

ALGER

HORATIO JR.

JED, THE POORHOUSE
BOY

Horatio Alger

Jed, the Poorhouse Boy

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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	8
CHAPTER III.	11
CHAPTER IV.	14
CHAPTER V.	17
CHAPTER VI.	21
CHAPTER VII.	24
CHAPTER VIII.	27
CHAPTER IX.	30
CHAPTER X.	33
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	34

Jr. Horatio Alger

Jed, the Poorhouse Boy

CHAPTER I.

JED

"Here, you Jed!"

Jed paused in his work with his axe suspended above him, for he was splitting wood. He turned his face toward the side door at which stood a woman, thin and sharp-visaged, and asked: "Well, what's wanted?"

"None of your impudence, you young rascal! Come here, I say!"

Jed laid down the axe and walked slowly to the back door. He was a strongly-made and well-knit boy of nearly sixteen, but he was poorly dressed in an old tennis shirt and a pair of overalls. Yet his face was attractive, and an observer skilled in physiognomy would have read in it signs of a strong character, a warm and grateful disposition, and a resolute will.

"I have not been impudent, Mrs. Fogson," he said quietly.

"Don't you dare to contradict me!" snapped the woman, stamping her foot.

"What's wanted?" asked Jed again.

"Go down to the gate and hold it open. Squire Dixon will be here in five minutes, and we must treat him with respect, for he is Overseer of the Poor."

Jed smiled to himself (it was well he did not betray his amusement), for he knew that Mrs. Fogson and her husband, though tyrannical to the inmates of the poorhouse, of which they had been placed in charge by Squire Dixon three months before, were almost servile in the presence of the Overseer of the Poor, with whom it was their object to stand well.

"All right, ma'am!" he said bluntly, and started for the gate. He did not appear to move fast enough for the amiable Mrs. Fogson, for she called out in a sharp voice: "Why do you walk like a snail? Hurry up, I tell you. I see Squire Dixon coming up the road."

"I shall get to the gate before he does," announced Jed, independently, not increasing his pace a particle.

"I hate that boy!" soliloquized Mrs. Fogson, looking after him with a frown. "He is the most independent young rascal I ever came across—he actually disobeys and defies me. I must get Fogson to give him a horse-whipping some of these fine days; and when he does, I'm going to be there and see it done!" she continued, her black eyes twinkling viciously. "Every blow he received would do me good. I'd gloat over it! I'd flog him myself if I was strong enough."

The amiable character of Mrs. Fogson may be inferred from this gentle soliloquy. When Fogson married her he caught a Tartar, as he found to his cost. But he was not so much to be pitied, for his own disposition was not unlike that of his wife, but he lacked her courage and intense malignity, and was a craven at heart.

As Jed walked to the gate his face became grave and almost melancholy.

"I can't stand this kind of life long!" he said to himself. "Mrs. Fogson is about the ugliest-tempered woman I ever knew, and her husband isn't much better. What a contrast to Mr. Avery and his good wife! When they kept the poorhouse we were all happy and contented. They had a kind word for all. But when Squire Dixon became overseer he put in the Fogsons, and since then we haven't heard a kind word or had a happy day."

Just then Squire Dixon's top buggy neared the gate. He was a pompous-looking man with a bald head and red face, the color, as was well known, being imparted by too frequent potations of brandy.

With him was his only son and heir, Percy Dixon, a boy who "put on airs," and was, in consequence, heartily detested by his schoolmates and companions. He had small, mean features and a pair of gray eyes, while his nose had an upward tendency, as if he were turning it up at the world in general.

Jed held the gate open in silence and the top buggy passed through.

Then he slowly closed the gate and walked up to the house.

There stood Mrs. Fogson, her thin lips wreathed in smiles, as she ducked her head obsequiously to the town magnate.

"How do you do, Squire Dixon?" she said. "It does me good to see you. But I needn't ask for your health, you look so fine and noble this morning."

Squire Dixon was far from being inaccessible to flattery.

"I am very well, I thank you, my good friend, Mrs. Fogson," he said in a stately tone, with a gracious smile upon his florid countenance. "And how are you yourself?"

"As well as I can be, squire, thanking you for asking, but them paupers is trials, as I daily discover."

"Nothing new in the way of trouble, I hope, Mrs. Fogson?"

"Well, no; but walk in and I'll send for my husband. He would never forgive me if I didn't send for him when you were here. Master Percy, forgive me for not speaking to you before. I hear such good accounts of you from everybody. Your father is indeed fortunate to have such a son."

Percy raised his eyebrows a little. Even he was aware of his unpopularity, and he wondered who had been speaking so well of him.

"I'm all right!" he answered curtly.

Squire Dixon, too, though he overestimated Percy, who was popularly regarded as a chip of the old block, was at a loss to know why he should be proud of him. Still it was pleasing to have one so near to him complimented.

"You are kind to speak of Percy in that way," he said.

"He's so like you, the dear boy!" murmured Mrs. Fogson.

This might be a compliment, but as Percy stood low in his studies and frequently quarreled with his school companions, Squire Dixon hardly knew whether to feel flattered.

Percy looked rather disgusted to be called a "dear boy" by a woman whom he regarded as so much his social inferior as Mrs. Fogson, but it was difficult to resent so complimentary a speech, and he remained silent. He looked scornfully about the plainly-furnished room, and reflected that it would be pleasanter out of doors.

"I guess I'll go out in the yard," he said abruptly.

"Would you be kind enough in that case, Master Percy, to tell the boy Jed to go and call my husband from the three-acre lot? He is at work there."

"Yes, Mrs. Fogson, I'll tell him."

Percy left the room and walked up to where Jed was splitting wood.

"Go and call Mr. Fogson from the three-acre lot!" he said peremptorily.

Jed paused in his work.

"Who says so?" he inquired.

"I say so!"

"Then I shan't go. You are not my boss."

"You are an impudent boy."

"Why am I?"

"You have no business to talk back to me. You'd better go after Mr. Fogson, if you know what's best for yourself."

"Did Mrs. Fogson send the message by you?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go. Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Because it was enough that I told you. My father's the Overseer of the Poor."

"I am aware of that."

"And he put the Fogsons where they are."

"Then I wish he hadn't. We had a good time when Mr. Avery was here. Now all is changed."

"So you don't like Mr. and Mrs. Fogson?" asked Percy curiously.

"No, I don't. But I must be going to the lot to call Mr. Fogson."

"I'll go with you. I don't want to be left alone."

Jed ought doubtless to have felt complimented at this offer of company from his high-toned visitor, but he did not appear to be overwhelmed by it.

"You can go along if you like," he said.

"Of course I can. I don't need to ask permission of you."

"Certainly not. No offense was meant."

"It is well for you that there isn't. So you liked Mr. and Mrs. Avery better than the Fogsons?"

"Yes," answered Jed guardedly, for he understood now that Percy wanted to "pump" him.

"Why?"

"Because they treated me better."

"My father thinks well of the Fogsons. He says that old Avery pampered the paupers and almost spoiled them."

"I won't argue the question. I only know that we all liked Mr. and Mrs. Avery. Now it's scold, scold, scold all day and every day, and we don't live nearly as well as we did."

"Paupers mustn't expect to live as well as at a first-class hotel!" said Percy sarcastically.

"They certainly don't live like that here."

"And they won't while my father is overseer. He says he's going to put a stop to their being pampered at the town's expense. You live well enough now."

"If you think we live so well, I wish you would come and board here for a week."

"*Me*—board at a poorhouse!" ejaculated Percy in intense disgust. "You are very kind, but I shouldn't like it."

"I don't think you would."

"All the same, you ought to be grateful for such a good home."

"It may be a good home, but I shan't stay here long."

"You shan't stay here long?" exclaimed Percy in amazement. "Do you mean to tell me you are going to run away?"

"I haven't formed any plans yet."

"I'll tell my father, and he'll put a spoke in your wheel. What do you expect to do if you leave? You haven't got any money?"

"No."

"Then don't make a fool of yourself."

Jed did not reply, for they had reached the fence that bounded the three-acre lot, and Mr. Fogson had discovered their approach.

CHAPTER II. MR. AND MRS. FOGSON

Mr. Fogson was about as unpleasant-looking as his wife, but was not so thin. He had stiff red hair with a tendency to stand up straight, a blotched complexion, and red eyes, corresponding very well with the color of his hair. He was quite as cross as his wife, but she was more venomous and malicious. Like her he was disposed to fawn upon Squire Dixon, the Overseer of the Poor, with whom he knew it was necessary to stand well.

Had Jed come alone he might have met with a disagreeable reception; but Mr. Fogson's quick eye recognized in his companion the son of the poorhouse autocrat, Squire Dixon, and he summoned up an ingratiating smile on his rugged features.

"How are you, Master Percy?" he said smoothly. "Did your pa come with you?"

"Yes, he's over to the house. Mrs. Fogson wants you to go right home, as he may want to see you."

"All right! It will give me pleasure. It always does me good to see your pa."

Percy looked at him critically, and thought that Mr. Fogson was about as homely a man as he had ever seen. It was fortunate that the keeper of the poorhouse could not read his thoughts, for, like most ugly men, Mr. Fogson thought himself on the whole rather prepossessing.

Fogson took his place beside Percy, and curtly desired Jed to walk behind.

Jed smiled to himself, for he understood that Mr. Fogson considered him not entitled to a place in such superior company.

Mr. Fogson addressed several questions to Percy, which the latter answered languidly, as if he considered it rather a bore to be entertained by a man in Fogson's position. Indeed he almost snubbed him, and Jed was pleased to find the man who made so many unpleasant speeches to others treated in the same manner himself. As a general thing, a man who bullies others has to take his turn in being bullied himself.

Meanwhile Mrs. Fogson was chatting with Squire Dixon.

"Nobody can tell what I have to put up with from them paupers," she said. "You'd actilly think they paid their board by the way they talk. The fact is, the Averys pampered and indulged them altogether too much."

"That is so, Mrs. Fogson," said the squire pompously, "and that, I may remark, was the reason I dismissed them from their responsible position. Do they—ahem!—complain of anything in particular?"

"Why, they want butter every day!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson. "Think of it! Butter every day for paupers!"

"As you justly observe, this is very unreasonable. And how often do you give them butter?"

"Once a week—on Sundays."

"Very judicious. It impresses them with the difference between Sunday and other days. It shows your religious training, Mrs. Fogson."

"I always aim to be religious, Squire Dixon," said Mrs. Fogson meekly.

"Well, and what else?"

"Likewise the old people expect tea every day. They say Mrs. Avery gave it to them."

"I dare say she did. It's an imposition on the town to spend their—ahem!—hard-earned money on such luxuries."

"That's the way I look at it, Squire Dixon."

"How often do you give them meat?"

"Every other day. I get the cheapest cuts from the butcher—what he has left over. But they ain't satisfied. They want it every day."

"Shocking!" exclaimed the squire, arching his brows.

"So I say. Of course I get a good many sour looks, and more complaints, but I tell 'em that if they ain't suited with their boarding-house they can go somewhere else."

"Very good! Very good indeed; ha, ha! I presume none of them have left the poorhouse in consequence?"

"No, but one has threatened to do so."

"Who is that?" asked Squire Dixon quickly.

"The boy Jed."

"Oh, yes, he was the one who opened the gate for me. Now, what sort of a boy is he, Mrs. Fogson?"

"He's an impudent young jackanapes," answered Mrs. Fogson spitefully, "begging your pardon for using such an inelegant expression."

"It is forcible, however, Mrs. Fogson. It is forcible, and I think you are quite justified in using it. So he is impudent?"

"Yes; you'd think, by the airs he puts on, that he owned the poorhouse, instead of being a miserable pauper. Why, I venture to say he considers himself the equal of your son, Master Percy."

"No, no, Mrs. Fogson, that is a little too strong. He couldn't be so absurd as that."

"I am not so sure of that, Squire Dixon. There is no end to that boy's impudence and—and uppishness. Why, he said the other day that the meat wasn't fit for the hogs."

"And was it, Mrs. Fogson?" asked the squire in an absent-minded way.

"To be sure, squire, though I must admit that it was a trifle touched, being warm weather; but paupers can't expect first-class hotel fare—can they, now, squire?"

"To be sure not."

"Then, again, Jed is always praising up Mr. and Mrs. Avery, which, as you can imagine, isn't very pleasant for Mr. Fogson and me. I expect he was Mr. Avery's pet, from all I hear."

"Very likely he was. He was brought to the poorhouse when a mere baby, and they took care of him from his infancy. I've heard Mrs. Avery say she looked upon him as if he were her own child."

"And that is why she pampered him—at the town's expense."

"As you truly observe, at the town's expense. I am sure you and Mr. Fogson will feel it your duty to make the poorhouse as inexpensive as possible to the town, bearing in mind the great responsibility that has devolved upon you."

"Of course, squire, me and Fogson bear that in mind, but we ain't paid any too well for our hard labor."

"That reminds me, Mrs. Fogson, another month has rolled by, and—"

"I understand, squire," said Mrs. Fogson. "I have got it all ready," and she drew a sealed envelope out of her pocket and passed it to the squire, who pocketed it with a deprecatory cough. His face brightened up, for he knew what the envelope contained.

"You can depend on me to use my official influence in your favor, Mrs. Fogson," he said cheerfully. "As long as you show a proper appreciation of my service in giving you the place, I will stand by you."

Squire Dixon was a rich man. He was paid by the town for his services as overseer, yet he was not above accepting five dollars a month from the man he had installed in office. He had never distinctly asked for it, but he had hinted in a manner not to be mistaken that it would be politic for Mr. Fogson to allow him a percentage on their salary and profits. They got the money back, and more, for in auditing their accounts he did not scrutinize too closely the prices they claimed to have paid for supplies. It was an arrangement mutually advantageous, which had never occurred to Mr.

and Mrs. Avery, who in their scrupulous honesty were altogether behind the times, according to the squire's thinking.

"And how many paupers have you in the house at present, Mrs. Fogson?" asked the overseer.

"Nineteen, squire. Would you like to look at them?"

"Well, perhaps in my official capacity it would be as well."

"Come in here, then," and Mrs. Fogson led the way into a large room where sat the paupers, a forlorn, unhappy-looking company. Two of the old ladies were knitting; one young woman, who had lost her child, and with it her mind, was fondling a rag baby; two were braiding a rag carpet, and others were sitting with vacant faces, looking as if life had no attraction for them.

"Will you address them, squire?" asked Mrs. Fogson.

"Ahem!" said the squire, straightening up and looking around him with the air of a benignant father. "I will say a few words."

"Attention all!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson in a sharp voice. "Squire Dixon has consented to make a few remarks. I hope you will appreciate your privilege in hearing him."

CHAPTER III. THE SCRANTON POORHOUSE

"Ahem!" began Squire Dixon, clearing his throat; "the announcement of my friend Mrs. Fogson furnishes me with a text. I hope you all appreciate your privileges in sharing this comfortable home at the expense of the town. Here all your material wants are cared for, and though you are without means, you need have no anxiety. A well-filled board is spread for you three times a day, and you enjoy the maternal care of Mrs. Fogson."

Here there was a shrill laugh from one of the old women.

Squire Dixon frowned, and Mrs. Fogson looked anything but maternal as she scowled at the offending "boarder."

"I am surprised at this unseemly interruption," said Squire Dixon severely. "I am constrained to believe that there is at least one person present who does not appreciate the privileges of this happy home. You are probably all aware that I am the Overseer of the Poor, and that it was through my agency that the services of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were obtained."

Here it would have been in order for some one to propose "Three cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Fogson," but instead all looked gloomy and depressed.

"I don't know that I have any more to say," concluded Squire Dixon after a pause. "I will only exhort you to do your duty in the position in which Providence has placed you, and to give as little trouble as possible to your good friends Mr. and Mrs. Fogson."

Here there was another cackling laugh, which caused Mrs. Fogson to look angry.

"I'm on to you, Sally Stokes," she said sharply. "You'll have to go without your supper to-night."

The poor, half-witted creature immediately burst into tears, and rocked to and fro in a dismal manner.

"You have done perfectly right in rebuking such unseemly behavior, Mrs. Fogson," said Squire Dixon.

"I didn't mind the insult to myself, squire," returned Mrs. Fogson meekly. "It made me angry to have you insulted while you were making your interesting remarks. The paupers are very ill-behaved; I give you my word that I slave for them from morning till night, and you see how I am repaid."

"Mrs. Fogson, virtue is its own reward," observed the squire solemnly.

"It has to be in my case," said Mrs. Fogson; "but it comforts me to think that you at least appreciate my efforts."

"I do; I do, indeed! You can always rely upon me to—to—in a word, to back you up."

Here a diversion was made by the appearance of Mr. Fogson and the two boys.

"Oh, Simeon!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson impulsively. "You don't know what you have lost."

Mr. Fogson mechanically glanced at his vest to see whether his watch-chain and the watch appended were gone.

"What have I lost?" he demanded.

"Squire Dixon's interesting speech to the paupers. It was truly eloquent."

"My dear Mrs. Fogson," said the squire, looking modest, "you quite overrate my simple words."

"They were simple, but they were to the point," said the lady of the poorhouse, "and I hope—I do hope that the paupers will lay them to heart."

There was an amused smile on the face of Jed, who was sharp enough to see through the shallow humbug which was being enacted before him. He understood very well the interested motives of Mrs. Fogson, and why she saw fit to flatter the town official from whom she and her husband had received their appointment.

"I wish you had heard the squire, too, Jed!" said Mrs. Fogson, detecting the smile on the boy's face.

"Perhaps, ma'am, you can tell me what he said," returned Jed demurely.

Mrs. Fogson was a little taken aback, but she accepted the invitation.

"He said you ought to consider yourself very lucky to have such a comfortable home."

"I do," said Jed with a comical look.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Fogson, suspiciously, "though it hasn't always looked that way, I am bound to say."

"Are you going to stay much longer, father?" asked Percy, who was getting tired.

"Perhaps we had better go," said Squire Dixon. "We have staid quite a while."

"When do you have dinner?" asked Percy, turning to Jed.

"In about an hour. I have no doubt Mrs. Fogson will invite you, if you would like to stay."

"*Me*—eat with paupers?" retorted Percy with fine scorn.

"I don't think you would like it," said Jed. "I don't."

"Why, you are a pauper yourself."

"I don't think so. I earn my living, such as it is. I work from morning till night."

"What do they give you for dinner?" asked Percy, moved by curiosity.

"Mrs. Fogson puts a bone in the boiler and makes bone soup," answered Jed gravely. "You can't tell how good it is till you try it."

"Is there anything else?"

"A few soggy potatoes, and some stale bread without butter."

"Don't you have tea?"

"Once on Sundays. It don't do to pamper us, you know."

"Do you have puddings or pies?"

"No; the town can't afford it," returned Jed without a smile. "What do you think of our bill of fare?"

"Pretty mean, I think. Do Mr. and Mrs. Fogson eat with you?"

"No; they eat later, in the small room adjoining."

"Do they have the same dinner as you?"

"Sometimes they have roast chicken, and the other day when I went into the room there was a plum pudding on the table."

Percy laughed.

"Just what I thought. The old man and old woman aren't going to get left."

"I don't know about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll explain another time," said Jed, nodding. "I wish I was Overseer of the Poor."

"What would you do?"

"I'd turn out the Fogsons and put back Mr. and Mrs. Avery."

"Father says they spoiled the paupers."

"At any rate they didn't starve them."

"Old Fogson is saving money to the town—so father says."

"Wait till the end of the year. You'll find the town will have just as much to pay. What they save off the food they will put into their own pockets."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Fogson suspiciously.

Jed did not have to reply, for Percy took offense at what he rightly judged to be a piece of impertinence.

"Mrs. Fogson," he said, "what we are talking about is no concern of yours."

A bright red spot showed itself in either cheek of Mrs. Fogson, and she would have annihilated the speaker if she could; but she was politic, and remembered that Percy was the son of the overseer.

"I didn't mean any offense, Master Percy," she said. "It was simply a playful remark on my part."

"I'm glad to hear it," responded Percy. "You didn't look very playful."

Squire Dixon was conversing with Mr. Fogson, and didn't hear this little conversation.

"I am just digging my potatoes," said Fogson deferentially. "I have some excellent Jackson whites. I will send you round a bushel to try."

"You are very kind, Mr. Fogson," said the squire, smiling urbanely. "I shall appreciate them, you may be sure. Mr. Avery never would have made me such an offer. It is clear to me that you are the right man in the right place."

"I am proud to hear you say so, Squire Dixon. With such an Overseer of the Poor as you are, I am sure the interests of the town will be safe."

"Thank you! Good-by."

"Come again soon, squire," said Mrs. Fogson with a frosty smile. She did not extend a similar invitation to Percy, who had wounded her pride by his unceremonious words.

"They are very worthy people, Percy," said the squire as they rode away.

"Do you think so, father? I don't admire your taste."

"My son, I am surprised at you," but in his secret heart the squire agreed with Percy.

Soon after Squire Dixon and Percy left the poorhouse dinner was served. It answered very well the description given by Jed. Though the boy was hungry, he found it almost impossible to eat his portion, scanty though it was.

"Turning up your nose at your dinner as usual!" said Mrs. Fogson sharply. "If you don't like it you can get another boarding-house."

"I think I shall," answered Jed.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Mrs. Fogson quickly.

"If the board doesn't improve I shall dry up and blow away," returned Jed.

Mrs. Fogson sniffed and let the matter drop.

Towards the close of the afternoon, as Jed was splitting wood in the yard, his attention was drawn to a runaway horse which was speeding down the road at breakneck speed, while a lady's terrified face was visible looking vainly around in search of help.

Jed dropped his axe, ran to the bend of the road, and dashed out, waving a branch which he picked up by the roadside. The horse slowed down, and Jed, seizing the opportunity, ran to his head, seized him by the bridle, and brought him to a permanent stop.

"How brave you are!" said the lady. "Will you jump into the buggy and drive me to my home? I don't dare to trust myself alone with the horse again."

Jed did as desired, and at the end of the ride Mrs. Redmond (she was the wife of Dr. Redmond) gave him a dollar, accompanying it with hearty thanks.

"I suppose Fogson will try to get this dollar away from me," thought Jed, "but he won't succeed."

CHAPTER IV. AN EXCITING CONTEST

Jed was not mistaken.

When he returned to the poorhouse supper was ready, and Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were waiting for him with sour and angry faces.

"Where have you been?" demanded Fogson.

"Absent on business," announced Jed coolly.

"Don't you know that your business is to stay here and work?"

"I have been working all day."

"No, you haven't. You have been to the village."

"I had a good reason for going."

"Why didn't you ask permission of me or Mrs. Fogson?"

"Because there wasn't time."

"You are two minutes late for supper. I've a good mind to let you go without," said Mrs. Fogson.

"It wouldn't be much of a loss," answered Jed, not looking much alarmed.

"You are getting more and more impudent every day. Why do you say there wasn't time to ask permission to leave your work?"

"Because the runaway horse wouldn't stop while I was asking."

"What runaway horse?" demanded Fogson with sudden interest.

"While I was splitting wood I saw Dr. Redmond's wife being run away with. She looked awfully frightened. I ran out to the bend and stopped the horse. Then she wanted me to drive her home, for she was afraid he would run off again."

"Is that so? Well, of course that makes a difference. Did she give you anything?"

"Now it's coming," thought Jed.

"Yes," he answered.

"How much?" asked Mr. Fogson with a greedy look.

"A dollar."

"Quite handsome, on my word. Well, hand it over."

"What?" ejaculated Jed.

"Give me the dollar!" said Fogson in a peremptory tone.

"The dollar is mine."

"You are a pauper. You can't hold any property. It's against the law."

"Is it? Who told you so?"

"No matter who told me so. I hope I understand the law."

"I hope I understand my rights."

"Boy, this is trifling. You'd better not make me any trouble, or you will find yourself in a bad box."

"What do you want to do with the dollar?"

"None of your business! I shall keep it."

"I have no doubt you will if you get it, but it is mine," said Jed firmly.

"Mrs. Fogson," said her husband solemnly, "did you ever hear of such perverseness?"

"No. The boy is about the worst I ever see."

"Mr. Fogson," said Jed, "when Mr. Avery was here I had money given me several times, though never as much as this. He never thought of asking me for it, but always allowed me to spend it for myself."

"Mr. Avery and I are two different persons," remarked Mr. Fogson with asperity.

"You are right, there," said Jed, in hearty concurrence with the speaker.

"And he was very unwise to let you keep the money. If it was five cents, now, I wouldn't mind," continued Mr. Fogson with noteworthy liberality. "But a dollar! You couldn't be trusted to spend a sum like that properly at your age."

"I am almost sixteen," said Jed significantly.

"No matter if you are. You are still a mere boy. But I don't propose to waste any more words. Hand over that money!"

Jed felt that the critical moment had come. He must submit to a flagrant piece of injustice or resist.

He determined to resist.

He met Fogson's glance firmly and resolutely, and uttered but two words: "I won't!"

"Did you ever hear such impudence, Mrs. Fogson?" asked her husband, his face becoming red and mottled in his excitement.

"No, Simeon, I didn't!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson.

"What shall I do?"

"Thrash him. It's the only way to cure him of his cantankerous conduct."

Jed was of good height for his age, and unusually thickset and strong. Though poorhouse fare was hardly calculated to give him strength, he had an intimate friend and school companion on a farm near by whose mother often gave him a substantial meal, so that he alone of the inmates of the poorhouse could afford to be comparatively indifferent to the mean table kept by the managers.

Jed was five feet six, and Simeon Fogson but two inches taller. Fogson, however, was not a well man. He was a dyspeptic, and frequently indulged in alcoholic drinks, which, as my young readers doubtless know, have a direct tendency to impair physical vigor.

"Get me the whip, Gloriana," said Mr. Fogson fiercely, addressing his wife by her rather uncommon first name. "I will see whether this young upstart is to rule you and me and the whole establishment."

"I don't care about ruling anybody except myself," said Jed.

"You can't rule yourself. I am put in authority over you."

"Who put you in authority over me?" asked Jed defiantly.

"The town."

"And did the town give you leave to rob me? Answer me that!"

"Did you ever hear the like?" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson, raising her arms in almost incredulous surprise.

By this time Mr. Fogson had the whip in his hand, and with an air of enjoyment drew the lash through his fingers.

"Take off your coat!" he said.

"I would rather keep it on," replied Jed undauntedly.

"It won't do you any good. I shall strike hard enough for you to feel it even if you had two coats on."

"You'd better not!" said Jed, eyeing Mr. Fogson warily.

"Are you going to stand the boy's impudence, Simeon?" demanded his wife sharply.

"No, I'm not;" and Simeon Fogson, flourishing the whip, brought it down on Jed's shoulders and back.

Then something happened which took the poorhouse superintendent by surprise. Jed sprang toward him, and, grasping the whip with energy, tore it from his grasp, and with angry and inflamed face confronted his persecutor. Mr. Fogson turned pale, and looked undecided what to do.

"Shall I hold him, Simeon?" asked his wife venomously.

"No; I'm a match for a half-grown boy like him," returned Fogson, ashamed to ask for help in so unequal a contest.

He sprang forward and grabbed Jed, who accepted the gage of battle and clinched with his adversary. A moment afterward they were rolling on the floor, first one being uppermost, then the other.

CHAPTER V. JED SECURES AN ALLY

It was trying to Mrs. Fogson to see her husband apparently getting the worst of it from "that young viper," as she mentally apostrophized Jed, and she longed to take a part, notwithstanding her husband's refusal to accept her assistance.

A bright but malicious idea struck her. She seized a tin dipper and filled it half full from the tea-kettle, the water in which was almost scalding. Then she seized an opportunity to empty it over Jed. But unfortunately for the success of her amiable plan, by the time she was ready to pour it out it was Mr. Fogson who was exposed, and he received the whole of the water on his neck and shoulder.

"Help! Help! Murder!" he shrieked in anguish. "You have scalded me, you—you she cat!"

As he spoke he released his hold on Jed, who sprang to his feet and stood watching for the next movement of the enemy.

"Did I scald you, Simeon?" asked Mrs. Fogson in dismay.

"Yes; I am almost dead. Get some flour and sweet oil—quick!"

"I didn't mean to," said his wife repentantly. "I meant it for that boy."

"You're an idiot!" roared Fogson, stamping his foot. "Go and get the oil—quick!"

Mrs. Fogson, much frightened, hurried to obey orders, and the next fifteen minutes were spent in allaying the anguish of her lord and master, who made it very unpleasant for her by his bitter complaints and upbraidings.

"I think I'd better get out of this," thought Jed. "The old woman will be trying to scald me next."

He disappeared through the side door, leaving the amiable couple busily but not pleasantly employed.

He had scarcely left the house when Dr. Redmond drove up, his errand being to see one of the inmates of the poorhouse.

"How are you, Jed?" he said pleasantly. "My wife tells me you did her a great service to-day?"

"I was glad to do it, doctor," said Jed.

"Here's a dollar. I am sure you can use it."

"But, doctor, Mrs. Redmond gave me a dollar."

"Never mind! You can use both."

"Thank you," said Jed. "You'd better go right in, doctor; Mrs. Fogson has just scalded her husband, and he is in great pain."

"How did it happen?" asked the doctor in amazement.

"Go in and they'll tell you," said Jed. "I'll see you afterwards and tell you whether their story is correct."

When Mr. and Mrs. Fogson saw the doctor enter they were overjoyed.

"Oh, Dr. Redmond," groaned Fogson, "do something to relieve me quick. I'm in terrible pain."

"What's the matter?" asked Dr. Redmond.

"I am scalded."

"How did it happen?"

"*She* did it!" said Fogson, pointing scornfully to Mrs. Fogson.

Dr. Redmond set himself at once to relieve the suffering one, making use of the remedies that Fogson himself had suggested to his wife. When the patient was more comfortable he turned gravely to Mrs. Fogson and asked: "Will you explain how your husband got scalded?"

"The woman poured hot water on me," interrupted Fogson with an ugly scowl. "It would serve her right if I treated her in the same manner."

"You don't mean that she did it on purpose, Mr. Fogson?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Of course I didn't," retorted Mrs. Fogson indignantly. "I meant it for Jed."

"You meant to scald Jed?" said the doctor sternly.

"Yes; he assaulted my husband, and I feared he would kill him. It was all the way I could help."

"Mrs. Fogson, I can hardly believe you would be guilty of such an atrocious act even on your own confession, nor can I believe that Jed would assault your husband without good cause."

"It is true, whether you believe it or not," said Mrs. Fogson sullenly.

Dr. Redmond's answer was to open the outer door and call "Jed!"

Jed entered at once, and stood in the presence of his persecutors, calm and undisturbed.

"Jed," said the doctor, "Mrs. Fogson admits that she scalded her husband in trying to scald you, and urges, in defense, that you assaulted Mr. Fogson. What do you say to this?"

"That Mr. Fogson struck me over the shoulder with a horsewhip, and that I pulled it away from him. Upon this he sprang at me, and in self-defense I grappled with him, and while we were rolling over the floor Mrs. Fogson poured a dipper of hot water over her husband, meaning it for me."

"Is this true, Mr. Fogson?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, it's about so. Mrs. Fogson acted like an idiot."

"If she had scalded Jed instead of you, would you say the same thing?"

"Well, of course that would have been different."

"I can see no difference," said Dr. Redmond sternly. "It was not an idiotic, but a brutal and inhuman act."

"Come, doctor, that's rather strong," protested Fogson uncomfortably.

"It is not too strong! I don't think there is a person in the village but would agree with me. Had the victim of the scalding been Jed, I would have reported the matter to the authorities. Now tell me why you attempted to horsewhip the boy?"

"Because he was impudent," replied Fogson evasively.

"And that was all?"

"He disobeyed me."

"Jed, let me hear your version of the story."

"Mr. Fogson knew that I had a dollar given me by Mrs. Redmond, and he called upon me to give it up to him. I wouldn't do it, and upon that he tried to horsewhip me."

"You see he owns up to his disobeying me, doctor," put in Fogson triumphantly.

"Why did you require him to give you the dollar, Mr. Fogson?"

"Because he is a pauper, and a pauper has no right to hold money."

"I won't discuss that point. What did you propose to do with the dollar in case you had obtained it from Jed?"

"As you are not Overseer of the Poor, Dr. Redmond, I don't know that I have any call to tell you. When Squire Dixon asks me I will make it all straight with him."

"Probably," answered the doctor in a significant tone, for he as well as others understood that there was some secret compact between Mr. Fogson and the town official, and he had earnestly opposed Squire Dixon at the polls.

"Not only you, but Squire Dixon will have to give an account of your stewardship," he said. "If any outrage should be committed against the boy Jed, or any one else in this establishment, you will find that making it straight with Squire Dixon won't be sufficient."

"I will report what you say to Squire Dixon," said Fogson defiantly.

"I wish you would. I shouldn't object to saying the same thing to his face. Now, Mrs. Fogson, if you will lead the way I will go and see Mrs. Connolly."

"Come along, then," said Mrs. Fogson, compressing her thin lips. "I don't believe there is anything the matter with that old woman."

"I am a better judge of that matter than you, Mrs. Fogson."

The poor old woman looked thin and wan, and hardly had strength to lift up her head to meet the doctor's glance.

After a brief examination he said: "Your trouble is nervous debility. You have no strength. What you need is nourishment. Do you have tea three times a day, Mrs. Connolly?"

"Only once a week, doctor," wailed the poor old woman, bursting into tears.

"Only once a week!" repeated the doctor shocked. "What does this mean, Mrs. Fogson?"

"It means, Dr. Redmond," answered the mistress of the poorhouse, "that this is not a first-class hotel."

"I should say not," commented the doctor. "How often did you have tea, Mrs. Connolly, when Mr. and Mrs. Avery were here?"

"At breakfast and supper, and on Sundays three times a day."

"Precisely. What do you say to that, Mrs. Fogson?"

"I say, as everybody says, that the Averys squandered the town's money."

"They certainly didn't put it into their own pockets. The town, I think I am safe in saying, doesn't mean to starve the poor people whom it provides for. Do I understand that you are actuated by a desire to save the town's money?"

"Of course I am, and Squire Dixon approves all I do," answered Mrs. Fogson defiantly.

"If he approves your withholding the necessities of life from those under your charge he is unfit for his position. When the accounts of the poorhouse are audited at the end of the year I shall make a searching examination, and ascertain how much less they are under your administration than under that of your predecessors."

Judging from her looks, Mrs. Fogson was aching to scratch Dr. Redmond's eyes out; but as he was not a pauper she was compelled to restrain her anger.

"Now, Mrs. Connolly," said the doctor, "you are to have tea twice a day, and three times on Sunday. I shall see that it is given to you," he added, with a significant glance at Mrs. Fogson.

"Oh, how glad I am!" said the poor creature. "God bless you, Dr. Redmond!"

"Mrs. Fogson," went on the doctor, "do you limit yourself to tea once a week?"

"I ain't a pauper, Dr. Redmond!" replied Mrs. Fogson indignantly.

"No; you are much stronger than a pauper, and could bear the deprivation better. Let me tell you that you needn't be afraid to supply decent food to the poor people in your charge. It won't cost any more than it did under the Averys, for prices are, on the whole, cheaper."

"Perhaps if it does cost more you'll pay it out of your own pocket."

"I contribute already to the support of the poorhouse, being a large taxpayer, and I give my medical services without exacting payment. The town is not mean, and I will see that no fault is found with reasonable bills."

"I wish you'd fall and break your neck, you old meddler," thought Mrs. Fogson, but she did not dare to say this.

"One thing more, madam!" said the doctor, who had now entered the room where Jed and her husband were; "reserve your hot water for its legitimate uses. No more scalding, if you please."

"That's well put, doctor!" growled Fogson. "If she wants to scald anybody else, she had better try herself."

"That's all the gratitude I get for taking your part, Simeon Fogson," said the exasperated helpmeet. "The next time, Jed may beat you black and blue for all I care."

"It strikes me," remarked the doctor dryly, "that your husband is a match for a boy of sixteen, and need be under no apprehension. No more horsewhips, Mr. Fogson, if *you* please, and don't trouble yourself about any small sums that Jed may receive. Jed, jump into my buggy, and I will take you home with me. I think Mrs. Redmond will give you some supper."

"The boy hasn't done his chores," said Mrs. Fogson maliciously.

"Very well, I will make a bargain with you. Don't object to his going, and I won't charge Mr. Fogson anything for my attendance upon him just now."

This appeal to the selfish interests of Mr. Fogson had its effect, and Jed jumped into the doctor's buggy with eager alacrity.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FOGSON MAKES UP HIS MIND

"I don't know, Jed, whether I can make up to you for the supper you will lose at the poorhouse," observed the doctor jocosely. "Mrs. Redmond may not be as good a cook as Mrs. Fogson."

"I will risk it," said Jed.

"Is the fare much worse than it was when Mrs. Avery was in charge?"

"Very much worse. I don't mind it much myself, for I often get a meal at Fred Morrison's, but the poor old people have a hard time."

"I will make it my business to see that there is an improvement."

"Dr. Redmond," said Jed after a pause, "do you think it would be wrong for me to run away from the poorhouse?"

"Have you any such intention?" asked the doctor quickly.

"Yes; I think I can earn my own living, and a better living than I have there. I am young and strong, and I am not afraid to try."

"As to that, Jed, I don't see why there should be any objection to your making the attempt. The town of Scranton ought not to object to lessening the number it is required to support."

"Mr. and Mrs. Fogson would object. They would miss my work."

"Have you ever spoken to them on the subject?"

"I did one day, and they said I would have to stay till I was twenty-one."

"That is not true."

"I don't think I could stay that long," said Jed soberly. "I should be dead before that time if I had to live with Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, and fared no better. Besides, you see how I am dressed. I should think you would be ashamed to have me at your table."

Jed's clothes certainly were far from becoming. They were of unknown antiquity, and were two sizes too small for him, so that the sleeves and the legs of the trousers were so scant as to attract attention. In his working hours he wore a pair of overalls, but those he took off when he accepted Dr. Redmond's invitation.

"I didn't invite your clothes, Jed; I invited you," responded the doctor. "I confess, however, that your suit is pretty shabby. How long have you worn it?"

"It was given me nearly two years ago."

"And you have had no other since?"

"No. If I stayed there till I was twenty-one I expect I should have to wear the same old things."

Dr. Redmond laughed.

"I am bound to say, Jed, that in that case you would cut a comical figure. However, I don't think it will be as bad as that. My son Ross is in college. He is now twenty. I will ask my wife to look about the house and see if there isn't an old suit of his that will fit you. It will, at any rate, be a good deal better than this."

"Thank you, doctor; but will you save it till I am ready to leave Scranton?"

"Yes, Jed. I will have it put in a bundle, and it will be ready for you any time you call for it."

"There's another thing, doctor. I think Mr. Fogson will try to get my money away, notwithstanding all you said."

"He wouldn't dare to."

"He is very cunning. He will find some excuse."

Jed was right. To prove this, we will go back to the poorhouse and relate the conversation between the well-matched pair after Dr. Redmond's departure.

"Simeon," said his wife, "if you had any spunk you wouldn't let Dr. Redmond insult and bully you, as he did just now."

"What would you have me to do?" demanded her husband irritably. "I couldn't knock him down, could I?"

"No, but you could have talked up to him."

"I did; but you must remember that he is an important man in the town, and it wouldn't be wise to make him an enemy."

"Squire Dixon is still more important. If he backs you up you needn't be afraid of this trumpety doctor."

"Well, what would you advise?"

"Go this evening and see the squire. Tell him what has happened, and if he gives you authority to take Jed's money, take it."

"Really, that is a good suggestion, Mrs. F. I will go soon after supper."

"It would do no good to triumph over Dr. Redmond. He is an impertinent meddler."

"So he is. I agree with you there."

Soon after seven o'clock Squire Dixon was somewhat surprised when the servant ushered Mr. Fogson into his presence.

"Ah, Fogson," he exclaimed. "I was not expecting to see you. Has anything gone wrong?"

"I should think so. Jed has rebelled against my lawful authority, and Dr. Redmond is aiding and abetting him in it."

"You astonish me, Fogson. Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I'll tell you the whole story, squire, and you can judge for yourself."

Upon this Mr. Fogson gave an account of the scenes that had taken place in the poorhouse, including his contest with Jed, and Mrs. Fogson's ill-judged attempt to assist him.

"Certainly, you were in bad luck," said the squire. "Is the injury serious?"

"The burn is very painful, squire. Mrs. Fogson acted like an idiot. Why didn't she take better aim?"

"To be sure, to be sure. Wasn't the boy scalded at all?"

"Not a particle," answered Fogson in an aggrieved tone. "Now, what I want to know is, didn't I have a right to take the money from Jed?"

"Yes, I think so. The boy would probably have made bad use of it."

"The ground I take, squire, is that a pauper has no right to possess money."

"I quite agree with you. Since the town maintains him, the town should have a right to exact any money of which he becomes accidentally possessed."

"I don't quite see that the town should have it," said Fogson. "As the boy's official guardian, I think I ought to keep it, to use for the boy whenever I thought it judicious."

"Yes, I think that view is correct. I had only given the point a superficial consideration."

"Dr. Redmond denies this. He says I have no right to take the money from Jed."

"Dr. Redmond's view is not entitled to any weight. He has no official right to intermeddle."

"You'd think he had, by the manner in which he lectured Mrs. Fogson and myself. I never heard such impudence."

"Dr. Redmond assumes too much. He doesn't appear to understand that I, and not he, was appointed Overseer of the Poor."

"He says you are not fit for the position," said Fogson, transcending the limits of strict accuracy, as the reader will understand.

"What?" ejaculated Squire Dixon, his face flushing angrily.

"That's just what he said," repeated Fogson, delighted by the effect of his misrepresentations. "It's my belief that he wanted the office himself."

"Very likely, very likely!" said the squire angrily. "Do I understand you to say that he actually called me unfit for the position?"

"Yes he did. He appears to think that he can boss you and Mrs. F. and myself. Why, he stood by that boy, though he had actually assaulted me, and invited him home to supper."

"You don't mean this, Mr. Fogson?"

"Yes I do. Jed is at this very moment at the doctor's house. What mischief they are concocting I can't tell, but I am sure that I shall have more trouble with the boy."

Squire Dixon was very much disturbed. He was a vain man, and his pride sustained a severe shock when told that the doctor considered him unfit for his position.

"However," resumed the crafty Fogson, "I suppose we shall have to give in to the doctor."

"Give in!" exclaimed the squire, his face turning purple. "Never, Mr. Fogson, never!"

"I hate to give in, I confess, squire, but the doctor is a prominent man, and—"

"Prominent man! I should like to know whether I am not a prominent man also, Mr. Fogson? Moreover, I represent the town, and Dr. Redmond doesn't."

"I am glad you will stand by me, squire. With you on my side, I will not fear."

"I will stand by you, Mr. Fogson."

"I should hate to be triumphed over by a mere boy."

"You shall not be, Mr. Fogson."

"Then will you authorize me to demand the money from him?"

"I will authorize you, Mr. Fogson, and if the boy persists in refusing, I authorize you to use coercive measures. Do you understand?"

"I believe I do, squire. You will let it be understood that you have given me authority, won't you? Suppose the boy complains to Dr. Redmond?"

"You may refer Dr. Redmond to me, Mr. Fogson," said the squire pompously. "I think I shall be tempted to give this meddling doctor a piece of my mind."

Mr. Fogson took leave of the squire and pursued his way homeward with a smile on his face. He had accomplished what he desired, and secured a powerful ally in his campaign against the boy Jed and Dr. Redmond.

He returned home a little after eight, and just before nine Jed made his appearance at the door of the poorhouse. He was in good spirits, for he had decided that he would soon turn his back upon the place which had been his home for fourteen years.

CHAPTER VII. FOGSON'S MISTAKE

"So you have got home?" said Mr. Fogson with an unpleasant smile as he opened the door to admit Jed later that evening.

"Yes, sir."

"You had a pleasant time, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jed, wondering to what all these questions tended.

"I suppose Dr. Redmond put himself out to entertain such a distinguished guest?"

"No, Mr. Fogson, I don't think he did."

"He didn't make arrangements to run the poorhouse, with your help, did he?"

"No," answered Jed with emphasis.

"We ought to be thankful, Mrs. Fogson and I, humbly thankful, that we ain't to be turned out by this high and mighty doctor."

"If you don't like the doctor you had better tell him so," said Jed; "he don't need me to defend him."

"Do you know where I've been to-night?" queried Fogson, changing his tone.

"How could I tell?"

"I've been to see Squire Dixon."

"Well, sir, I suppose you had a right to. I hope you had a pleasant call."

"I did, and what's more, I told him of Dr. Redmond's impertinent interference with me in my management of the poorhouse. He told me not to pay any attention to Redmond, but to be guided by him. So long as he was satisfied with me, it was all right."

"You'd better tell Dr. Redmond that when he calls here next time."

"I shall; but there's something I've got to say to you. He said I had a perfect right to take the dollar from you, for as a pauper you had no right to hold property of any kind. That's what Squire Dixon says. Now hand over that money, or you'll get into trouble."

"I wouldn't give the money to Squire Dixon himself," answered Jed boldly.

"You wouldn't, hey? I'll tell him that. You'll give it to me to-night, though."

He put out his hand to seize Jed, but the boy quietly moved aside, and said, "You can't get the money from me to-night, Mr. Fogson."

"Why can't I? There's no Dr. Redmond to take your part now. Why can't I, I'd like to know?"

"Because I haven't got it."

"What!" exclaimed Fogson. "Do you mean to say you've spent it already? If you have—"

"No, I haven't spent it, but I have given it to Dr. Redmond to keep for me."

Fogson showed in his face his intense disappointment. He expected to get the money without fail, and lo! the victory was snatched from him.

He glared at Jed, and seemed about to pounce upon him, but he thought better of it.

"You'll go and get the money in the morning," he said. "You and Dr. Redmond are engaged in a conspiracy against the town and the laws, and I am not sure but I could have you both arrested. Mind, if that money is not handed to me to-morrow you will get a thrashing. Now go to bed!"

Jed was not sorry to avail himself of this permission. He had not enjoyed the interview with Mr. Fogson, and he felt tired and in need of rest. Accordingly he went up stairs to the attic, where there was a cot bed under the bare rafters, which he usually occupied. There had been another boy, three months before, who had shared the desolate room with him, but he had been bound out to a farmer, and now Jed was the sole occupant.

Tired as he was, he did not go to sleep immediately. He undressed himself slowly in the obscurity, for he was not allowed a lamp, and made a movement to get into bed.

But a surprise awaited him. His extended hand came in contact with a human face, and one on which there was a mustache. Somebody was in his bed!

Naturally, Jed was startled.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

"Who'm I? I'm a gentleman," was the drowsy reply.

"You're in my bed," said Jed, annoyed as well as surprised.

"Where is *my* bed?" hiccupped the other.

"I don't know. How did you get in here?"

"I came in when no one was lookin'," answered the intruder. "Zis a hotel?"

"No; it's the Scranton poorhouse."

"You don't say? Dad always told me I'd end up in the poorhouse, but I didn't expect to get there so quick."

"You'd better get up and go down stairs. Fogson wouldn't like to have you stay here all night."

"Who's Fogson?"

"He is the manager of the poorhouse."

"Who cares for Fogson? I don't b'lieve Fogson is a gen'leman."

"Nor I," inwardly assented Jed.

This was the last word that he could get from the intruder, who coolly turned over and began to snore.

Fortunately for Jed, there was another cot bed—the one formerly occupied by the other boy—and he got into it.

Fatigued by the events of the day, Jed soon slept a sound and refreshing sleep. In fact his sleep was so sound that it is doubtful whether a thunderstorm would have awakened him.

Towards morning the occupant of the other bed turned in such a way as to lie on his back. This position, as my readers are probably aware, is conducive to heavy snoring, and the intruder availed himself of this to the utmost.

Mr. and Mrs. Fogson slept directly underneath, and after awhile, the door leading to the attic being open, the sound of the snoring attracted the attention of Mrs. Fogson.

"Simeon!" she said, shaking her recumbent husband.

"What is it, Mrs. F.?" inquired her lord and master drowsily.

"Did you hear that?"

"Did I hear what?"

"That terrific snoring. It is loud enough to wake the dead."

By this time Fogson was fairly awake.

"So it is," he assented. "Who is it?"

"Jed, of course. What possesses the boy to snore so?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. I never heard a boy of his age make such a noise."

"It must be stopped, Simeon. It can't be more than three o'clock, and if it continues I shan't sleep another wink."

"Well, go up and stop it."

"It is more suitable for you to go, Mr. Fogson. I do believe the boy is snoring out of spite."

Even Fogson laughed at this idea.

"He couldn't do that unless he snored when he was awake," he replied. "It isn't easy to snore when you are not asleep. If you don't believe it, try it."

"I am ashamed of you, Simeon. Do you think I would demean myself by any such low action? If that snoring isn't stopped right off I shall go into a fit."

"I wouldn't like to have you do that," said Fogson, rather amused. "It would be rather worse than hearing Jed snore."

About this time there was an unusual outburst on the part of the sleeper.

"A little hot water would fix him," said Fogson. "It is a pity you had not saved your hot water till to-night."

"Cold water would do just as well."

"So it would. Mrs. F., that's a bright idea. I owe the boy a grudge for giving his money to Dr. Redmond. I'll go down stairs and get a clipper of cold water, and I'll see if I can't stop the boy's noise."

Mr. Fogson went down stairs, chuckling, as he went, at the large joke he was intending to perpetrate. It would not be so bad as being scalded, but it would probably be very disagreeable to Jed to be roused from a sound sleep by a dash of cold water.

"I hope he won't wake up before I get there," thought Mr. Fogson, as he descended to the kitchen in his stocking feet to procure the water.

He pumped for a minute or two in order that the water might be colder, and then with the dipper in hand ascended two flights of stairs to the attic.

Up there it was still profoundly dark. There was but one window, and that was screened by a curtain. Moreover, it was very dark outside. Mr. Fogson, however, was not embarrassed, for he knew just where Jed's bed was situated, and, even if he had not, the loud snoring, which still continued, would have been sufficient to guide him to the place.

"It beats me how a boy can snore like that," soliloquized Fogson. "He must have eaten something at Dr. Redmond's that didn't agree with him. If I didn't know it was Jed I should feel frightened at such an unearthly hubbub. However, it won't continue long," and Fogson laughed to himself as he thought of the sensation which his dipper of water was likely to produce.

He approached a little nearer, and in spite of the darkness could see the outlines of a form on the bed, but he could not see clearly enough to make out the difference between it and Jed's.

He poised himself carefully, and then dashed the water vigorously into the face of the sleeping figure.

The results were not exactly what he had anticipated.

CHAPTER VIII. MR. FOGSON IS ASTONISHED

The sleeper had already slept off pretty nearly all the effects of his potations, and the sudden cold bath restored him wholly to himself. But it also aroused in him a feeling of anger, justifiable under the circumstances, and, not belonging to the Peace Society, he was moved to punish the person to whom he was indebted for his unpleasant experience.

With a smothered imprecation he sprang from the bed and seized the astonished Fogson by the throat, while he shook him violently.

"You—you—scoundrel!" he ejaculated. "I'll teach you to play such a scurvy trick on a gentleman."

Mr. Fogson screamed in fright. He did not catch his late victim's words, and was still under the impression that it was Jed who had tackled him.

Meanwhile the intruder was flinging him about and bumping him against the floor so forcibly that Mrs. Fogson's attention was attracted. Indeed, she was at the foot of the stairs, desiring to enjoy Jed's dismay when drenched with the contents of the tin dipper.

"What's the matter, Simeon?" she cried.

"Jed's killing me!" called out Fogson in muffled tones.

"You don't mean to say you ain't a match for that boy!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson scornfully. "I'll come up and help you."

Disregarding her light attire she hurried up stairs, and was astonished beyond measure when she saw how unceremoniously her husband was being handled. She rushed to seize Jed, when she found her hands clutching a mustache.

"Why, it ain't Jed!" she screamed in dismay.

"No, it ain't Jed," said the intruder. "Did you mean that soaking for Jed, whoever he is?"

"Yes, yes, it was—quite a mistake!" gasped Fogson.

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I meant to fling you down stairs, and might have broken your neck."

"Oh, what a dreadful man!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson. "How came you here and where is Jed?"

"I am here!" answered Jed, who had waked up two or three minutes previous and was enjoying the defeat of his persecutor.

"Did you bring in this man?" demanded Mrs. Fogson sternly.

"No. I walked in myself," answered the intruder. "I was rather mellow—in other words I had drunk too much mixed ale, and I really didn't know where I was. I had an idea that this was a hotel."

"You made a mistake, sir. This is the Scranton poorhouse."

"So the boy told me when he came in. I wouldn't have taken a bed here if I had known your playful way of pouring cold water on your guests."

"Sir, apart from your assault on me, *me*, the master of the poorhouse," said Fogson, trying to recover some of his lost dignity, "you committed a trespass in entering the house without permission and appropriating a bed."

"All right, old man, but just remember that I was drunk."

"I don't think that is an excuse."

"Isn't it? Just get drunk yourself, and see what you'll do."

"I don't allow Mr. Fogson to get drunk," said his wife with asperity.

"Maybe my wife wouldn't let me, if there was any such a person, but I haven't been so fortunate as Mr. Fogson, if that is his name."

"Mrs. F.," said her husband with a sudden thought, "you are not dressed for company."

Mrs. Fogson, upon this hint, scuttled down stairs, and the intruder resumed: "If I've taken a liberty I'm willing to apologize. What's more, I'll pay you fifty cents for the use of your bed and stay the night out."

He was appealing to Mr. Fogson's weak point, which was a love of money.

"I see you're ready to do the square thing," he said in softened accents. "If you'll say seventy-five—"

"No, I won't pay over fifty. I don't care to take it another night on those terms, if I am to be waked up by a dipper of water. You've wet the sheet and pillow so that I may take my death of cold if I sleep here any longer."

"I'll bring you a comforter which you can lay over the wet clothes."

"All right! Bring it up and I'll hand you the fifty cents."

"And—and if you would like breakfast in the morning, for the small extra sum of twenty-five cents—"

"Isn't that rather steep for a poorhouse breakfast?"

"You will not eat with the paupers, of course, but at a private table, with Mrs. Fogson and myself."

"All right! Your offer is accepted."

Mr. Fogson brought up the comforter, and the visitor resumed the slumbers which had been so unceremoniously interrupted.

The sun rose early, and when its rays crept in through the side window both Jed and his companion were awake.

"I say, boy, come over here and share my bed. I want to talk to you."

Jed's curiosity was excited, and he accepted the invitation.

He found his roommate to be a good-looking young man of perhaps thirty, and with a pleasant expression.

"So you are Jed?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you live in the poorhouse?"

"Yes," answered Jed, half-ashamed to admit it, "but I don't mean to stay here."

"Good! A smart boy like you ought not to be a pauper. You are able to earn your own living outside. But perhaps you are attached to the queer people who made me a visit last night."

"Not much!" answered Jed emphatically.

"I don't admire them much myself. I didn't see the old lady. Is she beautiful?"

Jed laughed heartily.

"You'll see her at the breakfast table," he said. "Then you can judge for yourself."

"I don't think I shall do anything to excite Fogson's jealousy. Zounds, if this isn't the queerest hotel I ever struck. I am sorry to have taken your bed from you."

"I was glad not to be in it when Mr. Fogson came up."

"You're right there," said the other laughing. "Whew! how the cold water startled me. Sorry to have deprived you of it."

"Mr. Fogson got a dose himself yesterday, only it was hot water."

"You don't say so! Was that meant for you, too?"

"Yes;" and Jed told the story of his struggle with Mr. Fogson, and his wife's unfortunate interference.

"That's a capital joke," said the visitor laughing. "Now I suppose you wonder who I am."

"Yes; I should like to know."

"I'm Harry Bertram, the actor. I don't know if you ever heard of me."

"I never attended the theatre in my life."

"Is that so? Why, you're quite a heathen. Never went to a theatre? Well, I *am* surprised."

"Is it a good business?" asked Jed.

"Sometimes, if the play happens to catch on. When you are stranded five hundred miles from home, and your salary isn't paid, it isn't exactly hilarious."

"Are you going to play anywhere near here?" asked Jed, who was beginning to think he would like to see a performance.

"We are billed to play in Duncan to-morrow evening, or rather this evening, for it's morning now."

"Duncan is only five miles away."

"If you want to attend I'll give you a pass. It's the least I can do to pay for turning you out of your bed."

"I could walk the five miles," said Jed.

"Then come. I'll see you at the door and pass you in. Ask for Harry Bertram."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram."

"Old Fogson won't make a fuss about your going, will he?"

"Yes, he will; but I've made up my mind to leave the poorhouse, and I might as well leave it to-day as any time."

"Good! I admire your pluck."

"I wish I knew what I could do to make a living."

"Leave that to me. I'll arrange to have you travel with the show for two or three days and bunk with me. Have you got any—any better clothes than those?" and Bertram pointed to the dilapidated garments lying on a chair near by.

"Yes, I am promised a good suit by a friend of mine in the village. I'll go there and put them on before starting."

"Do; the actors sometimes look pretty tough, but I never saw one dressed like that."

"Jed!" screamed Mrs. Fogson from the bottom of the stairs. "You get right up and come down stairs!"

"They're calling me," said Jed, starting up.

"Will I have to get up too?"

"No; Mr. and Mrs. Fogson don't breakfast till seven. They'll send me up to call you."

"All right! We'll soon be travelling together where there are no Fogsons."

"I hope so," and Jed went down stairs with new life in his step.

CHAPTER IX.

JED LEAVES THE POORHOUSE

At eight o'clock Harry Bertram was summoned to breakfast in the private sitting-room of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson. In spite of the poor fare of which the paupers complained the Fogsons took care themselves to have appetizing meals, and the well-spread table looked really attractive.

"Sit down here, Mr. Bertram," said Mrs. Fogson, pointing to a seat. The place opposite was vacant, as the heads of the table were occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Fogson.

"Mrs. Fogson," said the actor, "I am going to ask a favor."

"What is it?" returned the lady, wreathing her features into a frosty smile.

"I see the seat opposite me is unoccupied. Will you oblige me by letting the boy Jed take it?"

Mrs. Fogson's face changed.

"I should prefer not to have him here," she answered in a forbidding tone.

"Of course I propose to pay for his breakfast the same price that I pay for my own."

"The boy is insubordinate and disobedient," said the lady coldly.

"Still he gave me his bed last night. Some boys would have objected."

"My dear," said Fogson, whose weakness for money has already been mentioned, "I think, as the gentleman has agreed to pay for Jed's breakfast, we may give our consent, merely to gratify him."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Fogson, resolved to claim the twenty-five cents for herself.

She rose from her seat, went to the window, and opening it, called to Jed, who was at work in the yard.

He speedily made his appearance.

"Sit down to the table, Jedediah," said Mr. Fogson with dignity. "Mr. Bertram desires you to breakfast with him."

Jed was very much surprised, but as he noted the warm biscuit and beefsteak, which emitted an appetizing odor, he felt that it was an invitation not to be rejected.

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Bertram," he said, "and also to you and Mrs. Fogson."

This was a politic remark to make, and he was served as liberally as the guest.

"Do you find your position a pleasant one, Mr. Fogson?" asked Bertram politely.

"No, Mr. Bertram, far from it. The paupers are a thankless, ungrateful set, but I am sustained by a sense of duty."

"The paupers were spoiled by our predecessors, Mr. and Mrs. Avery," chimed in Mrs. Fogson. "Really, Mr. Bertram, you would be surprised to learn how unreasonable they are. They are always complaining of their meals."

"I am sure they must be unreasonable if they complain of meals like this, Mrs. Fogson," said the actor.

"Of course we can't afford to treat them like this. The town would object. But we give them as good fare as we can afford. Are you going to stay long in Scranton?"

"No; I am merely passing through. I shall sleep to-night at Duncan."

"At the poorhouse?" asked Jed with a comical smile.

"Yes, if I could be sure of as good fare as this," replied the actor with an answering smile. "But that would be very doubtful."

Mrs. Fogson, who, cross-grained as she was, was not above flattery, mentally pronounced Mr. Bertram a most agreeable young man—in fact, a perfect gentleman.

"I am really ashamed," continued Bertram, "to have entered your house in such a condition, but I was feeling a little internal disturbance, and fancied that whisky would relieve it. Unfortunately I took too much."

"It might have happened to anyone," said Fogson considerately. "I am myself a temperance man, but sometimes I find whisky beneficial to my health."

Bertram, noticing the ruddy hue of Mr. Fogson's nose, was quite ready to believe this statement.

"May I ask if you are a business man?" remarked Fogson.

"My business is acting. I belong to the Gold King Company, which is to play at Duncan to-night."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Fogson, with a glance of curiosity. "I never saw an actor before."

"I am sorry you should see such an unworthy representative of the Thespian art. If we were to play in Scranton, it would give me pleasure to offer you and Mr. Fogson complimentary tickets."

"I wish you were to play here," said Mrs. Fogson in a tone of regret. "I haven't seen a play for five years."

"I suppose you couldn't come to Duncan?"

"No; we could not be spared. Besides, we have no horse and carriage," said Fogson. "We must wait till you perform in Scranton."

Jed was very much relieved to hear this remark, for it would have interfered with his own plans if Mr. and Mrs. Fogson had accepted an invitation to witness the play at Duncan.

"Is it a good paying business?" asked Mr. Fogson.

"Well, so so. My salary is fifty dollars a week."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Fogson in envious surprise. "You ought to lay up money."

"It seems so, but in the summer we generally have a long vacation. Besides, we have to pay our hotel bills; so that, after all, we don't have as much left as you would suppose. Besides, we have to buy our costumes, and some of them are quite expensive."

In spite of these drawbacks the Fogsons evidently looked upon Bertram as a wealthy young man.

At length they rose from the table. Jed had never before eaten such a meal since he entered the poorhouse, and he felt in a degree envious of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, who probably fared thus every day. When he considered, however, how they nearly starved the poor people of whom they had charge he felt indignant, and could not help wishing that some time they might exchange places with the unfortunate paupers.

He went out to the yard again, and resumed his work at the woodpile. Harry Bertram strolled out and lazily watched him.

"I suppose you never did work of this kind, Mr. Bertram?" said Jed.

"Oh yes, I lived for nearly a year with an aunt who required me to prepare all the wood for the kitchen stove. I can tell you one thing, though, I did not enjoy it, and when I left her I retired forever from that line of business."

"Are you going to stay in Scranton to-day?"

"No; I must be getting over to Duncan. We have taken on a new actor and shall be obliged to have a rehearsal. Will you go along with me?"

"I should like to, but it would only get me into trouble. I will start about four o'clock, and go over to Dr. Redmond's to get the suit of clothes he promised me."

"I suppose you won't have to take a trunk of clothes from here?"

"About all the clothes I own are on my back. If I leave any behind me, anyone is welcome to them."

"Do you think there will be any difficulty in your getting away?"

"I think I can slip off without being noticed."

"Do you think they will go after you?"

"They might if they suspected where I was going."

"Then I shall have to help you. Join me at the theatre, and it will go hard if, between us, we cannot foil the enemy."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram. You are a real friend."

"Some people say I am everybody's friend but my own. You can judge for yourself about that when you know me better."

Harry Bertram walked off whistling, and Jed was left to his reflections. It is needless to say that he felt in an excited mood, for it seemed to him that he had come to a turning-point in his life. As far back as he could remember he had been an inmate of the Scranton poorhouse.

When Mr. and Mrs. Avery were in charge he had not minded this much, such was the kindness with which he was treated by those good people. But when, through the influence of Squire Dixon, they were removed and Mr. and Mrs. Fogson put in their place he began to feel the bitterness of his position. The three months which had passed since then seemed to him like so many years. But now he had resolved, once for all, to end his thralldom, and go out into the great world and see what he could do for himself.

Circumstances favored him.

About half-past three Mr. Fogson called him down.

"I want you to go to Squire Dixon's and carry this letter," he said.

Jed's heart leaped with joy. It at once occurred to him that Squire Dixon lived only about twenty rods from Dr. Redmond, and that he could call at the doctor's house after doing his errand.

"Is there any answer?" he asked.

"No; I have asked the squire to call here this evening, if he can. He is the overseer, and I wish to consult him."

"Very well, sir."

Jed took the letter, glad that no answer would be required. Even if there had been, he would have neglected to bring it, for he could not afford to throw away this chance of escape.

The distance from the poorhouse to Squire Dixon's residence was about three-quarters of a mile. Jed covered it in less than fifteen minutes.

In the front yard Percy Dixon was strutting about with the airy consequence habitual to him.

"What brings you here?" he asked rudely.

"I've come with a note for your father. After I've delivered it I will stop a little while and play with you if you want me to."

"You needn't trouble yourself. I don't care to play with paupers."

"Don't call me that again, Percy Dixon!" said Jed, his patience worn out.

"What will happen if I do?" demanded Percy tauntingly.

"I may be obliged to give you a thrashing."

CHAPTER X. JED REACHES DUNCAN

Percy Dixon's face flushed with resentment.

"Do you know who you are talking to?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Jed coolly. "I am talking to a boy who thinks a great deal more of himself than any one else does."

"I would punish you, but I don't want to dirty my hands with you. I'll tell my father, and he'll see that old Fogson flogs you."

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