" she cried.

"I don't know. He must have committed suicide."

"Don't think you are going to escape in that way. I won't rest till I see you hung!"

"I wish I had never entered the house," thought Carl, uncomfortably. "I would rather have gone hungry for twenty four hours longer than find myself in such a position."

Half an hour passed. Then a sound of voices was heard outside, and half a dozen men entered, including besides the messenger, the constable and a physician.

"Why was he not cut down?" asked the doctor, hastily. "There might have been a chance to resuscitate him."

"I didn't think of it," said the messenger. "Maria was so excited, and insisted that the boy murdered him."

"What boy?"

Carl was pointed out.

"That boy? What nonsense!" exclaimed Dr. Park. "Why, it would be more than you or I could do to overpower and hang a man weighing one hundred and seventy-five pounds."

"That's what I thought, but Maria seemed crazed like."

"I tell you he did it! Are you going to let him go, the red-handed murderer?"

"Loose the cord, and I will question the boy," said Dr. Park, with an air of authority.

Carl breathed a sigh of relief, when, freed from his bonds, he stood upright.

"I'll tell you all I know," he said, "but it won't throw any light upon the death."

Dr. Park listened attentively, and asked one or two questions.

"Did you hear any noise when you were sitting at the table?" he inquired.

"No, sir."

"Was the door closed?"

"Yes, sir."

"That of itself would probably prevent your hearing anything. Mrs. Brown, at what hour did you leave the house?"

"At ten minutes of twelve."

“It is now five minutes of one. The deed must have been committed just after you left the house. Had you noticed anything out of the way in your—husband’s manner?”

“No, sir, not much. He was always a silent man.”

“Had anything happened to disturb him?”

“He got a letter this morning. I don’t know what was in it.”

“We had better search for it.”

The body was taken down and laid on the bed. Dr. Park searched the pockets, and found a half sheet of note paper, on which these lines were written:

“Maria:—I have made up my mind I can live no longer. I have made a terrible discovery. When I married you, I thought my first wife, who deserted me four years ago, dead. I learn by a letter received this morning that she is still living in a town of Illinois. The only thing I can do is to free you both from my presence. When you come back from the store you will find me cold and dead. The little that I leave behind I give to you. If my first wife should come here, as she threatens, you can tell her so. Good-by.

“William.”

The reading of this letter made a sensation. Mrs. Brown went into hysterics, and there was a scene of confusion.

“Do you think I can go?” Carl asked Dr. Park.

“Yes. There is nothing to connect you with the sad event.”

Carl gladly left the cottage, and it was only when he was a mile on his way that he remembered that he had not paid for his dinner, after all.

CHAPTER IX

A PLAUSIBLE STRANGER

Three days later found Carl still on his travels. It was his custom to obtain his meals at a cheap hotel, or, if none were met with, at a farmhouse, and to secure lodgings where he could, and on as favorable terms as possible. He realized the need of economy, and felt that he was practicing it. He had changed his ten-dollar bill the first day, for a five and several ones. These last were now spent, and the five-dollar bill alone remained to him. He had earned nothing, though everywhere he had been on the lookout for a job.

Toward the close of the last day he overtook a young man of twenty-five, who was traveling in the same direction.

"Good-afternoon," said the young man, sociably.

"Good-afternoon, sir."

"Where are you bound, may I ask?"

"To the next town."

"Fillmore?"

"Yes, if that is the name."

"So am I. Why shouldn't we travel together?"

"I have no objection," said Carl, who was glad of company.

"Are you in any business?"

"No, but I hope to find a place."

"Oh, a smart boy like you will soon find employment."

"I hope so, I am sure. I haven't much money left, and it is necessary I should do something."

"Just so. I am a New York salesman, but just now I am on my vacation—taking a pedestrian tour with knapsack and staff, as you see. The beauty of it is that my salary runs on just as if I were at my post, and will nearly pay all my traveling expenses."

"You are in luck. Besides you have a good place to go back to. There isn't any vacancy, is there? You couldn't take on a boy?" asked Carl, eagerly.

"Well, there might be a chance," said the young man, slowly. "You haven't any recommendations with you, have you?"

"No; I have never been employed."

"It doesn't matter. I will recommend you myself."

"You might be deceived in me," said Carl, smiling.

"I'll take the risk of that. I know a reliable boy when I see him."

"Thank you. What is the name of your firm?"

"F. Brandes & Co., commission merchants, Pearl Street. My own name is Chauncy Hubbard, at your service."

"I am Carl Crawford."

"That's a good name. I predict that we shall be great chums, if I manage to get you a place in our establishment."

"Is Mr. Brandes a good man to work for?"

"Yes, he is easy and good-natured. He is liberal to his clerks. What salary do you think I get?"

"I couldn't guess."

"Forty dollars a week, and I am only twenty-five. Went into the house at sixteen, and worked my way up."

"You have certainly done well," said Carl, respectfully.

"Well, I'm no slouch, if I do say it myself."

"I don't wonder your income pays the expenses of your vacation trip."

"It ought to, that's a fact, though I'm rather free handed and like to spend money. My prospects are pretty good in another direction. Old Fred Brandes has a handsome daughter, who thinks considerable of your humble servant."

"Do you think there is any chance of marrying her?" asked Carl, with interest.

"I think my chance is pretty good, as the girl won't look at anybody else."

"Is Mr. Brandes wealthy?"

"Yes, the old man's pretty well fixed, worth nearly half a million, I guess."

"Perhaps he will take you into the firm," suggested Carl.

"Very likely. That's what I'm working for."

"At any rate, you ought to save something out of your salary."

"I ought, but I haven't. The fact is, Carl," said Chauncy Hubbard, in a burst of confidence, "I have a great mind to make a confession to you."

"I shall feel flattered, I am sure," said Carl, politely.

"I have one great fault—I gamble."

"Do you?" said Carl, rather startled, for he had been brought up very properly to have a horror of gambling.

"Yes, I suppose it's in my blood. My father was a very rich man at one time, but he lost nearly all his fortune at the gaming table."

"That ought to have been a warning to you, I should think."

"It ought, and may be yet, for I am still a young man."

"Mr. Hubbard," said Carl, earnestly, "I feel rather diffident about advising you, for I am only a boy, but I should think you would give up such a dangerous habit."

"Say no more, Carl! You are a true friend. I will try to follow your advice. Give me your hand."

Carl did so, and felt a warm glow of pleasure at the thought that perhaps he had redeemed his companion from a fascinating vice.

"I really wish I had a sensible boy like you to be my constant companion. I should feel safer."

"Do you really have such a passion for gambling, then?"

"Yes; if at the hotel to-night I should see a party playing poker, I could not resist joining them. Odd, isn't it?"

"I am glad I have no such temptation."

"Yes, you are lucky. By the way, how much money have you about you?"

"Five dollars."

"Then you can do me a favor. I have a ten-dollar bill, which I need to get me home. Now, I would like to have you keep a part of it for me till I go away in the morning. Give me your five, and I will hand you ten. Out of that you can pay my hotel bill and hand me the balance due me in the morning."

"If you really wish me to do so."

"Enough said. Here is the ten."

Carl took the bill, and gave Mr. Hubbard his five-dollar note.

"You are placing considerable confidence in me," he said.

"I am, it is true, but I have no fear of being deceived. You are a boy who naturally inspires confidence."

Carl thought Mr. Chauncy Hubbard a very agreeable and sensible fellow, and he felt flattered to think that the young man had chosen him as a guardian, so to speak.

"By the way, Carl, you haven't told me," said Hubbard, as they pursued their journey, "how a boy like yourself is forced to work his own way."

"I can tell you the reason very briefly—I have a stepmother."

"I understand. Is your father living?"

“Yes.”

“But he thinks more of the stepmother than of you?”

“I am afraid he does.”

“You have my sympathy, Carl. I will do all I can to help you. If you can only get a place in our establishment, you will be all right. Step by step you will rise, till you come to stand where I do.”

“That would satisfy me. Has Mr. Brandes got another daughter?”

“No, there is only one.”

“Then I shall have to be content with the forty dollars a week. If I ever get it, I will save half.”

“I wish I could.”

“You can if you try. Why, you might have two thousand dollars saved up now, if you had only begun to save in time.”

“I have lost more than that at the gaming table. You will think me very foolish.”

“Yes, I do,” said Carl, frankly.

“You are right. But here we are almost at the village.”

“Is there a good hotel?”

“Yes—the Fillmore. We will take adjoining rooms if you say so.”

“Very well.”

“And in the morning you will pay the bill?”

“Certainly.”

The two travelers had a good supper, and retired early, both being fatigued with the journey. It was not till eight o'clock the next morning that Carl opened his eyes. He dressed hastily, and went down to breakfast. He was rather surprised not to see his companion of the day before.

“Has Mr. Hubbard come down yet?” he asked at the desk.

“Yes; he took an early breakfast, and went off by the first train.”

“That is strange. I was to pay his bill.”

“He paid it himself.”

Carl did not know what to make of this. Had Hubbard forgotten that he had five dollars belonging to him? Fortunately, Carl had his city address, and could refund the money in New York.

“Very well! I will pay my own bill. How much is it?”

“A dollar and a quarter.”

Carl took the ten-dollar bill from his wallet and tendered it to the clerk.

Instead of changing it at once, the clerk held it up to the light and examined it critically.

“I can't take that bill,” he said, abruptly.

“Why not?”

“Because it is counterfeit.”

Carl turned pale, and the room seemed to whirl round. It was all the money he had.

CHAPTER X

THE COUNTERFEIT BILL

"Are you sure it is counterfeit?" asked Carl, very much disturbed.

"I am certain of it. I haven't been handling bank bills for ten years without being able to tell good money from bad. I'll trouble you for another bill."

"That's all the money I have," faltered Carl.

"Look here, young man," said the clerk, sternly, "you are trying a bold game, but it won't succeed."

"I am trying no game at all," said Carl, plucking up spirit. "I thought the bill was good."

"Where did you get it?"

"From the man who came with me last evening—Mr. Hubbard."

"The money he gave me was good."

"What did he give you?"

"A five-dollar bill."

"It was my five-dollar bill," said Carl, bitterly.

"Your story doesn't seem very probable," said the clerk, suspiciously. "How did he happen to get your money, and you his?"

"He told me that he would get to gambling, and wished me to take money enough to pay his bill here. He handed me the ten-dollar bill which you say is bad, and I gave him five in return. I think now he only wanted to get good money for bad."

"Your story may be true, or it may not," said the clerk, whose manner indicated incredulity. "That is nothing to me. All you have to do is to pay your hotel bill, and you can settle with Mr. Hubbard when you see him."

"But I have no other money," said Carl, desperately.

"Then I shall feel justified in ordering your arrest on a charge of passing, or trying to pass, counterfeit money."

"Don't do that, sir! I will see that you are paid out of the first money I earn."

"You must think I am soft," said the clerk, contemptuously. "I have seen persons of your stripe before. I dare say, if you were searched, more counterfeit money would be found in your pockets."

"Search me, then!" cried Carl, indignantly. "I am perfectly willing that you should."

"Haven't you any relations who will pay your bill?"

"I have no one to call upon," answered Carl, soberly. "Couldn't you let me work it out? I am ready to do any kind of work."

"Our list of workers is full," said the clerk, coldly.

Poor Carl! he felt that he was decidedly in a tight place. He had never before found himself unable to meet his bills, nor would he have been so placed now but for Hubbard's rascality. A dollar and a quarter seems a small sum, but if you are absolutely penniless it might as well be a thousand. Suppose he should be arrested and the story get into the papers? How his stepmother would exult in the record of his disgrace! He could anticipate what she would say. Peter, too, would rejoice, and between them both his father would be persuaded that he was thoroughly unprincipled.

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