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HORATIO JR.

RUPERT'S AMBITION

Horatio Alger
Rupert's Ambition

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Jr. Horatio Alger

Rupert's Ambition

CHAPTER I.

RUPERT LOSES HIS PLACE

"Rupert, the superintendent wishes to see you."

Rupert Rollins, a tall boy of sixteen, was engaged in folding some pieces of cloth which had been shown during the day to customers. It was the principal salesroom of Tenney & Rhodes, who conducted a large wholesale dry goods house in the lower part of New York city.

"Very well, Harry," he said. "I will go at once. I wonder what he wants to see me about."

"I don't know. I hope it is to raise your wages."

"That isn't likely in these dull times, though a raise would be very welcome."

When Rupert had finished folding the pieces he was upon he left his place and knocked at the door of a small room occupied by the superintendent.

A man of about forty was seated at a desk writing.

"Mr. Frost," said Rupert, respectfully, "I hear you wish to speak with me."

"Yes; take a seat."

Rupert was tired, for he had been on his feet all day, and was glad to sink into a chair near the door.

"How long have you been in our employ?" asked the superintendent, in the quick tones habitual to him.

"Nearly six months."

"So I supposed. You are one of the last clerks taken on."

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry, I have bad news for you. Mr. Tenney feels, in view of the dullness in business, that it will be advisable to diminish his clerical force. As you are one of the last taken on, he has selected you and a few others for discharge."

Rupert turned pale. What a terrible misfortune this would be to him he well knew. The future seemed to him dark indeed.

"I hope, sir," he said, in an unsteady voice, "that the firm is not dissatisfied with me."

"Oh, no. No indeed! I have heard only good reports of you. We shall be glad to recommend you to any other firm."

"Thank you, sir. When do you wish me to go?"

"You can stay till the end of the week."

Rupert bowed and left the room. His head was in a whirl, and he felt that a calamity had indeed fallen upon him. His wages were but five dollars a week, but this sum, small as it was, was the main support of his mother and sister, the latter a chronic invalid, only two years younger than himself. What they were to do when this small income was taken away he could not conjecture. He felt that he must look out at once for a new place.

"Well, Rupert, what business did the superintendent have with you?" asked Harry Bacon, Rupert's most intimate friend in the store.

"Only to tell me that I was discharged," said Rupert, quietly.

"Why, that's a shame!" exclaimed Harry, impetuously. "What are you discharged for?"

"Only on account of dull times. The house will give me a recommendation."

"It seems too bad you are to go. Why didn't they discharge me, too?"

"You have been here longer, and it is only those last taken on who must go. I suppose it is all right, but it is hard."

"Keep up your courage, Rupert. It isn't as if you were discharged for cause. With a recommendation from Tenney & Rhodes you ought to find another place here."

"Yes, in ordinary times, but you know business is dull elsewhere as well as with us. It isn't a good time to change places."

"Well, you'll get something else. All branches of business may not be as dull as ours."

Harry Bacon had a sanguine disposition, and always looked on the bright side. His assurances encouraged Rupert a little, and he determined to do his best to find something to do, no matter what.

At five o'clock the store closed. Retail stores kept open later, but early hours are one of the advantages of a wholesale establishment.

Rupert bent his steps towards Elizabeth Street. In an upper apartment in one of the shabby houses fronting on this thoroughfare lived his mother and sister. It was only a three-story house, and there were but two flights of stairs to ascend.

Entering the principal room, Rupert saw his mother with her head bent in an attitude of despondency over the table. Through a door he could see his sister lying uneasily on a bed in a small inner room, her face showing that she was suffering pain.

Rupert stepped forward and with tender sympathy strove to raise his poor mother from her position of despondency.

"What is the matter, mother?" he asked. "Are you not well?"

"Yes, Rupert," she answered, raising her head, "but for the moment I felt discouraged. Grace has been suffering more than usual to-day. Sickness and poverty, too, are hard to bear."

"That is true, mother," and Rupert's heart sank as he remembered that by the end of the week the poverty would become destitution.

"Grace has been unable to eat anything to-day. She thought she could eat an orange, but I absolutely didn't have money enough to buy one."

"She shall have an orange," said Rupert, in a low voice.

The sick girl heard, and her face brightened. It was an instinctive craving, such as a sick person sometimes has.

"I should enjoy an orange," she said, faintly. "I think I could sleep after eating one."

"I will go right out and get one."

Rupert put on his hat and went down stairs.

"You may buy a loaf of bread, Rupert," said his mother, as he was starting, "that is, if you have money enough."

"Yes, mother."

There was an Italian fruit vender's stall at the next corner. As he stepped out on the sidewalk Rupert took out his slender purse and examined its contents. It held but thirty-five cents, and this must last till Saturday night, when he would receive his weekly wages.

Going to the stand, he examined the Italian's stock. He saw some large, attractive oranges marked "five cents." There were some smaller ones marked three cents, but Rupert judged that they were sour, and would not please his sister. Yet five cents was considerable for him to pay under the circumstances. It represented one-seventh of his scanty stock of money.

"Won't you let me have one of these oranges for four cents?" he asked.

Nicolo, the Italian, shook his head.

"No," he answered. "It is good-a orange. It is worth more than I ask."

Rupert sighed and hesitated.

"I suppose I shall have to pay it," he said, regretfully.

He drew out his purse and took out a nickel.

"I'll take an orange," he said.

"Is it for yourself?" asked a gentle voice.

Rupert turned, and saw a tiny woman, not over five feet in height, with a pleasant, kindly face.

"No," he said, "it is for my sister."

"Is your sister sick?"

"Yes. She has taken a fancy to an orange, and I want her to have one, but—it is extravagant for one in my circumstances to pay a nickel for one."

"Would you mind," said the little woman, hesitatingly, "would you mind if I sent an orange to your sister?"

Rupert hesitated. He was proud, but not foolishly so, and he saw that the offer was meant in kindness.

"I should say it was very kind in you," he said, candidly.

The little woman nodded contentedly, and spoke a low word to the Italian.

He selected four oranges and put them in a paper bag.

"But that is too many," expostulated Rupert.

"No," answered the little woman, with a smile. "Keep the rest for to-morrow," and before Rupert had a chance to thank her she had paid Nicolo and was hurrying down the street.

The spontaneous kindness of the little woman, who was a perfect stranger, helped to cheer Rupert. He felt that there were some kind people in the world, and his trust in Providence was increased. He went to a baker's, near by, and purchased a ten-cent loaf of bread. Then he made his way back to his humble home in Elizabeth Street.

As he entered the room, the sick girl looked up eagerly. Rupert emptied the oranges on the table, and her face brightened as she saw the yellow fruit which she craved.

"Rupert, I am afraid you were extravagant," said his mother. "These oranges must have cost five cents each."

"Yes, they did."

"We cannot afford such a large purchase in our circumstances."

"They cost me nothing, mother. They are a present to Grace from a lady who met me at the stand."

"She must have a kind heart. Do you know who she was?"

"No, I never saw her before."

"The world is not all unkind. Grace, I will prepare an orange for you. I hope you will relish it."

The sick girl enjoyed the fruit, and after eating it lay back content.

"May I have another in the morning?" she asked.

"Yes, my child."

So the evening passed not wholly unhappily, but still Rupert could not help thinking of the next week, when he would be out of a position.

CHAPTER II. OUT OF WORK

On Saturday Rupert received his last week's wages at the store.

"I am awfully sorry you are going, Rupert," said Harry Bacon. "It is a shame you are discharged."

"No, it is not a shame. It is only because business is dull that I have to go. I can't blame the firm."

Rupert ascended the stairway at his humble home in Elizabeth Street with a slow step. He felt that he could no longer conceal his discharge from his mother, and he knew what a blow it would be to her. So as he handed the money to Mrs. Rollins he said: "I have bad news for you, mother. I am discharged."

"Discharged!" repeated his mother, in dismay. "Why? What have you done?"

"There is no dissatisfaction with me. I am discharged because times are dull, and business has fallen off."

"I am glad at least that no fault is found with you, but what shall we do? Your salary was all we had to depend upon except the little I make by sewing."

"Don't be discouraged, mother. I shall start to find a place Monday morning. I am allowed to refer to the old firm."

"But—do you think there is any chance to get in elsewhere? Won't other firms be affected by the dull times?"

This was precisely what troubled Rupert, but he answered his mother cheerfully.

"To-morrow is Sunday," he said. "Don't let us think of the future till Monday morning. I am sure something will turn up. At the worst, I can earn something by selling papers."

When Monday morning came Rupert started out on his quest. He had been sent on errands to several houses in the same line, and he resolved to go from one to another in the hope of finding a vacancy.

At the first he was pleasantly received. He was recognized as coming from Tenney & Rhodes, and it was supposed he came on an errand from them. When he asked for a place the superintendent looked distrustful.

"Why do you leave Tenney & Rhodes?" he was asked.

"Because the times are dull, and they are parting with some of their clerks."

"Will they recommend you?"

"Yes. Here is a recommendation," and Rupert took a folded paper from the envelope in which he had placed it.

"That is satisfactory," said the superintendent, his face clearing, "but the same dullness which has reduced their business affects ours. So far from taking on new clerks, we may have to discharge some of those at present in our employ."

Of course there was no more to be said. Rupert visited five other firms, but in each case the answer was the same. They had no vacancy, and did not expect to have any.

It was one o'clock, time for lunch, but Rupert did not feel hungry. His anxiety had taken away his appetite. He rested for an hour on one of the benches in City Hall Park, and then started out again. He resolved now to apply for a position of any kind, since there seemed to be no opening in the business to which he had been trained.

But he met with no better success. Everywhere there were complaints of hard times.

"You are doing better than I am, my boy," said one business man bluntly.

Rupert looked about the large store in which he was standing, and said: "I don't see how that can be, sir, I am making nothing."

"And I am making less than nothing. Last month I fell behind five hundred dollars."

"I am sorry to hear it, sir," said Rupert, in a tone of sympathy.

The merchant looked at him approvingly.

"You appear to be a good boy," he said. "I wish I had a place for you. I can send you on an errand, if that will be any object to you."

"Anything, sir, will be welcome."

"Then you may take a note from me to a firm in Astor Place. Wait five minutes and it will be ready."

Rupert took a seat, and in five minutes the merchant reappeared with a sealed note.

"This is the note," he said, "and here is a quarter for taking it."

"Thank you, sir."

The sum was not large, but Rupert was pleased to think that he would earn something.

"Well," said his mother, when at five o'clock he entered the room. "Have you found a place?"

"No, mother, places seem to be scarce. Still, I have earned something."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"It isn't much—only twenty-five cents. I received it for going on an errand."

"It is better than nothing."

"Yes, it will buy our supper."

Two days more passed. They were equally barren of results. It was nearing the end of the week, and except the silver quarter Rupert had earned nothing.

Things began to look serious. But little was left of his last week's wages, and the time was coming when they would be entirely destitute. Rupert, as he passed through the business district, reflected sadly that while thousands were at work there seemed to be no place and no work for him. He was going down Chambers Street toward the Elevated station when he saw in front of him a young man, perhaps thirty years of age, whose unsteady movements seemed to indicate that he was under the influence of liquor. He came near falling as Rupert neared him.

"Can't I assist you?" asked Rupert, stepping to his side.

The young man glanced at the boy who addressed him with a look of inquiry.

"Yes," he said. "Take my arm."

Rupert did so.

"Where do you wish to go?" he asked.

"I live in Harlem—at One-hundred-and-Seventeenth Street," replied the young man. "Have you a couple of hours to spare?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then see me home. I will make it worth your while."

"I shall be glad to do so," said Rupert, cheerfully.

"I suppose you understand what is the matter with me?"

"I should think you had been drinking too much."

"You are right. I have. Shameful, isn't it?"

"Well, it isn't altogether creditable," said Rupert, not wishing to hurt the other's feelings.

"I should say not. However, it isn't quite so bad as it seems. I haven't been drinking hard, only I am so constituted that I can drink but little without its affecting me."

They had now reached the stairway leading up to the Elevated road.

"Help me upstairs, boy. What is your name?"

"Rupert."

"Very well, Rupert."

When they reached the landing the young man took his purse from his pocket.

"Pay out of that," he said.

Rupert selected a dime and bought two tickets. Then they passed the box where the tickets were to be deposited, and entered a train which had just arrived. They took seats in one corner, and the young man sat down with an air of relief.

"I feel sleepy," he said. "If I should fall asleep, wake me up at One-hundred-and-Sixteenth Street Station."

"Yes, sir."

Rupert was able now to examine his companion a little more closely. He did not have a dissipated look, and Rupert judged that he was not in the habit of allowing himself to be overcome by liquor. Indeed, he had rather a refined look. It seemed to the boy a pity that he could not resist the temptation to drink.

As they were approaching One-hundred-and-Sixteenth Street Rupert aroused his companion, who opened his eyes in a bewildered way.

"Eh? What?" he asked.

"This is where we are to get out, sir."

"Oh, yes, I remember. Let me take your arm."

With this help he got down stairs, and they turned to the left.

"It is perhaps ten minutes' walk," said the young man. "You will see me all the way home?"

"Yes, sir. Do you feel any better?"

"I can walk a little more steadily. You are sure I am not putting you out?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I have plenty of time on my hands, for I am out of work."

"Indeed! And are you poor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you live with your father?"

"My father is dead. I am helping to support my mother and sister."

"Why, that is too bad!" said the young man, in a tone of sympathy. "I am out of work, too, but then I am rich."

"I am not troubled in that way," said Rupert, smiling.

"I live with my mother. I am glad she is out of the city, so that she won't see me in my present condition."

"Don't you think of working, sir? I shouldn't think you would know how to pass the time."

"I only lately returned from Europe. I may go into business after awhile. To be sure I don't need to earn anything, but if I have some steady employment I shall be less likely to disgrace myself."

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Certainly. My name is Frank Sylvester, I hope you are not a newspaper reporter."

"Oh, no, sir," said Rupert, smiling again.

"I should not like to have this little adventure of mine get into the papers. Do you see that house yonder?"

"Yes."

"It is the one where I live. If you have a little more time to spare won't you come in and stay a short time?"

"Yes, sir, if you desire it."

They reached the house and Sylvester rang the bell.

The door was opened by a maid servant about forty years of age. She looked at Sylvester's companion curiously.

"A young friend of mine, Rachel," said the young man. "Get ready a little supper for us, will you? Some tea, cold meat and toast."

"All right, Mr. Frank."

They went into a pleasant sitting-room, where Rupert was invited to sit down.

"That was an old family servant," exclaimed Sylvester. "If you hadn't been with me she would have taken me to task, for she saw I had been drinking."

CHAPTER III. IN A TIGHT PLACE

Presently Rachel announced tea. Sylvester had bathed his face, and thus removed some of the indications of his conviviality.

The house was handsomely furnished. The room in which the tea table was spread was particularly cozy and comfortable, and when he took his seat at the table, Rupert could not help wishing that his mother could be with him.

"What are you thinking about, Rupert?" asked Frank Sylvester, who noticed his expression.

Rupert hesitated.

"Come, tell me. I am your friend."

"I couldn't help thinking of the very different supper my mother will have."

"To be sure. You are a good boy for thinking of her. Where do you live?"

"At 117 Elizabeth Street."

Frank Sylvester took out a note book and jotted down the address.

Rachel Clark waited upon the table. Sylvester saw that her curiosity was excited about Rupert, and he decided to gratify it.

"I suppose you are wondering where I met my new friend, Rachel?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"He met me. I had been drinking too much, and I am afraid I should have got into trouble if he had not taken charge of me."

Rachel beamed upon Rupert.

"He was very kind," she said, "but oh, Mr. Frank—"

"I know just what you are going to say, Rachel," said Sylvester, good-humoredly. "I am going to have Rupert come and see me often, and he will help keep me straight. And by the way, Rachel, his mother is poor, and I want you to put up some cold meat and other nice things in a basket. I will send them to her."

"I shall be very glad to do so, Mr. Frank."

"You will stand high in Rachel's good graces, Rupert," said Sylvester, as she left the room. "She thinks everything of me, and evidently believes I am safe in your company. Suppose I make you my guardian?"

"I am afraid you wouldn't look up to me with the proper respect, Mr. Sylvester."

"Then for respect we will substitute attachment. Now tell me a little about yourself. How does it happen that you are out of a place?"

"It's the dull times, Mr. Sylvester. I was in the employ of Tenney & Rhodes."

"I know the firm."

"And they would have retained me if business had been good, but I was laid off on Saturday."

"What wages did they pay you?"

"Five dollars a week."

"And you lived on that?"

"We tried to."

"While I have had and wasted large sums of money. If I were in business I would give you a place. As it is, I will see if any of my friends want a clerk."

When supper was over, Rupert said he must go.

"Won't you stay the evening?" asked his new friend. "At least wait a few minutes. Rachel is putting up a basket for you."

The servant presently appeared with a basket neatly covered with a napkin.

"Perhaps I had better send it by an expressman, Rupert."

"Oh, no, sir. I shall be glad to carry it myself. It will be very acceptable at home."

As Rupert lifted it, Sylvester took from his pocket the purse from which Rupert had paid the car fare and handed it to him.

"Accept it," he said, "in return for your friendly services."

"You are paying me too liberally, Mr. Sylvester."

"Let me judge of that."

In the street Rupert did not wait to examine the purse. It was growing late, and he was in haste to get home. He feared that his mother might feel anxious about him, and he made his way as quickly as possible to the nearest Elevated station.

The train was only partly full, and Rupert found a seat near the door. He placed the basket on the floor in front of him.

Next to him sat a young woman rather showily dressed. Rupert casually took out the purse which had just been given him with the intention of examining the contents, but it occurred to him that he might find a more suitable place than an Elevated car, and he put it back again. His actions had, however, been noticed by the girl at his side.

At Fiftieth Street she rose to leave the car, but had not quite reached the door when she put her hand into her pocket and uttered a cry.

"I have been robbed," she exclaimed.

"Of what have you been robbed?" asked the guard.

"Of a purse."

"Where were you sitting?"

"Just here."

"Do you suspect anyone of taking your purse?"

"Yes, this boy took it. I am almost sure of it."

As she spoke she pointed to Rupert, who flushed with indignation.

"It is false," he said.

"If you don't believe me," said the girl, "search him. I am sure he has the purse in his pocket."

"What kind of a purse was it?" asked a quiet-looking man, sitting on the opposite side.

"It was a morocco purse," and the girl described the purse Rupert had in his pocket.

"Young man we will have to search you," said the guard. "If you have a purse in your pocket, produce it."

Rupert did so mechanically.

"There!" said the girl, triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you? Give it to me and I won't say anything more about it."

"I can't do that," said Rupert, sturdily, "for it belongs to me."

"What barefaced depravity!" groaned a severe-looking old lady opposite. "And so young, too."

"You're right, ma'am. It's shocking," said the girl. "I didn't think he'd go to do it, but you can't tell from appearances."

"Young man, you'd better give up the purse," said the guard, who was quite deceived by the young woman's assurance.

"No, sir!" said Rupert, pale but resolute. "The purse is mine, and I will keep it."

"Did you ever hear the like!" said the girl. "You'd better call an officer. I did mean to get off here, but I'll stay till I get my purse."

"Stop a minute," said the quiet-looking man opposite. "How much money was there in the purse you say the boy took from you?"

"I can't rightly say," repeated the girl, hesitating.

"You can give some idea."

"Well, there was a little over two dollars in silver change."

"My boy," said the new actor in the scene, "will you trust me with the purse while I ascertain whether this young woman is correct."

"Yes, sir," answered Rupert, who felt confidence in the good will of his new acquaintance.

The lawyer, for he was one, opened the purse, and his eye lighted up, as he looked inside.

"Did you say there was as much as five dollars in the purse?" he asked.

"No, sir, there wasn't as much as that," answered the girl, positively.

The lawyer nodded as if a suspicion were verified.

"Then the purse isn't yours," he said.

"There may have been more," said the girl, finding she had made a mistake. "Yes, I remember now there was, for my sister paid me back some money she was owing me."

"That won't do," said the lawyer, quietly. "The purse isn't yours."

"If it isn't hers," said the old lady sharply, "how did she happen to describe it so exactly?" and she looked round triumphantly.

"I could have described it just as accurately," returned the lawyer.

"You're smart!" said the severe-looking old lady, with a sneer.

"Not at all. Soon after the boy got in the car he took out the purse, so that anyone could see it. The person who charges him with taking it from her saw it in his hands, and scrutinized it closely. I understand now the object she had in doing so."

"It's a shame," said the girl, with a last desperate effort at imposition. "It's a shame that a poor girl should be robbed, and a gentleman like you," she added spitefully, "should try to protect the thief."

"So I say," put in the old lady, frowning severely at Rupert. "I don't know who you are, young woman, but I advise you to call an officer and have the young scamp arrested."

Rupert felt uneasy, for he knew that in an arrest like this he might not be able to clear himself.

"Why don't you ask the boy how much money there is in the purse?" continued the old lady.

"Well thought of. My boy, can you tell me what the purse contains?"

Rupert colored. He saw at once that he was in a tight place. He wished now that he had examined the purse when he left the house in Harlem.

"No," he answered. "I do not know."

"Didn't I tell you?" cried the old lady, venomously.

Even the lawyer looked surprised.

"How is it that you can't tell, if the purse is yours?" he asked.

"Because, sir, it was given me this evening by a gentleman in Harlem, and I have not yet had time to examine it."

"Your story may be true," said the lawyer, "but it does not seem probable."

"Oho!" the old lady said, "the boy owns up that he is a thief. If he didn't get it from this young woman he stole it from a man in Harlem."

Rupert glanced from one to the other, and he realized that things looked dark for him.

CHAPTER IV. A FALSE REPORT

"What was the name of the gentleman in Harlem from whom you say you obtained the purse?" asked the lawyer.

"Mr. Frank Sylvester," answered Rupert, promptly.

The lawyer looked interested.

"I know Mr. Sylvester," he said. "I live on the same street."

"He gave me this basket of provisions also," added Rupert.

"Why did he give you the purse?"

"Because I met him down town feeling ill, and at his request went home with him."

"The boy is all right," said the lawyer, looking satisfied. "Here is the purse. It is undoubtedly yours."

"And where do I come in?" asked the young woman. "Is that boy going off with my money?"

Just then they reached the next station, and among those who boarded the train was a policeman. The girl evidently recognized him, for she turned away to escape attention.

Before the officer had a chance to speak to her the old lady broke in with:

"Policeman, there's a poor girl been robbed of her purse by that boy, and that gentleman there is protecting him."

The policeman laughed.

"So, Kate, you have had your purse stolen, have you?" he asked.

The girl looked embarrassed.

"I may be mistaken," she admitted.

"I am afraid you have been up to one of your tricks."

"Do you know the girl?" asked the lawyer.

"I have arrested her more than once for playing a confidence game. It is only three weeks since I had her up before the Jefferson Market Police Court."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the old lady, astounded.

The girl sprang from her seat when the next station was reached, and hastily left the car.

"My boy," said the lawyer, "I must ask your pardon for doubting you even for a moment. This good lady, too, ought to apologize to you."

The old lady sniffed contemptuously.

"I never apologize to boys," she said.

"Then, madam, take care you don't do them injustice," said the lawyer gravely.

"I am old enough to manage my own affairs," cried the old lady, with asperity.

"You are certainly old enough, but—"

"Don't you speak to me again, sir."

The lawyer smiled, and crossing the car sat down at Rupert's side.

"My boy," he said, "you came near getting into a scrape because you did not know how much the purse contained. Suppose you count the money now."

Rupert took out the purse and followed this friendly advice. To his gratification and surprise he found a ten-dollar gold piece and two dollars and a half in silver.

His face expressed the joy he felt.

"That is a godsend," he said. "Do you think Mr. Sylvester knew about the gold?"

"I have no doubt of it. He is a very kind-hearted and generous man. You may keep the money without hesitation."

The time soon came when Rupert was to leave the Elevated train. He hurried home with joyful heart, feeling that he was carrying good news. When he entered the little room he found his mother again in an attitude of despondency.

"What is the matter, mother?" he asked.

"I don't know what we shall do, Rupert," she said. "I went round to Mr. Jacob Grubb's clothing store this afternoon for more work, and he said business was so dull he would not have any more work for a month."

"Then you can take a vacation, mother," said Rupert, lightly.

"But how shall we live in that case, Rupert? You are out of work."

"Mother, don't worry. I have made more to-day than in any week when I had regular work. First, here is a basketful of provisions," and he removed the cover from the basket, displaying the contents. "Have you had supper yet?"

"No."

"Then suppose you make some tea, and we will have a nice supper."

"You didn't buy those provisions, Rupert?"

"No, they were given me by a new friend. But that isn't all. What do you say to this?" and he emptied the purse on the table.

"Truly you have been fortunate," said Mrs. Rollins, with new cheerfulness. "It has come in good time, too, for our rent will fall due on Saturday."

"Then, mother, you had better take this money, and take care of it till it is wanted."

Just as Mrs. Rollins was placing the purse in a bureau drawer Mrs. Marlow, who lived on the floor below, opened the door and entered the room without knocking.

"Excuse my comin' in without knockin'," she said. "I didn't think."

Mrs. Marlow was in the habit of moving about in a noiseless, stealthy way, and was not a favorite with Rupert or his mother. They felt that there was something suspicious and underhanded about her.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Marlow?" asked Mrs. Rollins, civilly.

"I'm all out of matches. Can you give me a few?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Marlow took the matches, but did not go. She sank into a chair and grew social.

"And how is the times affectin' you, Mrs. Rollins?" she asked.

"Rupert is out of employment. All he has to depend upon are odd jobs."

Mrs. Marlow darted a curious glance at the bureau drawer in which her neighbor had deposited the purse.

"It don't make so much difference as long as a body has got money to fall back upon," she said.

"That is not my condition."

"I'm sorry for it. I surmised you might have money ahead. You're better off than I am, for I have no boy to work for me."

"If I am better off than anybody," said Mrs. Rollins, with a faint smile, "I suppose I ought not to complain."

"My! What a nice lot of provisions!" exclaimed Mrs. Marlow, espying for the first time the open basket. "Sure, you buy things by the quantity."

"That was a present to Rupert from a rich gentleman whose acquaintance he made."

"It's a nice thing to have rich friends. Rupert, would you mind tellin' the gentleman that you know a poor widder that would be thankful for his kind assistance?"

"I don't feel well enough acquainted with Mr. Sylvester for that," said Rupert, annoyed.

"Sure his name is Sylvester, is it? And where does he live?"

"In Harlem."

"And what's the street and number?"

"I should prefer not to tell you."

"Ah, it's selfish you are. You want to keep him to yourself."

"I don't expect to see him again."

"Then why do you mind tellin' me where he lives?"

"I don't want to annoy him."

Mrs. Marlow turned her attention to his mother.

"Would you mind givin' me a small bit of meat for my supper, you've got so much?" she said.

Her request was complied with, and she at length left the room.

"What a disagreeable woman!" exclaimed Rupert. "She was prying about all the time she was here."

"Yes. I don't enjoy her company much, but I can't order her out of the room."

They had a nice supper, which Mrs. Rollins and Grace enjoyed. Rupert sat down at the table, but confined himself to a cup of tea, having already supped at Mr. Sylvester's.

The next day he resumed his hunt for a place, knowing well that his good luck of the day previous would not take the place of regular employment. But in dull times searching for a place is discouraging work.

He was indeed offered a position in a drug store up town at three dollars a week, but there were two objections to accepting it. The small pay would not more than half defray the expenses of their little household, and, besides, the hours would be very long.

Resolving to leave no means untried, Rupert decided to remain out till five o'clock. Perhaps something might turn up for him at the last moment. He was walking in front of the Metropolitan Hotel when a boy hailed him in evident surprise.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I be all right, George?" asked Rupert, in great surprise.

"I thought you had broken your leg."

"Who told you such nonsense?"

"There was a slip of paper brought to your mother early this afternoon, saying that you had been run over by a horse car, and had been carried into a drug store near Thirtieth Street."

Rupert was amazed.

"Who brought the paper?"

"A messenger boy."

"And I suppose my mother was very much frightened?"

"She went out directly, and took the car up to Thirtieth Street."

"What can it mean?"

"I don't know," said George Parker, shaking his head. "I am glad it isn't true."

"If anybody played this trick on purpose, I'd like to give him a good shaking."

"You'd better go home and let your mother know you are all right."

"I will."

CHAPTER V. MRS. MARLOW'S SCHEME

Mrs. Marlow was of a covetous disposition, and not overburdened with principle. When she saw Mrs. Rollins drop a purse into her bureau drawer, she immediately began to consider how she could manage to appropriate it. It was necessary to get into the room when the widow was out, but unfortunately for her plans, Mrs. Rollins seldom left her daughter.

"Why can't she go out and get a bit of amusement like other folks?" she muttered.

Presently Mrs. Marlow had a bright idea. If the widow could suspect that some accident had happened to Rupert her absence could be secured.

She made her way to a district messenger office, and wrote a message announcing that Rupert had been run over and had his leg broken.

Then she went home and waited for the success of her stratagem.

Opening her door, she soon saw the young messenger ascend the stairs.

"Where does Mrs. Rollins live?" he asked.

"On the next floor," she answered, smiling with satisfaction.

Soon—almost immediately—Mrs. Rollins came down stairs in a terrible state of anxiety. She scarcely noticed Mrs. Marlow, who was watching her through the open door of her room, but hurried on her sad errand.

"Now's my chance!" thought Mrs. Marlow. "I hope the brat's asleep."

She crept softly up stairs and stealthily opened the door of her neighbor's room without knocking. Once in the room, she looked cautiously toward the bed. Grace had her face turned toward the wall and was in a light slumber.

"Heaven be praised!" thought Mrs. Marlow.

She walked on tiptoe to the bureau and opened the upper drawer. There was the purse! Mrs. Rollins had gone out in such a hurry that she had not thought to take it.

Mrs. Marlow took it hurriedly and dropped it into her capacious pocket.

Before she could leave the room Grace woke, and turning her head saw her.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Marlow? Why are you here?" she asked, in a startled voice.

"Drat the child!" muttered Mrs. Marlow, under her breath. Then aloud, "I thought you was asleep, my dear, and I didn't want to disturb you."

"But why are you here? Where is my mother?"

"She went out in a hurry like as if she had heard bad news. I saw her go out, and thought you might want something. So I came up, but I didn't want to disturb you."

Grace was surprised. It was not like Mrs. Marlow to be so thoughtful and considerate.

"No," she said, "I don't want anything—except my mother."

"She won't be gone long, my dear."

"Did she say anything to you when she went out?"

"No; but I saw a telegraph boy come upstairs with a message like, and she went out directly afterwards."

"I wish I knew what she went out for."

"You'll know soon. I must hurry back now, for my kettle will be bilin'."

Once in her own room Mrs. Marlow opened the purse, after she had locked the door. Her delight at discovering the gold piece was great.

"And it's a gold piece you've got, Mrs. Rollins!" she exclaimed. "Sure you're in luck, Maggie Marlow, for once in your life. It's ten dollars, as sure as you live. And I might be passin' it off for a quarter. I'll have to get it changed quick."

Mrs. Rollins had taken a dollar in silver, but there was a dollar and a half left besides the gold piece.

After she got into her own room it occurred to her that she might have hunted up the basket of provisions and helped herself from what was left.

"But it don't matter," she reflected. "With all this money I can buy what I like."

She put on her bonnet and shawl, and going down stairs went to the nearest grocery store.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Marlow?" asked the grocer.

"You may give me a pound of tea, a pound of butter, a pound of sugar and a loaf of bread," answered Mrs. Marlow, volubly.

"Are you sure you've got money enough to pay for them?" asked the grocer, doubtfully.

"Yes, and more, too."

Upon this assurance the articles were put up, and Mrs. Marlow passed over the gold eagle.

"A ten-dollar gold piece!" exclaimed the grocer, in surprise. "And where did you get so much money? Have you come into a fortune?"

"Sure it was given me by a cousin of my husband—he's a rich man, and lives uptown. It isn't often he thinks of me, but he opened his heart this time."

This explanation seemed plausible, and the grocer gave Mrs. Marlow her change—about nine dollars.

"I'm glad you are so lucky," he remarked. "I shall be glad to have you come again—as long as the money lasts," he added, with a laugh.

"Sure I made a good excuse. He'll never mistrust," said Mrs. Marlow to herself, as she went back to her room. "Now, Mrs. Rollins, you may come back as soon as you like."

Mrs. Rollins was away three hours. She visited the locality mentioned in the note she had received, but could hear nothing of a boy being run over by the cars and having his leg broken. She went into a drug store, but neither the druggist nor his clerks had heard of any such accident.

"Where can they have taken my boy?" she moaned. "If I could only find him, and have him brought home!"

There seemed to be absolutely no clew. After a while she bethought her of the sick girl she had left behind.

"If Grace wakes up she won't know what has become of me, and will feel frightened. I ought to have told her, or left word with Mrs. Marlow."

Weary and disheartened, she went home and toiled up the stairs to her own room.

"Where have you been, mother?" asked Grace, anxiously, "and what did you go out for?"

Mrs. Rollins sank into a chair, and could not answer at first for very weariness.

"What message did the telegraph boy bring you, mother?"

"What do you know about the telegraph boy, Grace? Were you awake when I went out?"

"No, mother. Mrs. Marlow told me."

"She told you about a telegraph boy calling on me?"

"Yes. I waked up and saw her in the room. She said you had gone out, and she thought the telegraph boy had brought you bad news."

"So he did, Grace," said the widow, and she burst into tears.

"What is it, mother? Anything about Rupert?"

"Yes. Your poor brother has been run over by the cars and got his leg broken."

"Did you see him? Where is he?" asked Grace, anxiously.

"No. I couldn't find him. I went to where the note mentioned, but could not hear anything about him."

"Perhaps he was taken to some hospital."

"Yes, I didn't think of that. I am sure he will send me a message as soon as he gets a chance. I wish I knew where he is."

Mrs. Marlow was aware that the widow had returned, but hesitated about going upstairs. She was afraid some questions might be asked that would involve her in trouble. Besides, Mrs. Rollins might discover the loss of the purse, and the evidence of Grace might expose her to suspicion.

"Drat the child? I wish she hadn't waked up. Then I could deny that I had been in the room at all."

But Mrs. Rollins did not have occasion to go to the bureau. She was absorbed in thoughts of Rupert. She did not know what course to take to get further knowledge of him. It seemed hard, but she could think of nothing except to wait for some message from him.

All at once she heard a familiar step on the stairs.

"It sounds like Rupert," said Grace, half-rising from the bed in her eagerness.

Mrs. Rollins rose and hurried to the door. She reached it just as Rupert opened it and dashed into the room.

"Oh, Rupert!" exclaimed the mother, joyfully. "Then your leg isn't broken?"

"I should say not. I should like to settle with the one that told you so. Tell me all about it, mother."

"So it was a telegraph boy who brought the message?" he said, thoughtfully, after the explanation.

"Yes."

"Let me see the message."

Rupert examined it, but the handwriting was not one that he was familiar with.

"Give it to me, mother. I'll find out the office it came from, and perhaps in that way I can get some light on the mystery."

"I don't see what object anyone could have in playing such a cruel trick on me," said the widow. "Thank heaven, it isn't true."

Rupert took the note and went to the nearest messenger office.

"Was any messenger boy sent from here this afternoon to Elizabeth Street?"

The superintendent looked over the books.

"Yes," he answered.

"Can you tell who left the message?"

"It was a stout woman, of medium height."

"What did she wear?"

"She had on a faded shawl. I don't remember what kind of a hat she wore."

But a light had already dawned on Rupert.

"It was Mrs. Marlow!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER VI. RUPERT AS A DETECTIVE

The next question that suggested itself to Rupert was, "What object could Mrs. Marlow have in sending off his mother on a wild goose chase?" The answer occurred immediately. "The purse."

He hurried home, and fairly ran up stairs.

"Mother," he cried, entering out of breath, "where did you put the purse I gave you?"

"In the bureau drawer."

"Will you look and see if it is there now?"

Wondering at his earnestness, Mrs. Rollins opened the bureau drawer.

"It is gone!" she said, with a startled look.

"I think I know where it has gone," said Rupert, his suspicions now become certainties.

"Where?"

"Mrs. Marlow can probably tell you."

"Do you mean that she has taken it, Rupert?" said his mother.

"I have found out that Mrs. Marlow sent the messenger giving you the false report of my accident. You can guess her motive."

"It hardly seems credible."

"I think there can be no doubt of it."

"What shall we do?"

"I will try to get some further evidence. You remember that Grace woke up and saw her in the room."

"You did not see her go near the bureau, Grace?" asked Mrs. Rollins.

"No, she was just leaving the room when I woke up."

"Wait here a minute, mother."

Rupert darted down stairs and made his way to the grocery store which he judged Mrs. Marlow would be likely to visit.

"What can I do for you, Rupert?" asked the grocer, pleasantly.

"Has Mrs. Marlow been here to-day?"

"Yes," laughed the grocer. "The old lady seems to be in funds. What do you think, Rupert? She changed a ten-dollar gold piece here."

"I thought so," said Rupert. "That gold piece was stolen from my mother."

"You don't tell me so!" ejaculated the grocer, opening wide his eyes in astonishment.

"It's a fact. How did she account for having so much money?"

"She said it was given her by a cousin of her late husband—a very rich man."

"That was a fiction of Mrs. Marlow's."

"It's too bad, Rupert. What do you want me to do? I can't give you the gold piece, for I gave Mrs. Marlow the change, about nine dollars. I can't afford to lose so much."

"You can help me to get back that money. When I call upon you, you can testify that she paid it to you."

"So I will, Rupert. I didn't think the woman was such a mean thief."

Five minutes later Rupert knocked at Mrs. Marlow's door.

The widow opened it herself, and when she saw her visitor she suspected his errand, but she was resolved to deny all knowledge of the money.

"How do you do, Rupert?" she said. "I thought you had met with an accident?"

"Did you? How came you to think so?" asked Rupert, looking her full in the face.

"The boy told me—the telegraph boy."

"Did he? That is strange. The note he brought my mother was sealed."

"Then he must have opened it. You can't trust them boys."

"How are you getting along, Mrs. Marlow? I see you have been buying some groceries," for the packages were on the table.

"Yes. I got a few things that I needed," said the widow, uneasily. "Then you didn't have your leg broken, after all?"

"If I did, it's well again. By the way, Mrs. Marlow, when my mother was out a purse was taken from the room."

"You don't tell me!" said Mrs. Marlow, flushing. "Them thieves is so bold. I must look and see if I haven't had something taken."

"I believe you came into the room while mother was gone."

"So I did," answered Mrs. Marlow, with engaging frankness. "I went in to see if your dear sister wanted anything done."

"You found her asleep?"

"She waked up just as I entered the room. She was only having a cat nap. I told her why your mother had gone out, she seemed so alarmed like."

"And then you went to the table drawer and took out the purse."

"It was in the bureau drawer—"

Here Mrs. Marlow stopped short, feeling that she had betrayed herself.

"You are right. You have good reason to know. You went to the bureau drawer and took out the purse."

"It's a lie, whoever says it," exclaimed the widow. "You're in good business, Rupert Rollins, to be comin' round accusin' a poor woman of stealin'—me that's as honest as the babe unborn."

"It may be so, Mrs. Marlow, but where did you get the gold piece you paid to Mr. Graves?"

"Sure, where did he hear that?" thought the widow, quite taken aback.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Rupert, sternly.

"Sure I got it from a cousin of my late husband, who sent it to me yesterday."

"Where does he live?"

"On Lexington Avenue."

"What is his name?"

"John Sheehan," answered Mrs. Marlow, after a pause.

"At what number does he live?"

"I don't just remember," answered the widow, warily.

"You can tell between what streets he lives."

"I think it's somewhere between Thirtieth and Fortieth Streets, but my memory isn't good."

"There is no need of making up any more stories, Mrs. Marlow. The purse contained eleven dollars and a half, including the gold piece. You spent a dollar at the grocery store. I want the balance."

"Sure you're very cruel to a poor widow, Rupert Rollins," said Mrs. Marlow, bursting into tears, which she could command when occasion required. "I never was called a thafe before."

As she spoke she drew out her handkerchief, but, unfortunately, there was something entangled with it, and the purse was twitched out and fell on the floor.

Rupert sprang forward and secured it, though Mrs. Marlow tried to put her foot on it.

"This is the purse that was taken from mother," said Rupert. "How came it in your pocket?"

"I don't know," faltered the widow. "I can't account for it."

"I can. Hereafter, Mrs. Marlow, if you ever enter our room again I will send for a policeman."

"It's my own purse!" asserted Mrs. Marlow, deciding to brazen it out.

For answer Rupert opened it, and showed written inside the name "Frank Sylvester."

"Do you see that, Mrs. Marlow? That is the name of the gentleman who gave me the purse."

"Why didn't I say that was my cousin's name?" thought Mrs. Marlow, but it was too late.

Rupert counted the contents of the purse, and found them intact, except the dollar which Mrs. Marlow had spent.

"I won't say anything about the money you spent," he said, "though I might claim the groceries. Good afternoon, and try to lead a better life."

Mrs. Marlow sank into a rocking-chair, and began to cry dismally. Her plans had miscarried for a certainty, and she felt angry with herself.

"Why didn't I put the purse in my trunk?" she asked herself. "Then he wouldn't have found out. Sure I cheated myself."

Rupert went upstairs with a light heart.

"Well, did you hear anything of the purse?" asked his mother.

For answer he held it up.

"Where did you get it?"

"It came from Mrs. Marlow's pocket."

"What a wicked woman!" exclaimed Grace. "She must have taken it when I was asleep."

"Did she give it up willingly? I thought she would have denied it."

"So she did, mother, but your son is a detective. I'll tell you how I managed it," and he told the story.

"There's only a dollar gone," he said in conclusion. "Don't leave it in the bureau drawer again, though I don't think Mrs. Marlow will trouble you with another call."

A day or two later the rent came due, and eight dollars had to be taken from the scanty fund, which left the family again very near destitution.

Rupert did not relax his efforts to secure a place, but when business is dull the difficulty of securing a position is much increased. He became anxious, and the prospect seemed very dark.

"I must do something," he said to himself, "if it's only selling papers. That will be better than blacking boots, though that is an honest business."

To make matters worse, his mother was unable to procure vests to make from any of the readymade clothing establishments.

"We've got all the hands we need," was the invariable answer to her applications.

They tried to economize more closely, but there was small chance for that. They had not eaten meat for three days, and remained contented with bread and tea, leaving out sugar, for they felt that this was a superfluity in their circumstances. It was emphatically a dull time, and there seemed no chance to earn anything.

"Rupert," said his mother, drawing a ring from her finger, "take this ring and pawn it. There seems no other way."

"Isn't it your wedding ring, mother?"

"Yes, Rupert, but I cannot afford to keep it while we are so poor."

Rupert took the ring, and bent his steps towards Simpson's, for he felt that there he would be likely to meet fair treatment.

CHAPTER VII. A LUCKY MEETING

It saddened Rupert to think his mother's wedding ring must be sacrificed, but when they were actually in need of food sentiment must not be considered. After that, when they had no longer anything to pawn except articles of clothing, Rupert shuddered to think what might lay before them.

He entered Simpson's with a slow step. A woman was ahead of him and he waited for his turn.

"Well," said an attendant, courteously, "what can I do for you?"

"What will you give me on this ring?"

"What do you want on it?"

"Two dollars," answered Rupert.

"No doubt it is worth that, but we have so many rings in stock that we are not anxious to receive more. We will give you a dollar and a quarter."

Rupert hesitated, when to his surprise some one tapped him on the shoulder.

"What brings you here, Rupert?" were the words that reached his ear.

He turned round in surprise.

"Mr. Sylvester!" he exclaimed.

"I see you have not forgotten me. What brings you here?"

"Sad necessity, Mr. Sylvester. But—I didn't expect to find you here. Surely you—"

"No, I have not come here to pawn anything," said the young man, smiling. "On the contrary, I want to redeem a watch for an old schoolmate who was obliged to pawn it. He has a wife and child and was thrown out of employment four weeks since. Fortunately I ran across him, and have got him a place."

"I will wait till you have attended to your business."

Soon a gold watch was placed in Mr. Sylvester's hands, and he paid the pawnbroker twenty dollars and sixty cents. It had been pledged not quite a month for twenty dollars. The sixty cents represented the three per cent. a month interest allowed by the laws regulating pawn shops.

"Now, young man," said the attendant, "do you want the dollar and a quarter I offered you on your ring?"

"Yes," answered Rupert.

"No," interposed Frank Sylvester, quietly. "What ring is this, Rupert?"

"My mother's wedding ring."

"And you are actually reduced to pawning it?"

"Yes, Mr. Sylvester, I can't get anything to do, and we are out of money."

"You have a mother and sister, I think you told me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think we can do better than pawn the ring. Where do you live?"

"In Elizabeth Street."

"Does your mother prefer the city to the country?"

"No, sir; but she has no choice."

"Suppose I obtain for her a position as housekeeper in the family of an elderly gentleman in Rutherford, about ten miles out on the Erie Railroad, would she accept?"

"She would be glad to do so but for Grace. She could not be separated from her."

"There would be no occasion. My uncle lives alone in a large house, and a child would make the house pleasanter."

"Some gentlemen don't like children."

"That is not the case with Uncle Ben. But let us go out. You have no further business here. We will go into the Astor House reading room and have a chat."

Rupert followed his friend to the Astor House and they ascended to the reading room on the second floor. Taking adjoining armchairs, Mr. Sylvester drew from his pocket the following letter which he showed to Rupert. It ran thus:

"My housekeeper is about to leave me, to join her married daughter in Wisconsin. I must supply her place, but I know of no one in Rutherford who would suit me. Can't you find me some one—a pleasant, ladylike person, who would make my house homelike and attractive? I think you know my tastes. Please give this matter your early attention.

Benjamin Strathmore."

"Now," continued Mr. Sylvester, "I was quite at a loss whom to recommend, but I think your mother would suit Uncle Ben."

"Suppose you call and make her acquaintance, Mr. Sylvester. Then you can tell better. That is, if you don't object to visiting our poor home."

"My dear Rupert, I shall be delighted to meet your mother. One thing I am sure of in advance, she is a lady."

"She is, Mr. Sylvester," said Rupert, warmly.

Mrs. Rollins was a good deal surprised when Rupert entered the room, followed by a handsomely-dressed young man, and she rose from her seat in some trepidation.

"Mother," said Rupert, "this is Mr. Sylvester, who was kind enough to give us the money and provisions I brought home the other day."

"I am glad to meet so kind a friend," said the widow, with simple dignity. "Ask him to take a seat."

"I came to make you a business proposal," began Mr. Sylvester, who was already favorably impressed with Rupert's mother. "Your son thinks you might be willing to accept the position of housekeeper in my uncle's family, in Rutherford."

Mrs. Rollins instinctively looked towards Grace.

"I see what you are thinking of," interposed her caller. "There will be no difficulty about taking your daughter with you."

"Then I shall be glad to accept. And Rupert—"

"Rupert, I am sure, will prefer to remain in the city. I will find him a place. Till then he can stay with me."

Rupert brightened up at this suggestion. He had no desire to go to the country, but would like nothing more than a place in some city establishment.

"How soon could you arrange to go, Mrs. Rollins?"

"Next Monday."

"That will answer. I will apprise my uncle. Now as to the compensation."

"If I have Grace with me I shall hardly feel justified in asking compensation."

"My uncle would not think of making any account of the little girl's board. I think he paid your predecessor twenty-five dollars a month. Will that be satisfactory?"

"It is very liberal, sir."

"You will allow me to offer you a month's salary in advance. I can settle it with Uncle Ben."

This relieved Mrs. Rollins from a great embarrassment, as she needed to replenish her wardrobe to some extent.

"I will go out with you on Monday, and take Rupert with me, as he will wish to see how his mother and sister are situated."

"How kind you are, Mr. Sylvester!" said Rupert, gratefully.

"Don't give me too much credit, Rupert. You have helped me out of an embarrassment. I expected to have a long hunt for a housekeeper. Thanks to your mother I have escaped all that."

"You don't know how much it means to us, Mr. Sylvester."

"Well, perhaps, I have some idea. It seems a good arrangement for all of us. Well, good morning. Oh, by the way, you meet me at the Astor House to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock."

"Yes, sir, with pleasure."

Mrs. Marlow was a very observing woman. She always kept her door ajar, and saw every one who went upstairs. Her curiosity was considerably excited when she saw Rupert's companion.

"My stars!" she said to herself. "What a fine-looking young man! He looks like a real gentleman—I wonder does he know them Rollinses."

Mrs. Marlow would liked to have listened at the door and heard the conversation between her neighbors and the distinguished-looking visitor. But this was not practicable. However, as Mr. Sylvester came down stairs she ventured out and intercepted him.

"Sure, you've been callin' on my friend, Mrs. Rollins," she said.

"Is she a friend of yours?" asked Sylvester, looking at her curiously.

"Indeed she is, and she's a fine lady. But she's been very unfortunate. I would like to have helped her, but I am poor myself, and—"

"Won't you accept this?" said Sylvester, offering her a dollar as the easiest way of getting rid of her.

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs. Marlow, with a profound courtesy. "It's easy to see you're a kindhearted man."

"What a curious woman! I should hardly think Mrs. Rollins would have made choice of her as a friend!" soliloquized the young man as he pushed on to the street.

"I wonder what his name is and where he lives," speculated Mrs. Marlow. "He must be the young man that gave the Rollinses the purse and the basket of provisions. If I knew where he lived I'd go and see him often."

There is very little doubt that Mrs. Marlow would have kept her word, but unfortunately she had no clew to the residence of her new acquaintance.

When Rupert came downstairs, she put herself in his way.

"You had a call from a nice gentleman this morning," she said, insinuatingly.

Rupert felt too happy to slight even Mrs. Marlow, and he answered, courteously,

"Yes."

"I hope he brought a present for your mother."

"No, Mrs. Marlow, but he brought something better."

"And what can that be?" asked the widow, with intense curiosity.

"He engaged mother to take a place as housekeeper for a gentleman in the country."

"You don't say! And what'll be done with your sister? I'll board her cheap, and be like a mother to her."

Rupert could not help smiling at the idea of leaving his sister in such hands. He explained that Grace would go with her mother.

"Sure your mother's a lucky woman! I'd like to be a housekeeper myself. Wouldn't you speak to the gentleman for me?"

"I'll mention it if you like."

Rupert could promise this safely, for he would take care that Mr. Sylvester understood the character of their unscrupulous neighbor.

"If you'll do it, Rupert, dear, I'll pay you back the dollar I borrowed the other day, when I get my first week's wages."

"Some folks is lucky!" soliloquized Mrs. Marlow. "The young man ought to have taken me. I'm much stronger than Mrs. Rollins, and I would have made a better housekeeper, but maybe my turn will come next."

CHAPTER VIII. JULIAN LORIMER

On Monday Rupert saw his mother and sister established at Rutherford. Their new home was a large old-fashioned mansion, exceedingly comfortable. One of the best chambers was assigned to Mrs. Rollins, with a small room opening out of it for Grace.

Benjamin Strathmore was a stout old gentleman of seventy, tall, and patriarchal-looking with his abundant white hair.

"How do you like my selection of housekeeper, Uncle Ben?" asked Sylvester, when he had a chance to be alone with the old gentleman.

"She will just suit me," said Mr. Strathmore, emphatically. "She is evidently a lady, and she will be an agreeable companion if I am not mistaken. Mrs. Martin was a good housekeeper, but she had no idea outside of her duties. I could not chat with her unless I talked about cooking. My evenings were solitary. She spent the time in the kitchen or in her own room. Now the house will be really social."

"I am delighted to have suited you, Uncle Ben."

"Where in the world did you come across Mrs. Rollins? Have you known her long?"

"I became acquainted through her son Rupert, to whom I introduced you."

"He seems a fine, manly boy. He can stay here, too. I will find something for him to do."

"Thank you, Uncle Ben, but I shall find him a place in New York. He prefers the city, and it will afford him more opportunities of advancement. Rupert is ambitious, and I predict that he will rise in time to an excellent position."

"Just as you think best, Frank; but remember that if ever there is need, or he becomes sick, there is room for him here."

To anticipate a little. Mr. Strathmore was not disappointed in Mrs. Rollins. It came to be her custom to spend the evenings with her employer. Sometimes she read aloud to him. At others, while she was engaged in needlework, and Grace, now restored to health, was occupied with her books, the old gentleman sat back in his easy chair, and with calm content watched his companions. He no longer felt his former burden of solitude.

"I have never been happier," he wrote later on to his nephew. "I regretted the loss of Mrs. Martin, but now I feel that it was for my happiness, since it has opened the way for such an acceptable substitute."

Rupert went at first to the house of Mr. Sylvester, where their acquaintance soon ripened into friendship.

They were walking down Broadway one day, when Frank Sylvester noticed a sudden start on the part of his young companion.

"What is the matter, Rupert?" he asked.

"Do you see that stout man on the opposite side of the street, Mr. Sylvester?" said Rupert.

"Yes. What of him?"

"He was the cause of my poor father's failure and death."

"How was that?"

"My father was a merchant in Buffalo, and that man was his partner. During a three months' absence in California, where he went partly for his health, the business was managed by Mr. Lorimer in such a way that the firm became deeply involved and was brought to the brink of failure.

"My father was greatly astonished at the sudden change, for when he left all was prosperous. He could not account for the disappearance of assets and the accumulation of claims against the firm except on the theory that large sums had been appropriated by his partner. He could prove nothing, however, and the firm was dissolved. When the business was closed there was barely enough

money left to pay the creditors. My father found himself with nothing, and soon died of grief and mortification."

"What became of Lorimer?"

"I have not seen him till to-day. I heard that he had come to New York and established himself on Third Avenue somewhere, in the same business. If so, he must have had capital, and this must have been the sum of which he defrauded my father."

"The story is a sad one, Rupert. You and your mother must have suffered from the change in circumstances."

"We did. We did not care to stay in Buffalo, where we had been accustomed to live in good style, so we came to New York, where we could live according to our change in circumstances among those who had never known us. I thought I might get employment that would enable me to support my mother and sister in tolerable comfort. I did get a place with Tenney & Rhodes, but I only earned five dollars a week. Just before meeting you I lost that, and had you not come to our assistance I don't know what would have become of us."

"I feel repaid for whatever I have done for you," said Frank Sylvester, kindly. "Has this Mr. Lorimer a family?"

"He has a wife and one son."

"Were your families intimate?"

"Yes. We occupied adjoining houses. Julian Lorimer was about my age, and attended the same school. I never liked him, however. He had a very high opinion of himself, and put on airs which made him generally unpopular."

"Did he put on airs with you?"

"Not till after the failure. My father moved out of his house, but Mr. Lorimer remained in his, and appeared to live in about the same style as before, while we moved into a few rooms in an unfashionable part of the city. After this Julian took very little notice of me."

"You haven't met him since you came to New York?"

"No; I rather wonder I haven't, but I suppose I shall some day."

The time came sooner than he anticipated.

Rupert was crossing Eighth Avenue near Forty-second Street one day, when he came near being run into by a bicycle. The rider gave a note of warning, and then stopped short in surprise.

"Rupert Rollins!" he said, in a half tone of inquiry.

"Is it you, Julian?" asked Rupert, recognizing his former schoolmate.

"Yes. Are you living in New York?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts?"

"At present I am staying in Harlem."

"I heard you and your mother were living in a tenement house down town."

"My mother is not living in the city," returned Rupert, coldly.

He did not care to give Julian any more information than was absolutely necessary.

"Where is she, then?"

"In Rutherford, New Jersey."

"Why don't you live there, too?"

"Because I expect to be employed in New York."

"Then you are out of work now?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you live in the Newsboys' Lodge? That is cheap."

"Have you ever lived there?"

"Do you mean to insult me? I live in a nice house on One Hundred and Sixteenth Street."

"So do I."

"You are bluffing."

"Why should I? What good would it do me?"

Further inquiry developed the fact that they lived in neighboring blocks.

"I don't see how you can afford to live on such a street."

"I am at present visiting a friend—Mr. Sylvester."

"Is he rich?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"I suppose you know that my father has a nice new store on Third Avenue, near Forty-second Street?"

"I heard something of the kind," said Rupert, briefly.

"He's doing a staving business—a good deal larger than he did in Buffalo."

Rupert made no comment.

"You said you were out of employment, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You might call round at the store. Perhaps pa can find a place for you as a cash boy, though you would be rather large for that."

"How much does he pay his cash boys?"

"Two and a half a week."

"I hardly think I could live on that," said Rupert, smiling.

"It is better than being out of work."

"That is true, but I shouldn't like to be getting more and more behindhand every week. Are you attending school?"

"Yes, but I think of going into business soon."

"Perhaps," suggested Rupert, "you will take one of the cash boys' places."

"You must be crazy. When I go into business it won't be into a retail store. I will get a place in some wholesale establishment. There's a better chance to rise there."

"I didn't know but you would go to college."

"I am not very fond of study. Pa would send me to Columbia College or to Harvard, if I wanted to go, but I prefer a life of business. I want to become a merchant prince."

"It would certainly be agreeable. I shall be satisfied if I can be successful enough to support my mother and sister in comfort. That is my ambition."

"Oh, I dare say. You are a poor boy, you know."

"Look here, Julian, there's one thing I don't understand. Your father and mine were partners, and I supposed in the same circumstances. Both failed together. Yet your father now has a large store of his own, and we are poor. Can you tell me why?"

"I'm not good at conundrums. I'll have to be going. If you want a place as cash boy I'll ask pa to fit you out. Ta ta!" And Julian dashed off on his wheel.

"I hope some time to be a successful and honorable man of business," thought Rupert, as he followed his former schoolfellow with his glance. "My ambition would not be satisfied with anything short of this."

CHAPTER IX.

RUPERT BECOMES A BELL-BOY

Rupert found a pleasant home at the house of Mr. Sylvester, but he was anxious as soon as possible to secure employment. His friend was active in his behalf, but the general depression in business was such that there seemed to be no opening anywhere.

One evening at supper Mr. Sylvester said: "I have been hoping to find you a place in a wholesale establishment in Pearl Street. I learned that one of the younger clerks was about to leave, but he has decided to stay six months longer, and, of course, we can't wait as long as that."

"No, Mr. Sylvester, it would seem like six years to me."

"Even if your wants were all provided for in that time?"

"I feel that I ought to be at work, and not depending on your generosity. I would rather work for two dollars a week than remain idle."

"That is the right spirit, Rupert. You will be glad, then, to hear that I have at last found employment for you."

"But I thought you just said—"

"That I could not get you a place in Pearl Street. True, but this is a different position—very different. It is that of bell-boy in a hotel."

"What are the duties, Mr. Sylvester?"

"You will be at the command of the clerk, and will have to run up and downstairs, answering calls from the guests, or carrying messages from the office. In fact, you will be a general utility clerk, and I have no doubt will get terribly tired the first few days."

"Never mind. I can stand that. If I make enough to pay my way I shall be satisfied."

"You will be better paid than if you were in a mercantile house. You will receive five dollars a week and get your meals at the hotel."

Rupert's face brightened.

"Why, that is excellent," he said. "When I was at Tenney & Rhodes' I only received five dollars weekly and had to furnish my own meals."

"True, but you were then in the line of promotion. Here you cannot expect to rise any higher unless you qualify yourself to be a hotel man."

"At any rate I am willing to try it. Where is the hotel?"

"It is the Somerset House, on lower Broadway. It is not a fashionable hotel, but comfortable and of good reputation. I am somewhat acquainted with the office clerk, who was an old schoolmate of mine, and at my request he has given you this position."

"I hope I shall give satisfaction. I shall be a green hand."

"The duties are easily understood and learned. If you show that you are desirous of succeeding you will make a good impression, and you will get on well."

"When am I to commence work?" asked Rupert.

"I will take you down town with me to-morrow morning, and introduce you to Mr. Malcolm, the clerk. I suppose you will be expected to go to work directly."

"I should prefer that."

"One thing I must tell you. You will have to secure a room outside, as the employees are not expected to sleep in the hotel. All the rooms are reserved for guests."

"What will my hours be?"

"From seven in the morning till seven in the evening. By this arrangement you will have your evenings to yourself."

Rupert went to bed in good spirits. He was of an active temperament, and enjoyed occupation. It would be pleasant to him also to feel that he was earning his own living.

In the morning Mr. Sylvester went down town with him.

The Somerset House was a hotel of moderate size, only five stories in height, which is low for a city hotel. I may as well say here that I have not given the correct name of the hotel for obvious reasons. So far as our story is concerned, the name I have chosen will do as well as any other.

"Those who frequent this hotel are not of the fashionable class," explained Mr. Sylvester, "but it is largely patronized by traveling salesmen and people from the country. The rates are moderate, and those come here who would not feel able to afford the Fifth Avenue or hotels of that grade."

The entrance was neat, and Rupert was well pleased with the aspect of his new place of employment.

At some distance from the doorway was the office, and behind the reading room.

"Mr. Malcolm," said Sylvester to a pleasant-looking man of thirty-five, who stood behind a counter, "this is the young man I mentioned to you. He will be glad to fill the position of bell-boy, and from my acquaintance with him I feel quite sure he will suit you. His name is Rupert Rollins."

The clerk smiled pleasantly.

"We shall soon know each other better," he said. "I hope you are strong, for you will have a good deal of exercise here."

"I think I can stand it," said Rupert. "I shall soon get used to it."

"I have a plan of the rooms here," went on the clerk. "Take it and go upstairs and look about you on the different floors. It will be necessary that you should learn the location of the rooms."

"I will leave you now, Rupert," said Mr. Sylvester. "You can come back to my house to-night, and to-morrow you can look up a room near the hotel."

For the first few days Rupert got very tired. He would have to go upstairs perhaps thirty or forty times during the day, sometimes to the fifth floor. There was an elevator in the Somerset Hotel, but the bell-boys were not allowed to use it.

When a guest registered and was assigned to a room on one of the upper floors he was conducted to the elevator, but the bell-boy, carrying his valise, was obliged to walk upstairs, and meet him at the landing-place. Often Rupert felt that there was an injustice in this, and that no harm would be done if he were also allowed to use the elevator. However, he was not foolish enough make any complaint, but by his pleasant manners and cheerful alacrity won the good opinion of Mr. Malcolm, the clerk.

The Somerset Hotel was on the European and American systems combined. If a guest preferred simply to lodge at the hotel he could do so, and take his meals either at the hotel restaurant or in any other.

One day a guest registered who was assigned to No. 143, on the fifth floor.

To Rupert was assigned the duty of carrying up the valise. He found it unusually heavy, and more than once as he climbed the stairs he felt that he would be glad to reach his destination. At the elevator landing he met the owner of the valise, a middle-aged man with a brown, sunburned face.

"You found it rather a heavy tug, didn't you?" he asked, with a smile.

"Your clothes seem to be heavy," returned Rupert.

"It isn't clothes merely," said the stranger. "I come from Colorado, and I have some specimens of quartz inside. Here, give me the valise, and lead the way to my room."

Rupert did so.

When they reached No. 143 the stranger drew a fifty cent piece from his pocket and handed it to Rupert.

"Take it," he said. "You deserve something for carrying such a load."

"Thank you, sir," said Rupert. "I don't find many guests so liberal."

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