ALGER HORATIO JR.

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS; OR, JACOB MARLOWE'S SECRET

Horatio Alger

Five Hundred Dollars; or, Jacob Marlowe's Secret

Alger H.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
A NEW ARRIVAL IN LAKEVILLE

Slowly through the village street walked an elderly man, with bronzed features and thin gray hair, supporting his somewhat uncertain steps by a stout cane. He was apparently tired, for, seeing a slight natural elevation under a branching elm tree, he sat down, and looked thoughtfully about him.

"Well," he said, "Lakeville hasn't changed much since I left it, twenty years since. Has there been any change among those who are near to me? I don't know, but I shall soon find out. Shall I receive a welcome or not? There ought to be two families to greet me, but–"

Here a boy appeared on the scene, a boy of fifteen, with a sturdy figure and a pleasant face, whose coarse suit indicated narrow means, if not poverty. Seeing the old man, with instinctive politeness he doffed his hat and with a pleasant smile bade him good-morning.

"Good-morning," returned the traveller, won by the boy's pleasant face and manner. "If you are not in a hurry won't you sit down by me and answer a few questions?"

"With pleasure, sir; my business isn't driving."

"This is Lakeville, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I used to know the place—a good many years since. It hasn't grown much."

"No, sir; it's rather quiet."

"Chiefly a farming region, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; but there is a large shoe manufactory here, employing a hundred hands."

"Who is the owner?"

"Squire Marlowe."

"Ha!" ejaculated the old man, evidently interested. "Albert Marlowe, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; do you know him?"

"I haven't met him for twenty years, but we are acquainted. I suppose he is prosperous."

"He is considered a rich man, sir. He is a relation of mine."

"Indeed! What then is your name?" asked the old man, eagerly.

"Herbert Barton—most people call me Bert Barton."

Bert was surprised at the keen scrutiny which he received from the traveller.

"Was your mother Mary Marlowe?" the latter asked.

"Yes, sir," returned Bert. "Did you know her, too?"

"I ought to; she is my niece, as the man you call Squire Marlowe is my nephew."

"Then you must be Uncle Jacob, who has lived so many years in California?" said Bert, excitedly.

"The same."

"Mother will be very glad to see you," added Bert, cordially.

"Thank you, my boy. Your kind welcome does me good. I hope your mother is well and happy."

"She is a widow," answered Bert soberly.

"When did your father die?"

"Two years ago."

"I hope he left your mother in comfortable circumstances."

Bert shook his head.

"He only left the small house we live in, and that is mortgaged for half its value."

"Then how do you live?"

"Mother covers base-balls for a firm in the next town, and I am working in the big shoe shop."

"Doesn't Squire Marlowe do anything for your mother?"

"He gave me a place in the shop—that is all."

"Yet he is rich," said the old man, thoughtfully.

"Yes, he lives in a fine house. You can see it down the street on the other side that large one with a broad piazza. He keeps two horses and two handsome carriages, and I am sure he must have plenty of money."

"I am glad to hear it. I have been a long time among strangers. It will be pleasant to come to anchor at the house of a rich relation. Where does your mother live?"

"In a small cottage at the other end of the street. Won't you come home with me, Uncle Jacob? Mother will be glad to see you."

"I must call at Albert Marlowe's first. What family has he?"

"He has one boy about my own age."

"I suppose you are very intimate—being cousins."

Bert laughed.

"He wouldn't thank you for calling us cousins," he answered. "Percy Marlowe is a boy who thinks a good deal of himself. He puts on no end of airs."

"Like his father before him. Is he a smart boy?"

"Do you mean in his studies?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what he could do if he tried, but he doesn't exert himself much. He says it isn't necessary for him, as his father is a rich man."

"How is it with you?"

"I only wish I had his chance," said Bert, warmly. "I am fond of study, but I am poor, and must work for a living."

"You have the right idea, and he has not," said the old man, sententiously.

At this moment a light buggy was driven swiftly by. Seated in it was a boy about the age of Bert, apparently, but of slighter figure. The horse, suddenly spying the old man, shied, and in a trice the buggy was upset, and the young dude went sprawling on the ground.

Bert grasped the situation, and sprang to the rescue. He seized the terrified horse, while the old man helped reverse the carriage, which fortunately had not met with any material damage. The same may be said of the young driver who, with mortified face, struggled to his feet, and surveyed ruefully the muddy stains on his handsome suit.

"I hope you're not hurt, Percy," said Bert, with solicitude.

"I've spoiled my suit, that's all," returned Percy, shortly. "What made you scare my horse?"

"I didn't," answered Bert, with spirit. "What right have you to charge me with such a thing?"

"Then if it wasn't you, it was that old tramp you were talking with," persisted Percy, sullenly.

"Hush, Percy!" said Bert, apprehensive lest the old man's feelings might be hurt. "You don't know who this gentleman is."

"I never met the gentleman before," rejoined Percy, with ironical deference.

"Then let me introduce him as your uncle, Jacob Marlowe, from California!"

Percy's face betrayed much more surprise than pleasure as he stammered, "Is that true?"

"Yes," answered the old man, smiling calmly; "I have the honor to be related to you, young gentleman."

"Does father know you are here?"

"No; I am going to call upon him."

Percy hardly knew what to think. He had heard his father speak of "Uncle Jacob" and indulge in the hope that he had accumulated a fortune in California. His shabby attire did not suggest wealth, certainly, but Percy was wise enough to know that appearances are not always to be relied upon. If this old man were wealthy, he would be worth propitiating. At any rate, till he knew to the contrary he had better be polite.

"Will you ride to the house with me, sir?" he asked, considerably to Bert's surprise.

"No, thank you. There might be another upset. Jump into the buggy, and I'll walk along after you."

Percy was relieved by this decision, for he had no wish to be seen with such a companion.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'll see you at the house."

Without a word of acknowledgment to Bert, Percy sprang into the buggy and drove rapidly away.

"Shall I go with you, Uncle Jacob?" asked Bert.

"No, thank you. I can find the way. Tell your mother that I will call on her very soon."

CHAPTER II.
UNCLE JACOB'S RECEPTION

Percy found his father at home, and quickly acquainted him with the arrival in town of Uncle Jacob. His news was received with interest by Squire Marlowe.

"Why didn't you invite him to ride home with you?" asked the squire.

"I did; but he preferred to walk."

"What does he look like?"

"Like an old tramp," answered Percy.

Squire Marlowe was taken aback; for, without having received any definite intelligence from the long absent relative, he had somehow persuaded himself that Uncle Jacob had accumulated a fortune at the mines.

"Then he is shabbily dressed?" said the squire, inquiringly.

"I should say so. I say, father, I thought he was rich. You always said so."

"And I still think so."

"Then why don't he dress better?"

"He is rather eccentric, Percy; and these California miners don't care much for dress as a rule. I shouldn't wonder if he were worth half a million. You'd better treat him with attention, for we are his natural heirs, and there's no telling what may happen."

"Enough said, father. I don't care how he dresses if he's got the cash."

"I must go and speak to your mother, or she will treat him coldly. You know how particular she is."

Squire Marlowe managed to drop a hint to his wife, who was as worldly wise as himself, and saw the advantage of being attentive to a wealthy relative.

By this time Uncle Jacob had reached the door.

Squire Marlowe himself answered the bell, as a mark of special attention, and gazed with curiosity at the old man.

Jacob Marlowe, though coarsely clad, was scrupulously neat and clean, and there was a pleasant smile on his bronzed face as he recognized his nephew.

"I believe you are Uncle Jacob," said the squire, affably.

"Yes, Albert, and I'm mighty glad to see a relation. It's twenty-five years since I have seen one that was kin to me."

"Welcome to Lakeville, Uncle Jacob. I am glad to see you. Percy told me he met you on the road: Why didn't you ride up with him?"

"It wasn't worth gettin' in to ride a quarter of a mile. I am used to exercise in California."

"To be sure. Come into the house, and lay your valise down anywhere. Here is my wife, Mrs. Marlowe. Julia, this is Uncle Jacob, of whom you have heard me speak so often."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Marlowe," said the lady, formally, just touching the old man's hand.

"Where are you going to put Uncle Jacob, Julia?" asked the squire.

"You may take him to the blue room," said Mrs. Marlowe, in a tone of hesitation.

This blue room was the handsomest chamber in the house, and was assigned to those whom it was considered politic to honor.

"Come right upstairs, Uncle Jacob. I'll show you your room myself," said Albert Marlowe.

"I ain't used to such luxury, Albert," said the old man, as he gazed around the comfortably appointed apartment. "You ought to see my cabin at Murphy's diggings. I reckon your servant would turn up her nose at it."

"I know you don't care much for style in California, uncle."

"No, we don't, though we've got as handsome houses in 'Frisco as anywhere else. Why, Albert, this room is fine enough for a prince."

"Then you can think yourself a prince," said the squire, genially. "Now, if you want to wash your face and hands, and arrange your toilet, you will have abundant time before dinner. Come down when you have finished."

Albert Marlowe returned to his wife.

"Mr. Marlowe," said she, "are you very sure that old man is rich?"

"I have no doubt of it, Julia."

"But what an old fright he is! Why, he looks dreadfully common, and his clothes are wretchedly shabby."

"True, Julia; but you must remember miners are not very particular about their dress."

"I should think not, if he is a fair specimen. It makes me shudder to think of his occupying the blue-room. The hall bedroom on the third floor would have been good enough for him."

"Remember, my dear, he is in all probability very wealthy, and we are his heirs. I am not so well off as people imagine, and it will be a great thing for us to have a fortune of a quarter or half a million drop in by and by."

"There's something in that, to be sure," the lady admitted. "But can't you induce him to wear better clothes?"

"I will suggest it very soon. We mustn't be too precipitate, for fear he should take offense. You know these rich uncles expect to be treated with a good deal of consideration."

"Do you think he will expect to live with us? I shall really give up if I have got to have such a looking old tramp as a permanent member of the family."

"But, Julia, if he is really very rich, it is important for us to keep him strictly in view. You know there will be plenty of designing persons, who will be laying snares to entrap him, and get possession of his money."

"How old is he? Is he likely to live long?"

"I think he must be about sixty-five."

"And he looks alarmingly healthy," said Mrs. Marlowe, with a sigh.

"His father died at sixty-seven."

Mrs. Marlowe brightened up. "That is encouraging," she said, hopefully.

"I don't think he looks so *very* healthy," added the squire.

"He has a good color."

"His father was the picture of health till within a few weeks of his death."

"What did he die of?"

"Apoplexy."

"To be sure. The old man looks as if he might go off that way."

"In that case we should only need to be troubled with him a couple of years, and for that we should be richly repaid."

"They will seem like two eternities," groaned the lady, "and the chief burden will come on me."

"You shall be repaid, my dear! Only treat him well!"

"Will you give me half what money he leaves to us?"

"Say one-third, Julia. That will repay you richly for all your trouble."

"Very well! Let it be a third. But, Mr. Marlowe, don't let there be any mistake! I depend upon you to find out as soon as possible how much money the old man has."

"Trust to me, Julia. I am just as anxious to know as you are."

In twenty minutes Uncle Jacob came down stairs. He had done what he could to improve his appearance, or "slick himself up," as he expressed it, and wore a blue coat and vest, each provided with brass buttons. But from close packing in his valise both were creased up in such a manner that Squire Marlowe and his wife shuddered, and Percy's face wore an amused and supercilious smile.

"I declare I feel better to be dressed up," said the old man. "How long do you think I've had this coat and vest, Albert?"

"I really couldn't guess."

"I had it made for me ten years ago in Sacramento. It looks pretty well, but then I've only worn it for best."

Percy had to stuff his handkerchief in his mouth to repress a laugh. Uncle Jacob regarded him with a benevolent smile, and seemed himself to be amused about something.

"Now, Uncle Jacob, we'll sit down to dinner. You must be hungry."

"Well, I have got a fairish appetite. What a nice eatin' room you've got, Albert. I ain't used to such style."

"I presume not," said Mrs. Marlowe, dryly.

CHAPTER III.
A VISIT TO THE FACTORY

During dinner the old man chatted away in the frankest manner, but not a word did he let drop as to his worldly circumstances. He appeared to enjoy his dinner, and showed himself entirely at his ease.

"I'm glad to see you so well fixed, Albert," he said. "You've got a fine home."

"It will do very well," returned the squire, modestly.

"I suppose he never was in such a good house before," thought Mrs. Marlowe.

"By the way, just before I fell in with you here," went on Jacob, "I ran across Mary's boy."

"Herbert Barton?" suggested the squire, with a slight frown.

"Yes; he said that was his name."

"They live in the village," said his nephew, shortly.

"They're poor, ain't they?"

"Yes; Barton was not a forehanded man. He didn't know how to accumulate money."

"I suppose he left very little to his widow."

"Very little. However, I have given the boy a place in my factory, and I believe his mother earns a trifle by covering base-balls. They don't want for anything—that is, anything in reason.

"Bert Barton seems a likely boy."

"Oh, he's as good as the average of boys in his position."

"I suppose he and Percy are quite intimate, being cousins."

"Indeed we are not!" returned Percy, tossing his head. "His position is very different from mine."

Uncle Jacob surveyed Percy in innocent wonder.

"Still, he's kin to you," he observed.

"That doesn't always count," said Percy. "He has his friends, and I have mine. I don't believe in mixing classes."

"I expect things *have* changed since I was a boy," said Uncle Jacob, mildly. "Then, all the boys were friendly and sociable, no matter whether they were rich or poor."

"I agree with Percy," broke in Mrs. Marlowe, stiffly. "His position in life will be very different from that of the boy you refer to. Any early intimacy, even if we encouraged it, could not well be kept up in after-life."

"Perhaps you are right," said the old man. "I've been away so long at the mines that I haven't kept up with the age or the fashions."

Percy smiled, as his glance rested on his uncle's creased suit, and he felt quite ready to agree with what he said.

"I was thinkin' how pleasant it would be if you would invite Mary and her boy to tea—we are all related, you know. We could talk over old times and scenes, and have a real social time."

Mrs. Marlowe seemed horror-struck at the suggestion.

"I don't think it would be convenient," she said, coldly.

"It would be better for you to see Mrs. Barton at her own house," put in the squire, hastily.

"Well, perhaps it would."

"By the way, Uncle Jacob, I hope your experiences of California are pleasant," insinuated Squire Marlowe.

"They're mixed, Albert. I've had my ups and downs."

"I have heard of large fortunes being made there," pursued the squire. "I suppose there's some truth in what we hear?"

"To be sure! Why, ten years from the time I went to the mines I had a hundred thousand dollars deposited to my credit in a Sacramento bank."

Squire Marlowe's eyes sparkled with pleasure. It was just what he had been hoping to find out. So Uncle Jacob was rich, after all! The squire's manner became even more gracious, and he pressed upon his relative another plate of ice cream.

"No, thank you, Albert," said the old man. "I'm used to plain livin'. It isn't often I sit down to a meal like this. Do you know, there's nothing suits me better than a dinner of corned beef and cabbage."

"How vulgar the old man is!" thought Mrs. Marlowe. "He may have money, but his tastes are *very* common."

"We never have corned beef and cabbage here," she said, with a slight shudder.

"Very likely Bert Barton's mother has it very often," suggested Percy.

"My dear," said the squire, urbanely, "if Uncle Jacob really enjoys those dishes so much, you might provide them for his special use."

"I will think of it," replied Mrs. Marlowe, shortly.

Now that Uncle Jacob had hinted at the possession of wealth, Squire Marlowe beheld him as one transfigured. He was no longer a common, shabby old man, but a worthy old gentleman of eccentric ideas in the matter of wardrobe and manners.

"I wonder if Uncle Jacob wouldn't advance me twenty-five thousand dollars," was the thought that was passing through his mind as he gazed genially at his countrified guest. "It would help me amazingly in my business, and enable me to do double as much. I will mention it to him in good time."

"I've a great mind to come upon the old man for a handsome birthday present," thought Percy. "Fifty dollars wouldn't be much for him to give. I shan't get more than a fiver from the governor."

"Uncle Jacob," said the squire, as they rose from the table, "suppose you walk over to the factory with me; I should like you to see it."

"Nothing would please me better," said Jacob Marlowe, briskly.

"Will you come along, Percy?" asked his father.

"No, papa," answered Percy, with a grimace. "You know I don't like the smell of leather."

"*I* ought not to dislike it," said the squire, with a smile, "for it gives me a very handsome income."

"Oh, it's different with you," returned Percy. "Just give me the profits of the factory and I'll go there every day."

"He's a sharp one!" said the squire, with a smile.

"I am afraid he is too sharp to suit me," thought Uncle Jacob. "It seems to me the boy's mind runs upon money, and his own interests."

The shoe factory was a large building of two stories, and within it was a hive of industry.

As the squire led the way he explained the various workings to the old man, who was really curious and interested. It was on a larger scale than was common at the time he left for California, and the use of machinery had to a greater extent supplemented and superseded the work of the hands.

Finally they came to a room where several boys were pegging shoes, for this work was still done in the old-fashioned way. Uncle Jacob's eyes lighted up when in one of them he recognized Bert Barton.

He hurried forward, and put his hand on Bert's shoulder.

"So this is your business," he said.

"Yes," answered Bert, with a smile.

"Do you find it hard work?"

"Oh, no! That is, I am used to it. It used to tire me at first."

"Did you tell your mother I was in town?"

"Yes," answered Bert, "and she says she hopes you will call."

"To be sure I will. I may call this evening."

"He's a likely boy, Albert," said Uncle Jacob, rejoining the squire, who stood aloof with a look of annoyance on his face.

"He works very well, I believe," was the cold reply. "Shall we move on?"

"Albert doesn't seem to feel much interest in his poor relations," thought Uncle Jacob. "Well, it's human nature, I suppose."

"You seem to be doing a large business, Albert," he said aloud.

"Yes; but with a little more capital I could very much increase it," rejoined the squire. "With twenty-five thousand dollars now, I would enlarge the factory to double its present size, and do twice the business I am now doing."

"I am afraid you want to get rich too fast, Albert."

"It would gratify my spirit of enterprise, Uncle Jacob. I feel that I have the ability to make a big business success."

"Very likely, Albert. I've seen enough to convince me of that."

"He'll lend me the money if I work things right," Squire Marlowe said to himself. "He'll be like wax in my hands."

CHAPTER IV.
UNCLE JACOB'S STARTLING REVELATION

"Uncle Jacob was at the factory this afternoon," said Bert to his mother, when he went home. "He says he may call here this evening."

"I hope he will. He was my poor mother's favorite brother—always kind and good-hearted. How is he looking, Bert?"

"He seems in good health for an old man. His face is browned up, as if he had been out in the open air a good deal."

"I hope he has. It is twenty-five years since he went to California. Does he look as if he had prospered?"

"I am afraid he is poor, mother, for although his clothing is neat and clean, it is plain and the cloth is faded?"

"I am sorry to hear that, but I will welcome him none the less warmly. It will indeed seem like old times to have Uncle Jacob in my house."

Meanwhile Bert had been bringing in wood and doing chores for his mother.

"Did Uncle Jacob tell you how long he intended to stay in Lakeville?"

"No, mother; I only had a short time to talk with him when Percy rode by, and then he started to call on the squire. Do you know, mother, I am rather surprised that he should have been so well received, poor as he looks."

"I think better of Albert for it. It shows that he is not so worldly as I feared. Certainly Uncle Jacob ought to be well received by Albert Marlowe, for when Albert's father was in trouble Jacob lent him five hundred dollars—all in money he had—and I feel sure the money has not been repaid to him to this day."

"I don't think Percy will be very cordial. You know what high notions he has."

"He gets them principally from his mother, who is extremely aristocratic in her ideas."

"Was she of a high family?"

Mrs. Barton smiled.

"Her father was a fisherman," she replied, "and when a girl she used to run barefoot on the sand. Later on she sewed straw for a living. She is no worse for that, certainly, but it doesn't give her any claims to aristocracy."

"Do you think Percy knows about his mother's early life?"

"I presume she has kept it secret from him."

"I shall think of it when Percy gets into one of his patronizing moods."

"Remember, Bert, that neither he nor his mother is any the worse for her humble birth."

"I understand that, I hope, mother, just as I don't feel ashamed of our being poor."

"As long as we can make an honorable living, we have no right to complain."

"That reminds me, mother, that I heard bad news at the shop to-day."

"What is that?"

"That the shop is likely to be shut down all next month."

"Why is that?" asked Mrs. Barton, an anxious look coming over her face.

"I believe the market is over-supplied with shoes, and it is thought best to suspend temporarily. It'll be rather hard on me."

"Yes, it will," said his mother, gravely. "I earn so little at sewing balls."

"Don't you think I could get a job at that, mother?"

"No, you could not do the work satisfactorily. Besides there are hands enough for all that is required. Well, we must hope for the best."

"I think I can manage to earn something, mother," said Bert, hopefully. "I'll try hard, anyway."

"We won't worry till the time comes, Bert."

An hour later there was a knock at the door. Mrs. Barton answered it in person.

"Why, Uncle Jacob, is it really you?" she exclaimed, joyfully.

"I'm delighted to see you, Mary," said the old man, his face lighting up. "I've been waiting twenty-five years for this meeting."

"Come right in, Uncle Jacob. I can hardly believe it is really you. Now tell me why you have not written these many years."

"I've no good excuse, Mary, but perhaps I shall think of one bimeby. Now tell me how you are getting along?"

"I am not rich, as you can see, Uncle Jacob; but as long as Bert and I have our health, and work to do, I shall be contented."

"Do you know, Mary," said Jacob Marlowe, looking about the plain little sitting-room, "I like your house better than Albert's?"

"I don't think you will find many to agree with you."

"Perhaps not, but this seems like home, and that doesn't."

"Albert's house is finely furnished."

"True, and he lives in fine style; but I don't think I should ever be contented to live with him."

"Has he invited you?"

"Yes," answered Jacob; "but," he added, with a smile, "I don't think the invitation will hold good after to-morrow."

"Why not?"

"The fact is, Albert and the whole family think I am rich."

"I shouldn't think they would judge that from your appearance."

"Oh, they think I am eccentric and plain in my tastes, and that I've got my pile safe somewhere."

"I wish you had, Uncle Jacob."

"Happiness doesn't depend on money, Mary, as you realize in your own case. I am an old man, to be sure, but I am well and strong, and able to work for a living."

"But at your age, Uncle Jacob, it would be comfortable to feel that you could rest."

"Come, Mary, don't make me out a patriarch. I'm only sixty-five, and I can tackle a pretty good day's work yet."

"You might be sick, Uncle Jacob."

"Don't let us imagine unpleasant things, Mary. I don't mean to be sick."

"And at any rate you can come and stay with us. You will always find a home here, though an humble one."

"Do you really mean that, Mary?" said Uncle Jacob, earnestly. "Would you really be willing to take in the old man, and provide for his comforts?"

"Of course I would, Uncle Jacob," answered Mrs. Barton, heartily. "I hope you didn't think so poorly of me as to doubt it."

"No, I was sure you hadn't changed so much since you were a girl. Well, Mary, I may some time remind you of your promise."

"You won't need to remind me, Uncle Jacob. I was afraid Albert would take you wholly away from us."

"So he might if I were as rich as he thinks I am; but now let us talk about other things. Remember, I haven't heard any family news for many years, and I have a great many questions to ask."

The rest of the evening was spent in such conversation as Uncle Jacob suggested, and when he had occasion to look at his watch, he started in surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "It is nearly ten o'clock. I ought to be getting back to Albert's."

"Then Bert shall accompany you as far as the house. It will be lonely to go alone."

Uncle Jacob reached Squire Marlowe's house as the church clock struck ten, and he bade Bert good-night.

Shortly after his return, Uncle Jacob was shown to his room, and being fatigued he soon fell asleep, not waking till seven in the morning.

After breakfast, Squire Marlowe said graciously: "Have you any plans, Uncle Jacob, in which I can assist you? If you would like to consult me about any investments, I can perhaps be of service to you."

"Now for it!" thought the old man.

"I was thinkin', Albert," he said, "of askin' your advice. I'm gettin' on in years, and can't work as well as I could once. Do you think it would pay me to open here in Lakeville a cigar and candy store, and–"

"What!" exclaimed Squire Marlowe, with an expression of horror and disgust on his face.

"You see I've got about five hundred dollars, which I think would be enough to stock it comfortably and–"

"But I thought you were a rich man," gasped Squire Marlowe. "Didn't you tell me you had a hundred thousand dollars in a Sacramento bank?"

"Yes, many years ago; but I bought mining stocks, and after a while they went down to nothing, and–"

"Then you are a pauper!" said the squire, harshly.

"No. I have five hundred dollars, and I hope with that to get started, so as to earn an honest living."

Words cannot describe the scorn and disgust that appeared on the faces of Percy and his mother at the old man's confession of poverty.

"Albert," said the wife, "may I speak with you outside a moment?"

"Certainly, my dear."

"Get rid of the old man as soon as you can!" she said, imperiously. "He doesn't eat another meal in my house!"

"Be easy, my dear," said the squire. "I'll manage it."

CHAPTER V.
UNCLE JACOB RECEIVES HIS WALKING PAPERS

Squire Marlowe returned to the breakfast room, wearing rather an embarrassed expression. Percy had followed his mother, and the old man found himself for a short time alone. There was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes, which vanished on the reappearance of his nephew.

"I am sorry to have left you alone, Uncle Jacob," said the squire, civilly.

"Oh, don't treat me with any ceremony, Albert. Being as we are such near relations, we ought to be free and easy like."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I shall be obliged to treat you unceremoniously."

"Eh?" said Uncle Jacob, inquiringly.

"I regret to say that my wife, who is of a *very* delicate organization, is taken suddenly ill, and I am afraid I shall have to ask you to cut your visit short, and come again some other time."

"I'm surprised to hear that, Albert. I thought Mrs. Marlowe looked in excellent health."

"You can't always tell by outward appearances. She is subject to severe headaches, and in that condition can't bear the least noise or excitement. That is why I can't invite you to stay any longer."

"I understand," said Uncle Jacob, with—it might have been—a little significance in his tone.

"I have no doubt," went on the squire, "that Mrs. Barton will be glad to have you pay her a short visit. I will get Percy to drive you down there."

"Thank you," answered the old man, dryly, "but it's only a little way, and I don't mind walking."

"Just as you prefer," said the squire, relieved by Uncle Jacob's declination of his offer, for he knew that Percy would not enjoy the trip.

"I'll get ready to go at once, Albert. Oh, about my plan of opening a cigar store in Lakeville?"

"I cannot advise you to do it," rejoined the squire, hastily. "You wouldn't make enough to pay your rent, or not much more."

"Don't the men in your factory smoke? There's a good many of them. If I could get their trade–"

"They smoke pipes for the most part," said the squire, hurriedly. "They'd find cigars too expensive."

"I meant to combine candy with cigars. That would be a help."

"They keep candy at the grocery store, Uncle Jacob."

"I see there isn't much show for me. Now if I only understood your business, you could give me something to do in the factory, Albert."

"But you don't, and, in fact, Uncle Jacob, it's too hard work for a man of your age."

"Then what would you advise me to do, Albert?" asked the old man, earnestly.

Squire Marlowe assumed a thoughtful look. In fact, he was puzzled to decide how best to get rid of the troublesome old man. To have him remain in Lakeville was not to be thought of. He would gladly have got rid of Mrs. Barton and her son, whose relationship to his family was unfortunately known, but there seemed to be no way clear to that without the expenditure of money. To have Uncle Jacob for a neighbor, in addition, would be a source of mortification, not only to himself, but even more to his wife and Percy, whose aristocratic ideas he well knew.

"I think you told me you had five hundred dollars," he said, after a pause.

"About that."

"Then I really think it would be the best thing you could do to go back to California, where you are known, and where you can doubtless obtain some humble employment which will supply your moderate wants. It won't cost you much for dress–"

"No, Albert; this coat and vest will do me for best five years longer."

"Just so! That is fortunate. So you see you've only got your board to pay."

"I might get sick," suggested Uncle Jacob, doubtfully.

"You look pretty healthy. Besides, you'll have part of your five hundred dollars left, you know."

"That's so! What a good calculator you are, Albert! Besides, if things came to the worst, there's that five hundred dollars I lent your father twenty-seven years ago. No doubt you'd pay me back, and–"

"I don't know what you refer to," said Squire Marlowe, coldly.

"Surely you haven't forgot the time when your father was so driven for money, when you were a lad of fifteen, and I let him have all I had except about fifty dollars that I kept for a rainy day."

"This is news to me, Uncle Jacob," said the squire, with a chilling frown. "You must excuse me for saying that I think you labor under a delusion."

Uncle Jacob surveyed his neighbor intently, with a gaze which disconcerted him in spite of his assurance.

"Fortunately, I am able to prove what I say," he rejoined, after a slight pause.

He drew from his pocket a wallet which bore the signs of long wear, and, opening it, deliberately drew out a folded sheet of note paper, grown yellow with age and brittle with much handling. Then, adjusting his spectacles, he added: "Here's something I'd like to read to you, Albert. It's written by your father:

> My Dear Jacob:
>
> I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for lending me the five hundred dollars I so urgently need. I know it is very nearly, if not quite, all you possess in the world, and that you can ill spare it. It will save me from failure, and sometime I hope to repay it to you. If I cannot, I will ask my son Albert to do so when he is able. I don't want you to lose by your kindness to me.
>
> Your affectionate brother,
>
> *Charles Marlowe.*

"You can see the signature, Albert. You know your father's handwriting, don't you?"

Squire Marlowe reluctantly took the paper and glanced at it.

"It may be my father's writing," he said.

"May be!" repeated the old man, indignantly. "What do you mean by that?"

"I dare say it is. In fact, I remember his mentioning the matter to me before he died."

"What did he say?"

"That it was quite a favor to him, the loan, but that he repaid it within three years from the time he received it."

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Jacob, pushing his spectacles up, in his amazement. "Your father said that?"

"Yes, he did," answered Albert Marlowe, with unabashed effrontery.

"That he paid back the five hundred dollars I lent him?"

"That's what I said," repeated the squire, impatiently.

"Then it's a lie—not of my brother's, but of—somebody's. That money remains unpaid to this day."

Squire Marlowe shrugged his shoulders. "No doubt you think so," he said, "but you are growing old, and old people are forgetful. That is the most charitable view to take of your statement."

"I wouldn't have believed this, Albert," said the old man, sorrowfully. "And you a rich man, too! I don't mind the money. I can get along without it. But to be told that I am claiming what has already been repaid!"

"I don't lay it up against you," went on the squire, smoothly. "I've no doubt you have forgotten the payment of the debt, and–"

"I don't forget so easily, though I am sixty-five. Don't fear that I shall ask for it again—indeed, I haven't asked for it at all—but I shall not forget how you have treated my claim. Of course it amounts

to nothing in law—it's outlawed long ago—but I only wish my poor brother were alive to disprove your words."

Even Albert Marlowe was shamed by the old man's sorrowful dignity.

"We can't agree about that, Uncle Jacob," he said; "but if ever you get very hard up, let me know, and I'll see if I can't help you—in a small way."

"You are very kind," answered the old man, "but I don't think that time will come. As you say, my wants are few, and I am still able to work. I'll go up to my room and get my valise, and then I'll go over to Mary Barton's."

"Thank Heaven! I've got rid of him," mused the squire, as from the doorway he saw Uncle Jacob walking slowly down the street. "I was afraid he'd mention that money he lent father. With twenty-seven years' interest it would amount to a good deal of money—more than I could well spare. I don't think I shall hear from it again."

"Has he gone, Albert?" asked Mrs. Marlowe, returning to the breakfast-room.

"Yes; I told him you were indisposed, and couldn't stand excitement."

"No matter what you told him, as long as we are rid of him."

CHAPTER VI
SQUIRE MARLOWE IS SURPRISED

Mrs. Barton was washing the breakfast dishes, and was alone, Bert having gone to his daily work at the shoe shop, when the outer door opened and Uncle Jacob entered the cottage, valise in hand.

"I've accepted your offer sooner than you expected, Mary," he said.

"You are heartily welcome, Uncle Jacob," responded his niece, with evident sincerity. "If you can put up with our poor accommodations after being entertained in Albert's luxurious home–"

"Don't trouble yourself about that, Mary," interrupted the old man. "Albert doesn't want me. He civilly asked me to find another stopping place."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Mrs. Barton indignantly.

"You see," explained Uncle Jacob, with a quiet smile, "his wife was taken suddenly indisposed —after she found I wasn't as rich as she expected."

"I hope you won't take it too much to heart, Uncle Jacob," observed Mary Barton, in a tone of solicitude.

Uncle Jacob's amused laugh reassured her.

"It is just what I expected, Mary," he said, "and I shan't grieve over it much. You ought to have seen how they all looked when I asked Albert's advice about opening a small cigar and candy store in the village. You can imagine what a mortification it would be to my high-toned nephew to have my sign out,

JACOB MARLOWE,

Candy and Cigars

over a small seven by nine store, when our relationship was known."

"I hope that won't prevent your carrying out the plan, Uncle Jacob. If your gains are small, you can make your home with us and pay what you can afford."

"Thank you, Mary, you are a true friend, and I shan't forget your kind offer. But I never had the slightest idea of opening such a store. I only mentioned it to test Albert."

"But you will have to do something, Uncle Jacob," said Mary Barton, perplexed; "and that would be as easy as anything. Bert could go in the evening and help you if you found it too confining."

"I have something else in view in the city," returned Jacob. "I don't need to earn much you know. I don't set up to be a dude," he added, with a comical glance at his rustic attire, "and I don't mean to board at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"I am sorry you can't stay in Lakeville," said Mrs. Barton regretfully.

"I will stay here a week, Mary, to get acquainted with you and your boy. I have taken a fancy to him. He is a fine, manly youth, worth a dozen of such fellows as Percy Marlowe."

"Indeed, he is a good boy," said his mother proudly. "I don't see what I could do without him."

"So, Mary, if you'll show me where you are going to accommodate me, I'll go up and take possession."

"Will you mind my putting you in with Bert? I have but two chambers."

"Not a bit. It will be all the better. If I were going to stay here permanently I would build an extension to the house for you."

"But that would be expensive, Uncle Jacob."

"So it would. I'm always forgetting that I am not a rich man. You see I was rich once. As I told Albert, I have seen the time when I had a hundred thousand dollars to my credit in a bank of Sacramento."

"Oh, Uncle Jacob! Why didn't you invest it in government bonds, and you would have been independent for life?"

"Because I was not so prudent as my niece, I suppose. However, it's no use crying over spilt milk, and I've got a matter of five hundred dollars left."

"But that won't last long, Uncle Jacob."

"Not unless I work. But I'm pretty rugged yet, and I guess I can manage to scrape along."

When Bert came home to dinner, he was surprised and pleased to find Uncle Jacob installed and evidently feeling quite at home.

"I wish I could stay at home this afternoon to keep you company," he said; "but I have only an hour for dinner."

"Business first, my boy!" said the old man. "For pleasure we'll wait till this evening. Is there a livery stable in the village?"

"Yes, sir; Houghton's."

"Then after supper we'll hire a buggy, and you and your mother and I will take a ride."

"But, Uncle Jacob, you forget that it will cost a dollar, or perhaps two."

"No, I don't, Mary; but I'm having a vacation, and I want to enjoy myself a little before pitching into hard work again. I am sure you will be the better for a ride."

"Yes, I shall. I haven't had one for months, and it will be a real treat."

"Then we will cast prudence to the winds for once, and have a good time. I suppose you can drive, Bert."

"Oh yes, sir; I like it. I worked for a few weeks in the grocery store, and drove every day. I like a horse."

"So do I; but I don't care much about handling the reins myself. You'll promise not to upset the carriage, as Percy did the other day?"

"Not unless we meet two tramps, as he did," said Bert, laughing.

"I declare, Mary, there is your boy calling his old uncle a tramp."

"And myself, too, uncle."

"That makes it seem a little better. Are you going back to the shop?"

"Yes, uncle; my time is up."

"I'll walk along with you."

As the two walked together, Uncle Jacob took a five dollar bill from his pocket, and handed it to Bert.

"There, Bert," he said, "I want you to give that to your mother toward buying groceries and meat this week, as her expenses will be increased by my being in the house."

"But, Uncle Jacob, we don't want you to pay board."

"I am able to do it, and prefer it, Bert. So say no more about it."

In truth, this donation was a relief to Bert and his mother, for they were compelled to economize closely, and yet wanted to live well while Uncle Jacob was visiting them.

About seven o'clock Bert drove round to the house in a handsome top buggy, drawn by a spirited black horse, the best in Houghton's stable.

"I'll let you have it, Bert," said Mr. Houghton, "because I know you're a careful driver. There are few persons I would trust with Prince."

"You may depend on me, Mr. Houghton."

"I know I can, Bert;" and with a few directions the stable keeper resigned the turnout to Bert.

"You have got a stylish rig, Bert," said Uncle Jacob. "I think we shall have to drive by Albert Marlowe's."

"Just what I would like," remarked Bert, with a smile.

Bert had his share of human nature, and rather enjoyed being seen by his aristocratic relatives in such a stylish turnout.

Supper was over at Squire Marlowe's and the family were sitting on the piazza, the evening being warm, when Percy espied the buggy approaching.

"I wonder who's driving Houghton's best team?" he said.

"By gracious, if it isn't Bert Barton and his mother and Uncle Jacob!" he exclaimed, a minute later.

The squire adjusted his eyeglasses, and looked at the carriage now nearly opposite.

"You are right, Percy," he said.

"What can it mean, Albert?" asked his wife, in bewilderment, as Uncle Jacob bowed from the buggy.

"It means that a fool and his money are soon parted," answered the squire.

"I thought your uncle was poor."

"So he is, and he will soon be poorer from all appearances. Uncle Jacob never was a good financial manager. He was always too liberal, or he wouldn't be as poor as he is now. Why with five hundred dollars he probably feels as rich as a nabob."

"No doubt Bert Barton will help him spend it," said Percy. "It won't last long at any rate, if he drives out every evening."

"When his money is all gone he will probably throw himself on you for support, father."

"I wash my hands of him," said Squire Marlowe, in a hard tone. "If he squanders his money, he must take the consequences."

"I am glad to hear you speak in that way, Albert," commented his wife, approvingly.

Uncle Jacob enjoyed his drive and paid two dollars at the stable without letting the thought of his extravagance worry him.

"I hope you enjoyed it, Mary," he said.

"I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much, Uncle Jacob."

"Nor I," put in Bert.

"Then I think the money well spent. It makes me feel young again, Mary. I think I made a mistake in staying away so long."

CHAPTER VII.
UNCLE JACOB LEAVES LAKEVILLE

On his way home to dinner the next day, Bert fell in with Percy Marlowe.

"I saw you out driving last evening," remarked Percy.

"Yes," answered Bert composedly.

"You had Houghton's best team?"

"Yes."

"How much did you have to pay?"

"I believe Uncle Jacob paid two dollars."

"He must be crazy to pay two dollars for a ride. Why, he's almost a pauper."

"I think that is *his* business, Percy. As to being a pauper, I don't believe he will ever be that."

"Don't be too sure of it. Why, he told father he had only five hundred dollars. How long do you think that's going to last him if he throws away his money on carriage rides?"

"It's only for once, and, as I said, that isn't our business."

"I don't know about that, either. When he has spent all his money he'll be coming upon father to support him."

"I don't believe he will," said Bert, to whom it was disagreeable to hear the kind old man spoken of slightingly.

"You see if he doesn't. But it won't do any good. Father says as he makes his bed he must lie on it. And I say, Bert Barton, it isn't very creditable to you and your mother to help the old man squander his money."

"I don't thank you for your advice, Percy Marlowe," retorted Bert, with spirit. "If ever Uncle Jacob does come to want, I'll work for him, and help him all I can."

"You! why you're as poor as poverty itself!" exclaimed Percy, with a mocking laugh.

"Good morning!" said Bert shortly, provoked, but not caring to prolong the discussion.

When he reached home, he gave Uncle Jacob an account of his conversation with Percy.

The old man laughed.

"So Albert says that as I make my bed I must lie upon it?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir; but I hope you won't be troubled at that. You will always be welcome here."

Uncle Jacob's eyes grew moist, and he regarded Bert with affection.

"You are a good boy and a true friend, Bert," he said, "and I shall not forget it."

"I don't know but Percy was right, Uncle Jacob. It does seem extravagant paying such a price for a ride."

"It's only for once in a way, Bert. You mustn't grudge the old man a little enjoyment in his vacation. I shall be going to work next week."

"You will? Where?" asked Bert eagerly.

"In New York. An old California friend of mine, who is in charge of a mine that has been put on the New York market, will give me a clerkship and a small salary which will support me in comfort. So you see I am all right."

"I am very glad to hear it, Uncle Jacob," said Bert joyfully. "I was afraid you wouldn't find anything to do, and would have to spend all your money on living."

"Come, Bert, that isn't much of a compliment to my ability. If I *am* sixty-five, I am able to earn a living yet, and though twelve dollars a week isn't much–"

"If I could earn twelve dollars a week I should feel rich, Uncle Jacob."

"True, but you are only fifteen."

"Almost sixteen."

"I forgot that," said Uncle Jacob, smiling. "Well, even at sixteen, a boy can hardly expect to earn as much as twelve dollars a week. By the way, how much does Albert pay you?"

"Four dollars a week."

"Is that about the usual price for boys employed as you are?"

"Most shoe bosses pay more. The squire pays low wages all round."

"Then why don't the men go elsewhere?"

"Because they live here, and it is better to work cheaper here than to move. Some have gone away."

"Well, keep up your courage, Bert, and the time will come when you will be earning twelve dollars a week like your rich old uncle. If the office were only in Lakeville, so that I could board with your mother–"

"I wish it was, Uncle Jacob."

"Well, Mary, I shan't have to open a cigar store in Lakeville," remarked Uncle Jacob, as his niece entered the room.

Mrs. Barton looked an inquiry, and Bert exclaimed: "Uncle Jacob has secured a clerkship in New York at twelve dollars a week."

"I am *really* glad!" said Mrs. Barton, with beaming face.

"Come, Mary, did you too think, like Bert here, that I was headed for the poorhouse?"

"I felt a little anxious for you, Uncle Jacob, I admit."

"You see that your fears were idle."

"Will you have to work very hard?" asked Mrs. Barton.

"No; my employer is an intimate friend."

"When do you commence work?"

"Next Monday, so that I must leave you on Saturday."

"Bert and I will both miss you; but as it is for your good, we won't complain. Now, Uncle Jacob, I hope you won't take it amiss if I urge you not to be too free with your money, but to try to save up some of your salary so that you can add to your little fund."

"Thank you, Mary. I suppose you are afraid I will be driving fast horses in Central Park, eh?"

"I am more afraid you will be too generous with your money, and give away more than you can afford."

"Well thought of, Mary! So far from that, I am going to turn miser and hoard up every cent I can."

"I don't think there is much danger of that."

"Oh, you have no idea how mean I can be if I try. However, as I shall be acting according to your advice, you can't find fault with me."

"I see you don't mean to follow my advice, Uncle Jacob."

"Still I am glad you gave it. It shows that you feel a real interest in your shabby old uncle. Some time—I can't promise how soon—I shall invite you and Bert to come and spend the day in New York. I will get a day off from the office, and we'll have a nice excursion somewhere."

On Friday, Uncle Jacob called on Squire Marlowe; not at the house, however, but at the factory.

"I've come to bid you good-by, Albert," he said.

"Are you going back to California?" asked the Squire.

"No, I am going to New York."

"It is expensive living in New York."

"I have obtained a situation there."

"Ah, indeed! That is different. What sort of a position?"

"I shall be a clerk in a mining office."

"What pay will you get?"

"Twelve dollars a week."

"Very fair! I congratulate you. You ought to live on that and save money besides."

"That's what Mary Barton says."

"Then she gives you very sensible advice. It will be a great deal better than opening a cigar store in Lakeville."

"I wouldn't do that after what you said on the subject," returned Uncle Jacob in a deferential tone, though there was a twinkle in his eye.

"I am glad you recognize the fact that I counseled you for your good," said the Squire pompously. "As an experienced business man, my judgment is worth something, I apprehend."

"Quite so, Albert; quite so! Is your wife feeling better?"

(Uncle Jacob had seen Mrs. Marlowe riding out the day before, apparently in full health.)

"She is somewhat improved, but still delicate," said Squire Marlowe guardedly. "I am sorry I cannot invite you to dine with us again before you go to the city."

"I should hardly be able to do so, as I go away to-morrow."

"Just so! I will say good-by for you, and that will do just as well."

"That's a load off my mind!" soliloquized the squire, after Uncle Jacob had left him. "I was afraid the old man would squander all his money, and then come upon me for that old loan. I hope he'll keep away from Lakeville in the future."

The next day Uncle Jacob left town. As he quitted the house, he put a sealed envelope into Mary Barton's hand.

"If you are ever in trouble, and cannot communicate with me," he said, "open this envelope. Take good care of it!"

"I will, Uncle Jacob. I will put it away in my trunk."

"Well, good-by, Mary, and God bless you!"

A minute later and Uncle Jacob was gone. Mrs. Barton went back to covering balls and Bert to his place in the shoe shop. Their united earnings enabled them to live comfortably, and they were content, though they had nothing to spare. But trouble was close at hand, though they did not suspect it.

What that trouble was will be disclosed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.
DISCHARGED

Three days later, while on his way to the factory, Bert overtook Luke Crandall, who was employed like himself in pegging shoes.

"Have you heard the news, Bert?" asked his friend.

"No; what is it?"

"All the peggers are to be discharged; you and I, and the two other boys."

"Is that true?" asked Bert, stopping short, and surveying his friend with a look of dismay.

"Yes; I wish it wasn't."

"What is the reason?"

"The squire has bought a pegging machine, and he has hired a man from out of town to run it. So he will have no need of us."

"How soon is he going to put it in?" asked Bert, with a sinking heart.

"Next Monday. At the end of this week we shall be discharged."

"What are you going to do?" Bert inquired, after a pause.

"I shall be all right. I have an uncle who keeps a store in Bradford, and I am going there to tend in the store, and shall board in the family. What shall you do?"

"I don't know," answered Bert soberly. "This has come on me so suddenly, that I haven't had time to think."

"There's precious little chance for a boy in Lakeville, unless he goes to work on a farm."

"I don't even know if there is a chance to do that. All the farmers are supplied with help. Besides, they generally pay a boy in his board and clothes, and I need money to help support my mother."

"Isn't old Marlowe your uncle?"

"No, but he is my mother's cousin."

"Then he ought to do something for you out of relationship."

"I don't expect it," answered Bert. "He appears to feel very little interest in us."

They had reached the factory, and entering, were soon at work. Before noon the bad news was confirmed, and the boys were informed that their services would not be required after Saturday night.

At dinner Bert informed his mother, and she too was dismayed. It was a calamity she had never dreamed of. She supposed Bert was sure of continued employment in pegging till he was old enough to be employed in some other part of the business.

"I don't see what we shall do, Bert," she said. "There is no other shop in Lakeville. If there were, you might get a chance there."

"There is no business of any kind here outside of Marlowe's shop."

"True. What are the other boys going to do?"

"Luke Crandall is going into his uncle's shop at Bradford, and the other two boys talk of leaving town."

"I do think Albert Marlowe might find some place for you. We are near relations, and he knows how I depend on your earnings."

"He isn't a man to consider that, mother."

Mrs. Barton was silent, but she determined to make an application to her cousin in Bert's behalf. Accordingly, in the evening, she said to him. "Bert, I am going out to make a call. I would like to have you look after the house while I am gone."

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Barton did not venture to let Bert know of her intention, for he would have done his best to prevent her applying to the squire for a special favor. Perhaps he was too proud, but it was an honorable pride. Besides, he knew very well that the appeal was likely to prove ineffectual.

With a faltering step Mrs. Barton advanced and rang the bell of her cousin's handsome house. It was a call from which she shrank, but she was spurred by necessity.

"Is Mr. Marlowe in?" she inquired.

"I will see, ma'am."

Squire Marlowe was at home, and she was ushered into his presence.

Albert Marlowe was not, on the whole, surprised to see his cousin. He guessed the errand that brought her, and he frowned slightly as she entered the room.

"Good evening," he said, in a distant tone. "I hope you are well."

"Well in health, but anxious in mind, Albert," she said. "Bert tells me that he has been discharged from the shop."

"Yes, but he is not the only one. There are three other boys."

"It has come upon us like a thunderbolt. I had no idea that he was in any danger of losing his place."

"I have nothing against your son, Mrs. Barton. It is a business necessity that compels me to dispense with his services."

"Why a business necessity?"

"You may have heard that I intend to introduce a pegging machine. It will do the work cheaper and more effectually than under the present system."

"Oh, why couldn't you have let matters remain as they were? You may gain something, but you are depriving the boys of their livelihood."

"You don't regard the matter in a business light, Mrs. Barton. I must keep up with the times. Other manufacturers are making the change, and I should stand in my own light if I adhered to the old-fashioned system."

"I don't pretend to know about business, Albert, but I do know that in dismissing Bert you deprive us of more than half our income, and Heaven knows we need it all."

"Your son can find something else to do."

"What is there for him to do in Lakeville? I shall be grateful if you will suggest anything."

"No doubt he can get a chance to work on a farm."

"I know of no farmer who needs his services, and even if there were one he would not get money for his services, and that is what we want."

"Of course farming isn't the only thing," said the squire vaguely. "If he looks round sharp he will come across something–"

Mrs. Barton shook her head.

"You know how little business there is in Lakeville," she answered. "Isn't there some other department in the factory in which you can employ him?"

Squire Marlowe shook his head.

"He is too young for any other work," he said.

"Then what are we to do?"

"Oh, you'll think of something," said the squire indefinitely. "He is to be in the shop the rest of the week, and that will give you time to think the matter over."

"Then you can't hold out any hope!" said Mrs. Barton mournfully.

"No, but you mustn't be despondent. Something will turn up."

Mrs. Barton was silent, and her sad face made the squire vaguely uncomfortable. He wished she would go.

"Mrs. Marlowe is not feeling well this evening," he said awkwardly, "or I would invite you to meet her. Some other evening–"

"I am not in the mood to meet any one to-night, Albert," she said. "I will be going," and she rose from her chair and moved toward the door.

"Good-evening, then. I am glad to have seen you."

Mrs. Barton did not reply to the compliment. Her heart was too full of sorrow to respond to what she knew to be insincere and unmeaning. She understood very well that Albert Marlowe was glad to be rid of her.

"How unreasonable women are!" muttered Squire Marlowe, impatiently, as he closed the door upon his unwelcome guest. "Mary Barton would have had me postpone all improvements in my shop for the sake of keeping that boy of hers in his place. Business considerations are as nothing to women. They are so unpractical."

Mrs. Barton walked homeward slowly, musing bitterly on her cousin's want of feeling.

"How cold-hearted he is!" she murmured. "He evidently cares nothing for our needs, or the prospect of our hardships. He lives in a fine house, and rears his family in luxury, while Bert and I are likely to want even the necessaries of life."

Perhaps Mrs. Barton was a little too despondent. Perhaps she ought to have had more trust in Providence; but there had been sorrows in her life which had robbed her of her natural hopefulness, and she was no longer as courageous in the face of threatening misfortune as she had once been.

She had nearly reached home when, from out of the darkness, a man's figure advanced from the roadside and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Who are you!" she asked faintly, suppressing a scream.

"Don't be frightened, Mary," was the reply, "I am your husband, Simeon Barton."

CHAPTER IX.
MRS. BARTON'S SECRET

Mrs. Barton staggered, and would have fallen, had not the other held her up. "You here," she exclaimed, in amazement, "after being absent so many years?"

"Yes; it has been a cruel exile. We have been very unfortunate."

"Where have you been these last ten years, Simeon?"

"For the last eight years in Canada."

"And you did not write me?"

"No; I feared it would set officers on my track. I have heard from you now and then, indirectly. Have you suffered much?"

"It has been a weary time. It would have been easier to bear if I had heard from you."

"A letter from Canada would have been sure to attract attention and invite comment. Besides, I had no money to send you. Misfortune has pursued me, and I have only been able to support myself. When I think of the probable author of my misfortunes, I own it has made me feel revengeful."

"To whom do you refer, Simeon?"

"To Albert Marlowe."

"What do you mean? How is he responsible for your—misfortune?"

"I will tell you. I believe that it was he who stole the bonds, the loss of which was imputed to me."

"Is it possible that you have any proof of this?" asked Mary Barton eagerly. "The bond that was found in your possession–"

"Was placed in my overcoat pocket for the express purpose of throwing suspicion upon me. You remember that it was a bond for five hundred dollars, while the amount stolen was six thousand."

"Yes."

"Albert and I were both at work in the same establishment. We were on a level, so far as means are concerned."

"Yes."

"Now he is a rich man," added Simeon Barton significantly.

"Yes; he is considered worth thirty thousand dollars."

"It was the stolen money that gave him his start, I verily believe."

"He did not start in business for himself for more than a year after—the trouble."

"No; for he thought it would invite suspicion. I have reason to think that he disposed of the bonds in Canada, and with the proceeds started in as a manufacturer. How otherwise could he have done so? He was only earning two dollars a day when we were working together, and it cost him all of that to support his family."

"I have often wondered where he obtained money to go into business."

"I don't think there is any mystery about it."

"And you have been compelled to bear the consequences of his wrong-doing while he has been living in luxury?" said Mary Barton bitterly.

"Yes; but mine is not a solitary case. Wickedness often flourishes in this world. We must look to the future for compensation."

"Do you think you will ever be able to prove your innocence, Simeon?"

"It is all that I live for. If I can do that, we can live together again. But tell me, before I go any further, how are you and the boy getting along?"

"We are comfortable," answered Mary Barton briefly. She did not care to add to her husband's anxieties by speaking of Bert's discharge.

"I wish I had some money to give you, but I only had enough to bring me here and return."

"You had an object in coming?"

"Yes; there was a man who was employed by Weeks Brothers at the time of the loss of the bonds. I learned some months since—it is not necessary to explain how—that he could throw light on the long unsolved mystery—that he knew the real thief. I am in search of him. Some time I hope to find him, and make clear my innocence by the aid of his testimony."

"Oh, Simeon, if you only could!" exclaimed Mrs. Barton, clasping her hands.

"I shall try, at all events."

"I wonder if it would not be well to consult Uncle Jacob?"

"Uncle Jacob!" repeated Simeon Barton in surprise.

"Yes; I have not told you. He has returned from California, and is now in New York."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; he spent a week at our house."

Mrs. Barton went on to give the particulars of Uncle Jacob's visit.

"He is a poor man," she concluded. "As I understand, he brought home but five hundred dollars, but he is lucky enough to be employed in an office in New York at a salary of twelve dollars a week."

"If I were earning that, and could hold up my head an honest man, without a stain—an undeserved stain—upon my name, I should be happy."

"Can you tell me Uncle Jacob's address?" he asked, after a pause. "I don't think I shall venture to call upon him, for I am subject to arrest on the old charge, as you know, and the New York detectives are sharp, but I might write to him and ask his advice. But stay! he thinks me dead, does he not?"

"Yes."

"And Bert—is that what you still call him?—he still thinks that he has no father living?"

"You wished it so, Simeon."

"Yes; but the time may come when the secret can be revealed to him. I may disclose myself to Uncle Jacob. I don't remember him very well, but–"

"He is the best and kindest of men. I wish, he could have found employment here."

"Did he visit Albert?"

"Yes; he remained at his house one night."

"Was he well received?"

"At first; for, coming from California, Albert supposed him rich. When he found he had but five hundred dollars, he lost no time in turning him out of the house."

"Poor Uncle Jacob! It must have hurt the old man's feelings."

"I feared it would, but he only seemed amused—not at all offended."

"He has seen so much of the world that he probably expected it. The old man seemed in good spirits, then?"

"Yes; he declared that he was well able to earn his own living still, though he is sixty-five, and was as gay and cheerful as a young man. He insisted on paying his board while he was with us."

"There is nothing mean about Uncle Jacob."

"No; and it is a mystery to me why such men as he, who would make so good use of riches, should almost always be poor."

"And men like Albert Marlowe are rich."

"Yes."

"There are a good many things that are difficult to make out. Where are you going to stay to-night, Simeon?" she asked, after a pause.

"I—don't know."

"I wish I could invite you to the house where you have the best right to be."

"I wish so, too."

"Bert doesn't know that you are alive. Perhaps I might introduce you as an old friend of his father."

"If you think it would do. He would not speak of your having a visitor?"

"Not if I told him not to do so."

"You have tempted me strongly, Mary. I should like to see our boy, to see with my own eyes how he is looking at fifteen. And it would be a comfort to rest once more beneath the same roof as the wife from whom I have been so long separated."

"I think we can risk it, Simeon. I must introduce you under another name."

"Call me Robinson. That is the name I have borne for some years past."

"Mother!" was heard from a little distance.

"Bert has come out in search of me, being alarmed by my long absence. Now, be on your guard."

"Is that you, mother? Where have you been so long? I got quite anxious about you."

"I met an old friend of your father, Bert, and in talking with him I forgot how time was passing. Mr. Robinson, this is my son Herbert."

Bert greeted the stranger politely. As his hand rested for a moment in the hand of Mr. Robinson, he felt the latter tremble.

"Do you remember your father, Herbert?" asked the supposed stranger.

"Not very well. He died when I was quite a young boy."

"True! It was indeed a long time since," murmured Robinson, with a sigh.

"Bert, I have invited Mr. Robinson to stay with us to-night. It is long since I have seen him and we may not meet again for some time. He will share your room."

"Certainly, mother."

They went together to the cottage. Mrs. Barton prepared some tea, and they sat down to a slight meal.

"Oh, if it could only continue thus!" thought Simeon Barton, as he looked wistfully at the wife and son from whom he had been so long separated. "It is like a sight of the promised land."

"Do you know my mother's cousin, Albert Marlowe?" asked Bert, during the evening.

"I used to know him some years ago."

"Shall you call upon him? He is a rich man now."

"I think not I never—liked—him much."

Bert laughed.

"Ditto for me!" he said. "He is a cold, selfish man. He is not popular with his workmen."

"By the way, Bert," said his mother, "you need not mention Mr. Robinson's visit. His business requires secrecy."

"All right, mother! I'll bear it in mind."

CHAPTER X.
STOLEN MONEY

Saturday afternoon arrived, and with it came Bert's discharge from the shoe shop. He put the four dollars in his pocket, and with a sober face went home.

"There are my week's wages, mother," he said. "I don't know when I shall have any more money to hand you."

"We won't borrow trouble to-night, Bert," responded Mrs. Barton, concealing her solicitude under a cheerful exterior. "To-morrow is Sunday, and we will defer all worldly anxieties till it is over."

"You are right, mother," said Bert, readily chiming in with her cheerful humor. "I am young and strong, and there is plenty of work to be done in the world."

"Keep up your courage, Bert, and you will be more likely to win success."

When Sunday was over, however, Bert felt that he must begin to look about him. But the more he looked the more downhearted he became. He went to the village store, having heard that the boy employed there was about to leave. After buying a pound of sugar for his mother, he ventured to say, "Mr. Jones, don't you want to hire a boy?"

"Why should I want to hire a boy?" asked the store-keeper, in a tone of surprise.

"I thought that Herman was going to leave you."

"So he was, but he has changed his mind."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bert, disappointed.

"Are you asking for yourself?" inquired the merchant.

"Yes, sir."

"I thought you were at work in the shoe shop."

"So I was, but I have lost my place."

"Ha!" exclaimed the store-keeper suspiciously. "If Squire Marlowe has discharged you, I don't want to hire you."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Jones, about the cause of my discharge. He had no fault to find with me."

"So *you* say," returned Jones, in evident skepticism. "Boys don't get discharged for nothing."

Bert felt inclined to be angry, but he controlled his temper.

"I am a pegger, and the squire has introduced a pegging machine, so he has discharged all the peggers."

"Oh, that's different. Well, I'm sorry for you, but I have no vacancy."

"If Herman should change his mind again, will you think of me?"

"Yes, I will. I think you are a good boy, and you look strong for your size."

Bert felt a little encouraged by this promise, though it was very doubtful if it would ever amount to anything.

Day after day passed, and no employment offered. But one morning a bright idea came to Bert. Blueberries were just coming into the market, and he knew of a large pasture a little over a mile away.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.