ALGER HORATIO JR.

GRIT

Horatio Alger
Grit

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Grit / or The Young Boatman of Pine Point:

Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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CHAPTER I.
GRIT

"Grit!"

"Well, mother, what is it?"

The speaker was a sturdy, thick-set boy of fifteen, rather short for his age, but strongly made. His eyes were clear and bright, his expression was pleasant, and his face attractive, but even a superficial observer could read in it unusual firmness and strength of will. He was evidently a boy whom it would not be easy to subdue or frighten. He was sure to make his way in the world, and maintain his rights against all aggression. It was the general recognition of this trait which had led to the nickname, "Grit," by which he was generally known. His real name was Harry Morris, but even his mother had fallen into the habit of calling him Grit, and his own name actually sounded strange to him.

"Well, mother, what is it?" he asked again, as his mother

continued to look at him in silence, with an expression of trouble on her face.

"I had a letter this morning, Grit."

"From—*him*?"

"Yes, from your father."

"Don't call him my father!" said the boy hastily. "He isn't my father."

"He is your stepfather—and my husband," said Mrs. Morris soberly.

"Yes, worse luck for you! Well, what does he say?"

"He's coming home."

An expression of dismay quickly gathered on the boy's face.

"How can that be? His term isn't out."

"It is shortened by good behavior, and so he comes out four months before his sentence would have expired."

"I wouldn't have him here, mother," said Grit earnestly. "He will only worry and trouble you. We are getting on comfortably now without him."

"Yes, thanks to my good, industrious boy."

"Oh, don't talk about that," said Grit, who always felt embarrassed when openly praised.

"But it is true, Grit. But for the money you make in your boat, I might have to go to the poorhouse."

"You will never go while I live, mother," said Grit quickly.

"No, Grit, I feel sure of that. It seems wicked to rejoice in your father's misfortune and disgrace–"

"Not my father," interrupted Grit.

"Mr. Brandon, then. As I was saying, it seems wicked to feel relieved by his imprisonment, but I can't help it."

"Why should you try to help it? He has made you a bad husband, and only brought you unhappiness. How did you ever come to marry him, mother?"

"I did it for the best, as I thought, Grit. I was left a widow when you were four years old. I had this cottage, to be sure, and about two thousand dollars, but the interest of that sum at six per cent. only amounted to a hundred and twenty dollars, and I was not brave and self-reliant like some, so when Mr. Brandon asked me to marry him, I did so, thinking that he would give us a good home, be a father to you, and save us from all pecuniary care or anxiety."

"You were pretty soon undeceived, mother."

"No, not soon. Your stepfather had a good mercantile position in Boston, and we occupied a comfortable cottage in Newton. For some years all went well, but then I began to see a change for the worse in him. He became fond of drink, was no longer attentive to business, picked up bad associates, and eventually lost his position. This was when you were ten years of age. Then he took possession of my little capital and went into business for himself. But his old habits clung to him, and of course there was small chance of success. He kept up for about a year, however, and then he failed, and the creditors took everything–"

"Except this house, mother."

"Yes, this house was fortunately settled upon me, so that my husband could not get hold of it. When we were turned out of our home in Newton, it proved a welcome refuge for us. It was small, plain, humble, but still it gave us a home."

"It has been a happy home, mother—that is, ever since Mr. Brandon left us."

"Yes; we have lived plainly, but I have had you, and you have always been a comfort to me. You were always a good boy, Grit."

"I'm not quite an angel, mother. Ask Phil Courtney what he thinks about it," said Grit, smiling.

"He is a bad, disagreeable boy," said Mrs. Brandon warmly.

"So I think, mother; but Phil, on the other hand, thinks I am a low, vulgar boy, unworthy of associating with him."

"I don't want you to associate with him, Grit."

"I don't care to, mother; but we are getting away from the subject. How did Mr. Brandon behave after you moved here?"

"He did nothing to earn money, but managed to obtain liquor at the tavern, and sometimes went off for three or four days or a week, leaving me in ignorance of his whereabouts. At last he did not come back at all, and I heard that he had been arrested for forgery, and was on trial. The trial was quickly over, and he was sentenced to imprisonment for a term of years. I saw him before he was carried to prison, but he treated me so rudely that I have not felt it my duty to visit him since. Gradually I resumed your father's name, and I have been known as Mrs. Morris, though my legal name of course is Brandon."

"It is a pity you ever took the name, mother," said Grit hastily.

"I agree with you, Grit; but I cannot undo the past."

"The court ought to grant you a divorce from such a man."

"Perhaps I might obtain one, but it would cost money, and we have no money to spend on such things."

"If you had one," said Grit thoughtfully, "Mr. Brandon would no longer have any claim upon you."

"That is true."

"You said you had a letter from him. When did you receive it?"

"While you were out, this morning. Mr. Wheeler saw it in the post-office, and brought it along, thinking we might not have occasion to call."

"May I see the letter, mother?"

"Certainly, Grit; I have no secrets from you."

Mrs. Morris—to call her by the name she preferred—took from the pocket of her dress a letter in a yellow envelope, which, however, was directed in a neat, clerky hand, for Mr. Brandon had been carefully prepared for mercantile life, and had once been a bookkeeper, and wrote a handsome, flowing hand.

"Here it is, Grit."

Grit opened the letter, and read as follows:

'"– Prison, May 10.

"My Affectionate Wife: I have no doubt you will be overjoyed to hear that my long imprisonment is nearly over, and that on the fifteenth, probably, I shall be set free, and can leave these cursed walls behind me. Of course, I shall

> lose no time in seeking out my loving wife, who has not deigned for years to remember that she has a husband. You might at least have called now and then, to show some interest in me.'

"Why should you?" ejaculated Grit indignantly. "He has only illtreated you, spent your money, and made you unhappy."

"You think, then, I was right in staying away, Grit?" asked his mother.

"Certainly I do. You don't pretend to love him?"

"No, I only married him at his urgent request, thinking I was doing what was best for you. It was a bad day's work for me. I could have got along much better alone."

"Of course you could, mother. Well, I will read the rest:

> "'However, you are my wife still, and owe me some reparation for your long neglect. I shall come to Pine Point as soon as I can, and it is hardly necessary to remind you that I shall be out of money, and shall want you to stir round and get me some, as I shall want to buy some clothes and other things."

"How does he think you are to supply him with money, when he has left you to take care of yourself all these years?" again burst from Grit's indignant lips.

He read on:

> "'How is the cub? Is he as independent and saucy as ever? I am afraid you have allowed him to do as he pleases. He needs a man's hand to hold him in check and train him up

properly.'"

"Heaven help you if Mr. Brandon is to have the training of you, Grit!" exclaimed his mother.

"He'll have a tough job if he tries it!" said Grit. "He'll find me rather larger and stronger than when he went to prison."

"Don't get into any conflict with him, Grit," said his mother, a new alarm seizing her.

"I won't if I can help it, mother; but I don't mean to have him impose upon me."

CHAPTER II.
THE YOUNG BOATMAN

Pine Point was situated on the Kennebec River, and from its height overlooked it, so that a person standing on its crest could scan the river for a considerable distance up and down. There was a small grove of pine-trees at a little distance, and this had given the point its name. A hundred feet from the brink stood the old-fashioned cottage occupied by Mrs. Morris. It had belonged, in a former generation, to an uncle of hers, who, dying unmarried, had bequeathed it to her. Perhaps half an acre was attached to it. There had been more, but it had been sold off.

When Grit and his mother came to Chester to live—it was in this township that Pine Point was situated—she had but little of her two thousand dollars' remaining, and when her husband was called to expiate his offense against the law in prison, there were but ten dollars in the house. Mrs. Morris was fortunate enough to secure a boarder, whose board-money paid nearly all their small household expenses for three years, the remainder being earned by her own skill as a dressmaker; but when the boarder went to California, never to return, Grit was already thirteen years old, and hit upon a way of earning money.

On the opposite bank of the Kennebec was the village of Portville, but there was no bridge at that point. So Grit bought a

boat for a few dollars, agreeing to pay for it in instalments, and established a private ferry between the two places. His ordinary charge for rowing a passenger across—the distance being half a mile—was ten cents; but if it were a child, or a poor person, he was willing to receive five, and he took parties of four at a reduction.

It was an idea of his own, but it paid. Grit himself was rather surprised at the number of persons who availed themselves of his ferry. Sometimes he found at the end of the day that he had received in fares over a dollar, and one Fourth of July, when there was a special celebration in Portville, he actually made three dollars. Of course, he had to work pretty hard for it, but the young boatman's arms were strong, as was shown by his sturdy stroke.

Grit was now fifteen, and he could reflect with pride that for two years he had been able to support his mother in a comfortable manner, so that she had wanted for nothing—that is, for nothing that could be classed as a comfort. Luxuries he had not been able to supply, but for them neither he nor his mother cared. They were content with their plain way of living.

But if his stepfather were coming home, Grit felt that his income would no longer be adequate to maintain the household. Mr. Brandon ought to increase the family income, but, knowing what he and his mother did of his ways, he built no hope upon that. It looked as if their quiet home happiness was likely to be rudely broken in upon by the threatened invasion.

"Well, mother," said Grit, "I must get to work."

"You haven't finished your dinner, my son."

"Your news has spoiled my appetite, mother. However, I dare say I'll make up for it at supper."

"I'll save a piece of meat for you to eat then. You work so hard that you need meat to keep up your strength."

"I haven't had to work much this morning, mother, worse luck! I only earned twenty cents. People don't seem inclined to travel to-day."

"Never mind, Grit. I've got five dollars in the house."

"Save it for a rainy day, mother. The day is only half over, and I may have good luck this afternoon."

As Grit left the house with his quick, firm step, Mrs. Morris looked after him with blended affection and pride.

"What a good boy he is!" she said to herself. "He is a boy that any mother might be proud of."

And so he was. Our young hero was not only a strong, manly boy, but there was something very attractive in his clear eyes and frank smile, browned though his skin was by constant exposure to the sun and wind. He was a general favorite in the town, or, rather, in the two towns, for he was as well known in Portville as he was in Chester.

I have said he was a general favorite, but there was one at least who disliked him. This was Phil Courtney, a boy about his own age, the son of an ex-president of the Chester bank, a boy who considered himself of great consequence, and socially far above the young boatman. He lived in a handsome house, and had a

good supply of pocket-money, though he was always grumbling about his small allowance. It by no means follows that money makes a boy a snob, but if he has any tendency that way, it is likely to show itself under such circumstances.

Now, it happened that Phil had a cousin staying at his house as a visitor, quite a pretty girl, in whose eyes he liked to appear to advantage. As Grit reached the shore, where he had tied his boat, they were seen approaching the same point.

"I wonder if Phil is going to favor me with his patronage," thought Grit, as his eyes fell upon them.

"Here, you boatman!" called out Phil, in a tone of authority. "We want to go over to Portville."

Grit's eyes danced with merriment, as he answered gravely:

"I have no objection to your going."

The girl laughed merrily, but Phil frowned, for his dignity was wounded by Grit's flippancy.

"I am not in the habit of considering whether you have any objection or not," he said haughtily.

"Don't be a goose, Phil!" said his cousin. "The boy is in fun."

"I would rather he would not make fun of me," said Phil.

"I won't, then," said Grit, smiling.

"Ahem! you may convey us across," said Phil.

"If you please," added the young lady, with a smile.

"She is very good-looking, and five times as polite as Phil," thought Grit, fixing his eyes admiringly upon the pretty face of Marion Clarke, as he afterward learned her name to be.

"I shall be glad to have you as a passenger," said our hero, but he looked at Marion, not at Phil.

"Thank you."

"If you've got through with your compliments," said Phil impatiently, "we'd better start."

"I am ready," said Grit. "May I help you in?" he asked of Marion.

"Yes, thank you."

"It is quite unnecessary. I can assist you," said Phil, advancing.

But he was too late, for Marion had already availed herself of the young boatman's proffered aid.

"Thank you," said Marion again, pleasantly, as she took her seat in the stern.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" demanded Phil crossly, as he took his seat beside her.

"I didn't want to be always troubling you, cousin Phil," said Marion, with a coquettish glance at Grit, which her cousin did not at all relish.

"Don't notice him so much," he said, in a low voice. "He's only a poor boatman."

"He is very good-looking, I think," said Marion.

Grit's back was turned, but he heard both question and answer, and his cheeks glowed with pleasure at the young lady's speech, though it was answered by a contemptuous sniff from Phil.

"I don't admire your taste, Marion," he said.

"Hush, he'll hear you," she whispered. "What's his name?"

By way of answering, Phil addressed Grit in a condescending tone.

"Well, Grit, how is business to-day?"

"Rather quiet, thank you."

"You see, he earns his living by boating, explained Phil, with the manner of one who was speaking of a very inferior person.

"How much have you earned now?" he asked further.

"Only twenty cents," answered Grit; "but I suppose," he added, smiling, "I suppose you intend to pay me liberally."

"I mean to pay you your regular fare," said Phil, who was not of a liberal disposition.

"Thank you; I ask no more."

"Do you row across often?" asked Marion.

"Sometimes I make eight or ten trips in a day. On the Fourth of July I went fifteen times."

"How strong you must be!"

"Pooh! I could do more than that," said Phil loftily, unwilling that Grit should be admired for anything.

"Oh, I know you're remarkable," said his cousin dryly.

Just then the wind, which was unusually strong, took Phil's hat, and it blew off to a considerable distance.

"My hat's off!" exclaimed Phil, in excitement. "Row after it, quick. It's a new Panama, and cost ten dollars."

CHAPTER III.
THE LOST HAT

Grit complied with the request of his passenger, and rowed after Phil's hat. But there was a strong current, and it was not without considerable trouble that he at last secured it. But, alas! the new hat, with its bright ribbon, was well soaked when it was fished out of the water.

"It's mean," ejaculated Phil, lifting it with an air of disgust. "Just my luck."

"Are you so unlucky, then?" asked his cousin Marion, with a half smile.

"I should say so. What do you call this?"

"A wet hat."

"How am I ever to wear it? It will drip all over my clothes."

"I think you had better buy a common one in Portville, and leave this one here to dry."

"How am I going round Portville bareheaded?" inquired Phil crossly.

"Shall I lend you my hat?" asked Marion.

"Wouldn't I look like a fool, going round the streets with a girl's hat on?"

"Well, you are the best judge of that," answered Marion demurely.

Grit laughed, as the young lady glanced at him with a smile.

"What are you laughing at, you boatman?" snarled Phil.

"I beg your pardon," said Grit good-naturedly; "I know it must be provoking to have your hat wet. Can I help you in any way? If you will give me the money, and remain in the boat, I will run up to Davis, the hatter's, and get you a new hat."

"How can you tell my size?" asked Phil, making no acknowledgment for the offer.

"Then I will lend you my hat to go up yourself."

Phil's lip curled, as if he considered that there would be contamination in such a plebeian hat. However, as Marion declared it would be the best thing to do, he suppressed his disdain, and, without a word of thanks, put Grit's hat on his head.

"Come with me, Marion," he said.

"No, Phil; I will remain here with Mr. –," and she turned inquiringly toward the young boatman.

"Grit," he suggested.

"Mr. Grit," she said, finishing the sentence.

"Just as you like. I admire your taste," said Phil, with a sneer.

As he walked away, Marion turned to the young boatman.

"Is your name really Grit?" she asked.

"No; people call me so."

"I can understand why," she answered with a smile. "You look —gritty."

"If I do, I hope it isn't anything disagreeable," responded our hero.

"Oh, no," said Marion; "quite the contrary. I like to see boys that won't allow themselves to be imposed upon."

"I don't generally allow myself to be imposed upon."

"What is your real name?"

"Harry Morris."

"I suppose you and Phil know each other very well?"

"We have known each other a long time, but we are not very intimate friends."

"I don't think Phil has any intimate friends," said Marion thoughtfully. "He—I don't think he gets on very well with the other boys."

"He wants to boss them," said Grit bluntly.

"Yes; I expect that is it. He's my cousin, you know."

"Is he? I don't think you are much alike."

"Is that remark a compliment to me—or him?" asked Marion, laughing.

"To you, decidedly."

"Well, Phil can be very disagreeable when he sets out to be. I should not want to be that, you know."

"You couldn't," said Grit, with an admiring glance.

"That's a compliment," said Marion. "But you're mistaken. I can be disagreeable when I set out to be. I expect Phil finds me so sometimes."

"I wouldn't."

"You know how to flatter as well as to row, Mr. Grit. It's true. I tease Phil awfully sometimes."

By this time Phil came back with a new hat on his head, holding Grit's in the tips of his fingers, as if it would contaminate him. He pitched it into Grit's lap, saying shortly:

"There's your hat."

"Upon my word, Phil, you're polite," said his cousin. "Can't you thank Mr. Grit?"

"Mr. Grit!" repeated Phil contemptuously. "Of course I thank him."

"You're welcome," answered Grit dryly.

"Here's your fare!" said Phil, taking out two dimes, and offering them to the young boatman.

"Thank you."

"Phil, you ought to pay something extra for the loan of the hat," said Marion, "and the delay."

With evident reluctance Phil took a nickel from his vest pocket, and offered it to Grit.

"No, thank you!" said Grit, drawing back, "I wouldn't be willing to take anything for that. I've found it very agreeable to wait," and he glanced significantly at Marion.

"I suppose I am to consider that another compliment," said the young lady, with a coquettish glance.

"What, has he been complimenting you?" asked Phil jealously.

"Yes, and it was very agreeable, as I got no compliments from you. Good afternoon, Mr. Grit. I hope you will row us back by and by."

"I hope so, too," said the young boatman, bowing.

"Look here, Marion," said Phil, as they walked away, "you take altogether too much notice of that fellow."

"Why do I? I am sure he is a very nice boy."

"He is a common working boy!" snapped Phil. "He lives with his mother in a poor hut upon the bluff, and makes his living by boating."

"I am sure that is to his credit."

"Oh, yes, I suppose it is. So's a ditch-digger engaged in a creditable employment, but you don't treat him as an equal."

"I should be willing to treat Grit as an equal. He is very good-looking, don't you think so, Phil?"

"Good-looking! So is a cow good-looking."

"I've seen some cows that were very good-looking," answered Marion, with a mischievous smile. "I suppose Grit and you are well acquainted."

"Oh, I know him to speak to him," returned Phil loftily. "Of course, I couldn't be intimate with such a boy."

"I was thinking," said Marion, "it would be nice to invite him round to the house to play croquet with us."

"Invite Grit Morris?" gasped Phil.

"Yes, why not?"

"A boy like him!"

"Why, wouldn't he behave well?"

"Oh, I suppose he would, but he isn't in our circle."

"Then it's a pity he isn't. He's the most agreeable boy I have

met in Chester."

"You say that only to provoke me."

"No, I don't. I mean it."

"I won't invite him," said Phil doggedly. "I am surprised that you should think of such a thing."

"Propriety, Miss Marion, propriety!" said the young lady, in a tone of mock dignity, turning up the whites of her eyes. "That's just the way my governess used to talk. It's well I've got so experienced a young gentleman to look after me, and see that I don't stumble into any impropriety."

Meanwhile, Grit sat in his boat, waiting for a return passenger, and as he waited he thought of the young lady he had just ferried over.

"I can't see how such a fellow as Phil Courtney can have such a nice cousin," he said to himself. "She's very pretty, too! She isn't stuck-up, like him. I hope I shall get the chance of rowing them back."

He waited about ten minutes, when he saw a gentleman and a little boy approaching the river.

"Are you the ferry-boy?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, sir."

"I heard there was a boy who would row me across. I want to go to Chester with my little boy. Can you take us over?"

"Yes, sir; I shall be happy to do so."

"Are you ready to start?"

"Yes, sir, just as soon as you get into the boat."

"Come, Willie," said the gentleman, addressing his little boy, "won't you like to ride over in the boat?"

"Oh, yes, papa," answered Willie eagerly.

"I hope you are well acquainted with rowing, and careful," said Mr. Jackson, for this was his name. "I am rather timid about the water, for I can't swim."

"Yes, sir, I am as much at home on the water as on the land. I've been rowing every day for the last three years."

The gentleman and his little boy sat down, and Grit bent to his oars.

CHAPTER IV.
A BOY IN THE WATER

Mr. Jackson was a slender, dark-complexioned man of forty, or thereabouts. He was fashionably dressed, and had the air of one who lives in a city. He had an affable manner, and seemed inclined to be social.

"Is this your business, ferrying passengers across the river?" he asked of Grit.

"Yes, sir," answered the young boatman.

"Does it pay?" was the next inquiry—an important one in the eyes of a city man.

"Yes, sir; I make more in this way than I could in any other."

"How much, for instance?"

"From five to seven dollars. Once—it was Fourth of July week—I made nearly ten dollars."

"That is a great deal more than I made at your age," said Mr. Jackson.

"You look as if you made more now," said Grit, smiling.

"Yes," said the passenger, with an answering smile. "I am afraid I couldn't get along on that sum now."

"Do you live in the city?" asked Grit, with a sudden impulse.

"Yes, I live in what I regard as the city. I mean New York."

"It must be a fine place," said the young boatman thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is a fine place, if you have money enough to live handsomely. Did you ever hear of Wall Street?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am a Wall Street broker. I commenced as a boy in a broker's office. I don't think I was any better off than you at your age—certainly I did not earn so much money."

"But you didn't have a mother to take care of, did you, sir?"

"No; do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a good boy to work for your mother. My poor boy has no mother;" and the gentleman looked sad. "What is your name?"

"Grit."

"Is that your real name?"

"No, sir, but everybody calls me so."

"For a good reason, probably. Willie, do you like to ride in the boat?"

"Yes, papa," answered the little boy, his bright eyes and eager manner showing that he spoke the truth.

"Grit," said Mr. Jackson, "I see we are nearly across the river. Unless you are due there at a specified time, you may stay out, and we will row here and there, prolonging our trip. Of course, I will increase your pay."

"I shall be very willing, sir," said Grit. "My boat is my own, and my time also, and I have no fixed hours for starting from either side."

"Good! Then we can continue our conversation. Is there a good hotel in Chester?"

"Quite a good one, sir. They keep summer boarders."

"That was the point I wished to inquire about. Willie and I have been staying with friends in Portville, but they are expecting other visitors, and I have a fancy for staying a while on your side of the river—that is, if you live in Chester."

"Yes, sir; our cottage is on yonder bluff—Pine Point, it is called."

"Then I think I will call at the hotel, and see whether I can obtain satisfactory accommodations."

"Are you taking a vacation?" asked Grit, with curiosity.

"Yes; the summer is a dull time in Wall Street, and my partner attends to everything. By and by I shall return, and give him a chance to go away."

"Do people make a great deal of money in Wall Street?" asked Grit.

"Sometimes, and sometimes they lose a great deal. I have known a man who kept his span of horses one summer reduced to accept a small clerkship the next. If a broker does not speculate, he is not so liable to such changes of fortune. What is your real name, since Grit is only a nickname?"

"My real name is Harry Morris."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No, sir; I am an only child."

"Were you born here?"

"No, sir; I was born in Boston."

"Have you formed any plans for the future? You won't be a boatman all your life, I presume?"

"I hope not, sir. It will do well enough for the present, and I am glad to have such a chance of earning a living for my mother and myself; but when I grow up I should like to go to the city, and get into business there."

"All the country boys are anxious to seek their fortune in the city. In many cases they would do better to stay at home."

"Were you born in the city, sir?" asked Grit shrewdly.

"No; I was born in the country."

"But you didn't stay there."

"No; you have got me there. I suppose it was better for me to go to the city, and perhaps it may be for you; but there is no hurry. You wouldn't have a chance to earn six dollars a week in the city, as you say you do here. Besides, it would cost much more for you and your mother to live."

"I suppose so, sir. I am contented to remain where I am at present."

"Is your father dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a great loss. Then your mother is a widow?"

"I wish she were," said Grit hastily.

"But she must be, if your father is dead," said Mr. Jackson.

"No, sir; she married again."

"Oh, there is a stepfather, then? Don't you and he get along

well together?"

"There has been no chance to quarrel for nearly five years."

"Why?"

"Because he has been in prison."

"Excuse me if I have forced upon you a disagreeable topic," said the passenger, in a tone of sympathy. "His term of confinement will expire, and then he can return to you."

"That is just what troubles me, sir," said Grit bluntly. "We are expecting him in a day or two, and then our quiet life will be at an end."

"Will he make things disagreeable for you?"

"Yes, sir."

"At least, you will not have to work so hard."

"Yes, sir. I shall have to work harder, for I shall have to support him, too."

"Won't he be willing to work?"

"No, sir, he is very lazy, and if he can live without work, he will."

"That is certainly unfortunate."

"It is worse than having no father at all," said Grit bluntly. "I don't care to have him remain in prison, if he will only keep away from us, but I should be glad if I could never set eyes upon him again."

"Well, my boy, you must bear the trial as well as you can. We all have our trials, and yours comes in the shape of a disagreeable stepfather–"

He did not finish the sentence, for there was a startling interruption.

Mr. Jackson and Grit had been so much engaged in their conversation that they had not watched the little boy. Willie had amused himself in bending over the side of the boat, and dipping his little fingers in the rippling water. With childish imprudence he leaned too far, and fell head first into the swift stream.

A splash told the startled father what had happened.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, "my boy is overboard, and I cannot swim."

He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth than Grit was in the water, swimming for the spot where the boy went down, now a rod or two distant, for the boat had been borne onward by the impulse of the oars.

The young boatman was an expert swimmer. It would naturally have been expected, since so much of his time had been spent on the river. He had often engaged in swimming-matches with his boy companions, and there was no one who could surpass him in speed or endurance.

He struck out boldly, and, as Willie rose to the surface for the second time, he seized him by the arm, and, turning, struck out for the boat. The little boy struggled, and this made his task more difficulty but Grit was strong and wary, and, holding Willie in a strong grasp, he soon gained the boat.

Mr. Jackson leaned over, and drew the boy, dripping, into its safe refuge.

"Climb in, too, Grit!" he said.

"No, I shall upset it. If you will row to the shore, I will swim there."

"Very well."

Mr. Jackson was not wholly a stranger to the use of oars, and the shore was very near. In three minutes the boat touched the bank, and almost at the same time Grit clambered on shore.

"You have saved my boy's life," said Mr. Jackson, his voice betraying the strong emotion he felt. "I shall not forget it."

"Willie is cold!" said the little boy.

"Our house is close by," said Grit. "Let us take him there at once, and mother will take care of him, and dry his clothes."

The suggestion was adopted, and Mr. Jackson and his two young companions were soon standing at the door of the plain cottage on the bluff.

When his mother admitted them, Grit noticed that she looked disturbed, and he seized the first chance to ask her if anything were the matter.

"Your stepfather has come!" she answered.

CHAPTER V.
THE STEPFATHER

Grit was disagreeably surprised at the news of Mr. Brandon's arrival, and he looked about him in the expectation of seeing his unwelcome figure, in vain.

"Where is he, mother?" the boy inquired.

"Gone to the tavern," she answered significantly.

"Did you give him any money?"

"I gave him a dollar," she replied sadly. "It is easy to tell how it will be spent."

Grit had no time to inquire further at that time, for he was assisting his mother in necessary attentions to their guests, having hurriedly exchanged his own wet clothes for dry ones.

Mr. Jackson seemed very grateful to Mrs. Morris for her attention to Willie. She found an old suit of Grit's, worn by him at the age of eight, and dressed Willie in it, while his own wet suit was being dried. The little boy presented a comical spectacle, the suit being three or four sizes too large for him.

"I don't like it," he said. "It is too big."

"So it is, Willie," said his father; "but you won't have to wear it long. You would catch your death of cold if you wore your wet clothes. How long will it take to dry his clothes, Mrs. Morris?"

"Two or three hours at least," answered the widow.

"I have a great mind to go back to Portville, and get a change of garments," said the father.

"That would be the best thing, probably."

"But I should have to burden you with Willie; for I should need to take Grit with me to ferry me across."

"It will be no trouble, sir. I will take good care of him."

"Willie, will you stay here while I go after your other clothes?" asked Mr. Jackson.

Willie readily consented, especially after Grit had brought him a picture-book to look over. Then he accompanied the father to the river, and they started to go across. While they were gone, Mr. Brandon returned to the cottage. His flushed face and unsteady gait showed that he had been drinking. He lifted the latch, and went in.

When he saw Willie sitting in a small chair beside his wife, he gazed at the child in astonishment.

"Is that the cub?" he asked doubtfully. "Seems to me he's grown smaller since I saw him."

"I ain't a cub," said Willie indignantly.

"Oh! yer ain't a cub, hey?" repeated Brandon mockingly.

"No, I ain't. My name is Willie Jackson, and my papa lives in New York."

"What is the meaning of this, Mrs. Brandon?" asked the inebriate. "Where did you pick up this youngster?"

His wife explained in a few words.

"I thought it wasn't the cub," said Mr. Brandon indistinctly.

"Where is he?"

"He has gone to row Mr. Jackson over to Portville."

"I say, Mrs. B., does he earn much money that way?"

"He earns all the money that supports us," answered his wife coldly.

"I must see to that," said Brandon unsteadily. "He must bring me his money every night—do you hear, Mrs. B.?—must bring me his money every night."

"To spend for liquor, I suppose?" she responded bitterly.

"I'm a gentleman. My money—that is, his money is my money. D'ye understand?"

"I understand only too well, Mr. Brandon."

"That's all right. I feel tired. Guess I'll go and lie down."

To his wife's relief he went up-stairs, and was soon stretched out on the bed in a drunken sleep.

"I am glad he is out of the way. I should be ashamed to have Mr. Jackson see him," thought Grit's mother, or Mrs. Brandon, as we must now call her.

"Who is that man?" asked Willie anxiously.

"His name is Brandon," answered Grit's mother.

"He isn't a nice man. I don't like him."

Mrs. Brandon said nothing. What could she say? If she had spoken as she felt, she would have been compelled to agree with the boy. Yet this man was her husband, and was likely to be to her a daily source of anxiety and annoyance.

"I am afraid Grit and he won't agree," she thought anxiously.

"Oh I why did he ever come back? For the last five years we have been happy. We have lived plainly and humbly, but our home has been peaceful. Now, Heaven knows what trouble is in store for us."

Half an hour later Mr. Jackson and Grit returned.

CHAPTER VI.
GRIT'S RECOMPENSE

No time was lost in arraying Willie in clothes more suitable for him. The little boy was glad to lay aside Grit's old suit, which certainly was not very becoming to him.

"Are we going now, papa?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, Willie; but first I must express to this good lady my great thanks for her kindness."

"I have done but little, sir," said Mrs. Brandon; "but that little I was very glad to do."

"I am sure of that," said the visitor cordially.

"If you remain in the neighborhood, I shall hope to see your little boy again, and yourself, also."

"I will come," said Willie promptly.

"He answers for himself," said his father, smiling, "and he will keep his promise. Now, Grit," he said, turning to the young boatman, "I will ask you to accompany me to the hotel."

"Certainly, sir."

When they had passed from the cottage, Mr. Jackson turned to the boy and grasped his hand.

"I have not yet expressed to you my obligations," he said, with emotion, "for the great service you have done me—the greatest in the power of any man, or boy."

"Don't speak of it, sir," said Grit modestly.

"But I must. You have saved the life of my darling boy."

"I don't know, sir."

"But I do. I cannot swim a stroke, and but for your prompt bravery, he would have drowned before my eyes."

Grit could not well contradict this statement, for it was incontestably true.

"It was lucky I could swim," he answered.

"Yes, it was. It seems providential that I should have had with me so brave a boy, when Willie's life was in peril. It will be something that you will remember with satisfaction to the end of your own life."

"Yes, sir, there is no doubt of that," answered Grit sincerely.

"I shudder to think what a sad blank my own life would have been if I had lost my dear boy. He is my only child, and for this reason I should have missed him the more. Your brave act is one that I cannot fitly reward–"

"I don't need any reward, Mr. Jackson," said Grit hastily.

"I am sure you do not. You do not look like a mercenary boy. But, for all that, I owe it to myself to see that so great a favor does not go unacknowledged. My brave boy, accept this wallet and what it contains, not as the payment of a debt, but as the first in the series of my acknowledgments to you."

As he spoke, he put into the hand of the young boatman a wallet.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Jackson," said Grit, "but

I am not sure that I ought to take this."

"Then let me decide for you," said the broker, smiling. "I am older, and may be presumed to have more judgment."

"It will seem as if I took pay for saving Willie from drowning."

"If you did, it would be perfectly proper. But you forget that I have had the use of your boat and your own services for the greater part of the afternoon."

"I presume you have paid me more than I ask for such services."

"Very likely," answered Mr. Jackson. "In fact, outside of my obligations to you, I have formed a good opinion of a boy who works hard and faithfully to support his mother. I was a poor boy once, and I have not forgotten how to sympathize with those who are beginning the conflict with narrow means. Mind, Grit, I don't condole with you. You have good health and strong hands, and in our favored country there is no reason why, when you reach my age, you may not be equally well off."

"I wish I might—for mother's sake," said Grit, his face lighting up with hope.

"I shall see more of you while I am here, but I may as well say now that I mean to bear you in mind, and wish you to come to me, either here or in the city, when you stand in need of advice or assistance."

Grit expressed his gratitude. Mr. Jackson selected a room at the hotel, and promised to take up his quarters there the next day. Then Grit once more took up his oars and ferried Willie and his

father across the river.

It was not for some time, therefore, that he had a chance to examine the wallet which had been given him.

CHAPTER VII.
GRIT ASTONISHES PHIL

Grit was not wholly without curiosity, and, as was natural, he speculated as to the amount which the wallet contained. When Mr. Jackson and Willie had left him, he took it out of his pocket and opened it.

He extracted a roll of bills and counted them over. There were ten five-dollar bills, and ten dollars in notes of a smaller denomination.

"Sixty dollars!" ejaculated Grit, with a thrill of pleasure. "I never was so rich in all my life."

He felt that the sum was too large for him to accept, and he was half tempted to run after Mr. Jackson and say so. But quick reflection satisfied him that the generous New Yorker wished him to retain it, and, modest though he was, he was conscious that in saving the little boy's life he had placed his passenger under an obligation which a much larger sum would not have overpaid. Besides, he saw two new passengers walking toward his boat, who doubtless wished to be ferried across the river. They were Phil Courtney and Marion Clarke.

"We are just in time, Mr. Grit," said the young lady, smiling.

"Yes, my good fellow," said Phil condescendingly, "we will employ you again."

"You are very kind," answered Grit, with a smile of amusement.

"I like to encourage you," continued Phil, who was not very quick to interpret the looks of others.

Grit looked at Marion, and noticed that she, too, looked amused.

"Have you had any passengers since we came over?" asked Phil, in a patronizing tone.

He was quite ready to employ his old schoolmate, provided he would show proper gratitude, and be suitably impressed by his condescension.

"I have been across several times," answered Grit briefly.

"And how much have you made now?" asked Phil, with what he intended to pass for benevolent interest.

If Phil had been his friend, Grit would not have minded telling him; but he had the pride of self-respect, and he objected to being patronized or condescended to.

"I haven't counted up," he answered.

"I might have brought my own boat," said Phil, "but I like to encourage you."

"Really, Phil, you are appearing in a new character," said Marion. "I never should have taken you for a philanthropist before. I thought you told your mother it would be too much bother to row over in your own boat."

"That was one reason," said Phil, looking slightly embarrassed. "Besides, I didn't want to interfere with Grit's

business. He is poor, and has to support his mother out of his earnings."

This was in bad taste, and Grit chafed against it.

"That is true," he said, "but I don't ask any sympathy. I am prosperous enough."

"Oh, yes; you are doing well enough for one in your position, I don't doubt. How much would you give, now, to have as much money as I carry in this pocketbook?" asked Phil boastfully.

He had just passed his birthday, and had received a present of ten dollars from his father, and five dollars each from his mother and an aunt. He had spent a part of it for a hat and in other ways, but still he had seventeen dollars left.

"Perhaps I have as much money," answered Grit quietly.

"Oho! That's a good joke," said Phil.

"No joke at all," said Grit. "I don't know how much money you have in your pocketbook, but I presume I can show more."

Phil's face grew red with anger. He was one of those disagreeable boys who are purse-proud, and he was provoked at hearing such a ridiculous assertion from a poor boy who had to earn his own living.

Even Marion regarded Grit with some wonder, for she happened to know how much money her cousin carried, and it seemed to her very improbable that the young boatman should have as much in his possession.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Grit!" said Phil sharply.

"Thank you; I don't propose to."

"But you are doing it."

"How?"

"Didn't you say you had more money than I?"

"I think I have."

"Hear him talk!" said Phil, with a glance of derision.

By this time the young boatman's grit was up, if I may use the expression, and he resolved to surprise and mortify his young adversary.

"If you are not afraid to test it," he said, "I will leave it to the young lady to decide. Let her count the money in your pocketbook, and I will then give her my wallet for the same purpose."

"Done!" said Phil promptly.

Marion, wondering a little at Grit's confidence, took her cousin's pocketbook, and counted the contents.

"Well, Marion, how much is there?" said Phil exultingly.

"Seventeen dollars and thirty-seven cents," was the announcement of the fair umpire.

Phil smiled triumphantly.

"You didn't think I had so much—eh, Grit?" he said.

"No, I didn't," Grit admitted.

"Now hand over your wallet."

"With pleasure, if Miss Marion will take the trouble," answered the young boatman, with a polite bow.

When Marion opened the wallet, and saw the roll of bills, both she and Phil looked astonished. She proceeded to count the bills,

however, and in a tone of serious surprise announced:

"I find sixty dollars here."

"That is right," said Grit quietly, as he received back his wallet, and thrust it into his pocket.

Phil hardly knew whether he was more surprised or mortified at this unexpected result. But a thought struck him.

"Whose money is that?" he demanded abruptly.

"It is mine."

"I don't believe it. You are carrying it over to some one in Chester."

"Perhaps I am; but, if so, that some one is my mother."

"You don't mean to say that you have sixty dollars of your own?"

"Yes, I do. You didn't think I had so much money—eh, Phil?" he retorted, with a smile.

"I don't believe a word of it," returned Phil crossly. "It is ridiculous that a boy like you should have so much money. It can't be yours."

"Do you doubt it, Miss Marion?" asked Grit, turning to the young lady.

"No; I believe that it is yours since you say so."

"Thank you."

"If it is yours, where did you get it?" asked Phil, whose curiosity overcame his mortification sufficiently to induce him to ask the question.

"I don't feel called upon to tell you," answered Grit.

"Then I can guess."

"Very well. If you guess right, I will admit it."

"You found it, and won't be long before finding the owner."

"You are wrong. The money is mine, and was paid me in the course of business."

Phil did not know what to say, but Marion said pleasantly:

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Grit, on being so well off. You are richer than either of your passengers. I never had sixty dollars of my own in my life."

By this time they had reached the other side of the river, and the two passengers disembarked.

"Well, Phil, you came off second best," said his cousin.

"I can't understand how the boy came into possession of such a sum of money," said Phil, frowning.

"Nor I; but I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That he came by it honestly."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Phil, shaking his head.

"Phil, you are too bad," said Marion warmly. "You seem to have taken an unaccountable prejudice against Grit. I am sure he seems to me a very nice boy."

"You're welcome to the young boatman's society," said Phil, with a sneer. "You seem to be fond of low company."

"If you call him low company, then perhaps I am. I never met Grit before this morning, but he seems a very polite, spirited boy, and it is certainly to his credit that he supports his mother."

"I can tell you something about him that may chill your ardor? His father is in jail."

"I heard that it was his stepfather."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter which."

"In one sense, no. The boy isn't to blame for it."

"No, but it shows of what stock he comes."

Meanwhile, Grit, having fastened his boat, made his way to the cottage on the bluff. He wanted to tell his mother of his good fortune.

CHAPTER VIII.
GRIT PUTS HIS MONEY AWAY

"You seem to be in good spirits, Grit," said his mother, as our hero opened the outside door and entered the room where she sat sewing.

"Yes, mother, I have reason to be. Is—is Mr. Brandon home?"

"Yes; he is up-stairs lying down," answered Mrs. Brandon, with a sigh.

Grit rose and closed the door.

"I don't want him to hear what I'm going to tell you," he said. "Mother, I have been very lucky to-day."

"I suppose Mr. Jackson was liberal."

"I should say he was. Guess how much money I have in this wallet, mother."

"Five dollars."

"Multiply that by twelve."

"You don't mean to say that he gave you sixty dollars?" inquired his mother quickly.

"Yes, I do. See here," and Grit displayed the roll of bills.

"You are, indeed, in luck, Grit. How much good this money will do us. But I forgot," she added, her expression changing to one of anxious solicitude.

"What did you forget, mother?"

"That your father—that Mr. Brandon had returned."

"What difference will that make, mother? I suppose, of course, it will increase our expenses."

"If that were all, Grit."

"What is it, then, you fear, mother?"

"That he will take this money away from you."

"I should like to see him try it," exclaimed Grit, compressing his lips.

"He will try it, Grit. He said only an hour ago that you would have to account to him for your daily earnings."

"Doesn't he mean to do any work himself?"

"I fear not. You know what sort of a man he is, Grit. He probably means to live on what we can earn, and spend his time and what money he can get hold of at the tavern."

"And he calls himself a man!" said Grit disdainfully.

"I am afraid our quiet, happy life is at an end, Grit," sighed his mother.

Grit did not answer for a moment, but he looked stern and determined. Finally, he answered:

"I don't want to make any disturbance, mother, or to act improperly, but I feel sure that we ought not to submit to such treatment."

"What can we do, Grit?"

"If Mr. Brandon cares to stay here we will provide him a home, give him his board, but, as to supplying him with money, we ought not to do it."

"I agree with you, Grit, but I don't see how we can help it. Mr. Brandon is a man, and you are only a boy. I don't want you to quarrel with him."

"I won't if I can help it. By the way, mother, I don't think it will be prudent to leave all this money in the house."

"What can we do with it?"

"I will put it out of my hands. Perhaps I had better not tell you what I am going to do with it, for Mr. Brandon might ask you, and it is better that you should be able to tell him that you don't know."

"You are right, Grit."

"I will attend to that matter at once, mother. I will be back in half or three-quarters of an hour," and the young boatman hurried from the house.

He bent his steps to the house of his particular friend, Fred Lawrence, the son of a lawyer in the village. Mr. Lawrence was rated as wealthy by the people in the village, and lived in a house quite as good as Mr. Courtney's, but his son Fred was a very different style of boy. He had no purse-pride, and it never occurred to him that Grit was unfit to associate with, simply because he was poor, and had to earn a living for himself and his mother by ferrying passengers across the Kennebec. In fact, he regarded Grit as his most intimate friend, and spent as much time in his company as their differing engagements would allow.

Phil Courtney, though he condescended to Grit, regarded Fred as his social equal, and wished to be intimate with him;

but Fred did not fancy Phil, and the latter saw, with no little annoyance, that the young boatman's company was preferred to his. It displayed shocking bad taste on the part of Fred, but he did not venture to express himself to the lawyer's son as he would not scruple to do to the young ferryman.

Naturally, when Grit felt the need of advice, he thought of his most intimate friend, and sought the lawyer's house.

He met Fred on the way.

"Hello, Grit!" said Fred cordially. "Where are you going?"

"I was going to your house."

"Then turn round, and we will go there."

"I can talk with you in the street. I want your advice and help."

"My advice is probably very valuable," said Fred, smiling, "considering my age and experience. However, my help you can rely upon, if I can give it."

"Did you hear that Mr. Brandon had got home?" asked Grit abruptly.

"Your stepfather?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say that there is that tie between us. I presume you know where he has spent the last five years?"

"Yes," answered Fred.

"Of course, I am glad for his sake that he is free; but I am afraid he is going to give us trouble."

"How does he appear?"

"I have not seen him yet."

"How's that?"

"He only arrived to-day, and I was absent when he reached home."

"Does he mean to live here?"

"I am afraid so; and, what is more, I am afraid he means that mother and I shall pay his expenses. He has already told mother that he shall require me to account to him for my daily earnings."

"That will be hard on you."

"Yes; I need all I can make to pay our daily expenses, and I don't feel like letting mother suffer for the necessaries of life in order to supply Mr. Brandon with money for drink."

"You are right there, Grit. I sympathize with you; but how can I help it?"

"That is what I am coming to. I want to deposit my money with you—that is, what I don't need to use."

"I suppose you haven't much. It might not be well to trust me too far," said Fred, smiling.

"I have sixty dollars here, which I would like to put in your hands—that is, all but two dollars."

"Sixty dollars! Where on earth did you get so much money, Grit?" asked his friend, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

Grit told the story briefly, and received the warm congratulations of his friend.

"You deserve it all, Grit," he said, "for your brave deed."

"Don't flatter me, Fred, or I may put on airs like Phil Courtney. But, to come back to business—will you do me this favor?"

"Of course, I will. Father has a safe in his office, and I will put the money in there. Whenever you want any of it, you have only to ask me."

"Thank you. That will suit me. I shan't break in upon it unless I am obliged to, as I would like to have it in reserve to fall back upon."

"Come and take supper with us, Grit, won't you?" asked Fred cordially.

"Thank you, Fred; not to-night. I haven't seen Mr. Brandon yet, and I may as well get over the first interview as soon as possible. We shall have to come to an understanding, and it is better not to delay it."

"Good night, then; I shall see you to-morrow, for I am going to Portville, and I shall go over in your boat."

"Then we can have a chat together. Good night."

Meanwhile, Mr. Brandon, having slept off his debauch, had come down-stairs.

"Where's the cub?" he asked.

"I wish you wouldn't call him by that name," said his wife. "He wouldn't like it."

"I shall call him what I please. Hasn't he been in?"

"Yes, Grit has been in."

"Grit?"

"That's a nickname the boys have given him, and as everybody calls him so, I have got into that way."

"Oh, well, call him what you like. Has he been in?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He went out for a short time. I expect him in every minute."

"Did he leave his day's earnings with you?"

"No," answered Mrs. Brandon, with a troubled look. "He has the best right to that himself."

"Has he, hey? We'll see about that. I, as his stepfather and legal guardian, shall have something to say to that."

Mrs. Brandon was not called upon to reply, for the door opened just then, and the young boatman stood in the presence of his worthy stepfather.

CHAPTER IX.
A LITTLE DISCUSSION

Grit was only ten years old when his stepfather began to serve out his sentence at the penitentiary, and the two had not seen each other since. Instead of the small boy he remembered, Brandon saw before him a boy large and strong for his age, of well-knit frame and sturdy look. Five years had made him quite a different boy. His daily exercise in rowing had strengthened his muscles and developed his chest, so that he seemed almost a young man.

Brandon stared in surprise at the boy.

"Is that—the cub?" he asked.

"I object to that name, Mr. Brandon," said Grit quietly.

"You've grown!" said Brandon, still regarding him with curiosity.

"Yes, I ought to have grown some in five years."

It occurred to Mr. Brandon that it might not be so easy as he had expected to bully his stepson. He resolved at first to be conciliatory.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "It's long since we met."

"Yes," answered Grit.

He was not prepared to return the compliment, and express pleasure at his stepfather's return.

"I'm glad you and your mother have got along so well while

I was away."

Grit felt tempted to say that they had got along better during Mr. Brandon's absence than when he was with them, but he forbore. He did not want to precipitate a conflict, though, from what his mother had said, he foresaw that one would come soon enough.

"Your mother tells me that you make money by your boat," continued Mr. Brandon.

"Yes, sir."

"That's a good plan. I approve it. How much money have you made to-day, now?"

"I have a dollar or two in my pocket," answered Grit evasively.

"Very good!" said Brandon, in a tone of satisfaction. "You may as well hand it to me."

So the crisis had come! Mrs. Brandon looked at her son and her husband with anxiety, fearing there would be a quarrel, and perhaps something worse. She was tempted to say something in deprecation, but Grit said promptly:

"Thank you, Mr. Brandon, but I would prefer to keep the money myself."

Brandon was rather taken aback by the boy's perfect coolness and self-possession.

"How old are you?" he asked, with a frown.

"Fifteen."

"Indeed!" sneered Brandon. "I thought, from the way you talked, you were twenty-one. You don't seem to be aware that I

am your legal guardian."

"No, sir, I was not aware of it."

"Then it's time you knew it. Ain't I your stepfather?"

"I suppose so," said Grit, with reluctance.

"Ha, you admit that, do you? I'm the master of this house, and it's my place to give orders. Your wages belong to me, but if you are obedient and respectful, I will allow you a small sum daily, say five cents."

"That arrangement is not satisfactory, Mr. Brandon," said Grit firmly.

"Why isn't it?" demanded his stepfather, frowning.

"I use my money to support the family."

"Did I say anything against it? As the master of the house, the bills come to me to be paid, and therefore I require you to give me every night whatever you may have taken during the day."

"Do you intend to earn anything yourself?" asked Grit pointedly; "or do you expect to live on us?"

"Boy, you are impertinent," said Brandon, coloring.

"Don't provoke Mr. Brandon," said Grit's mother timidly.

"We may as well come to an understanding," said Grit boldly. "I am willing to do all I can for you, mother, but Mr. Brandon is able to take care of himself, and I cannot support him, too."

"Is this the way you talk to your father, you impertinent boy?" exclaimed Brandon wrathfully.

"You are not my father, Mr. Brandon," said Grit coldly.

"It is all the same; I am your mother's husband."

"That's a different thing."

"Once more, are you going to give me the money you have in your pocket?"

"No, sir."

Brandon looked at Grit, and he felt that it would have given him pleasure to shake the rebellion out of his obstinate stepson, but supper was almost ready, and he felt hungry. He decided that it would be as well to postpone an open outbreak. Grit was in the house, and not likely to run away.

"We'll speak of this another time," he said, waving his hand. "You will find, young man, that it is of no use opposing me. Mrs. Brandon, is supper almost ready?"

"Nearly," answered his wife, glad to have the subject postponed.

"Then serve it as soon as possible," he said, in a lordly tone. "I am to meet a gentleman on business directly afterward."

Supper was on the table in fifteen minutes.

Mr. Brandon ate with evident enjoyment. Indeed, it was so short a time since he had been restricted to prison fare that he relished the plain but well-cooked dishes which his wife prepared.

"Another cup of tea, Mrs. Brandon," he said. "It seems pleasant to be at home again after my long absence."

"I shouldn't think he would like to refer to his imprisonment," thought Grit.

"I hope soon to be in business," continued Brandon, "and we

shall then be able to live in better style. When that time comes I shall be willing to have Grit retain his small earnings, stipulating only that he shall buy his own clothes, and pay his mother, say a dollar and a quarter a week, for board."

He said this with the air of a man who considered himself liberal, but neither Grit nor his mother expressed their sense of his generosity.

"Of course, just at present," Mr. Brandon proceeded, "I have no money. The minions of the law took from me all I had when they unjustly thrust me into a foul dungeon. For a time, therefore, I shall be compelled to accept Grit's earnings, but it will not be for long."

Grit said nothing to this hint, but all the same he determined, whether for a short or a long time, to resist the exactions of his stepfather.

As for Brandon, his change of front was induced by the thought that he could accomplish by stratagem what he might have had some difficulty in securing by force. He still had twenty-five cents of the dollar which his wife had given him in the morning.

When supper was over he rose, and, putting on his hat, said:

"I am going to the village on business. I shall be home in good season. Are you going my way, Grit?"

"Not just at present," answered Grit.

Mother and son looked at each other when they were alone.

"I suppose he's gone to the tavern," said Grit.

"Yes, I presume so," said his mother, sighing.

"Well, mother, I didn't give up the money."

"No, Grit, but he means to have it yet."

"He's welcome to it if he can get it," said the boy manfully.

"You haven't got the sixty dollars with you?" said his mother anxiously.

"No, they are safe. I have kept only two dollars, thinking you might need some groceries."

"Yes, I do, Grit. They go off faster, now that we have another mouth to feed."

"Suppose you make out a list of what you want, mother, and I will go up to the store this evening. I may as well save Mr. Brandon from temptation."

His mother made a list, and Grit, putting it in his pocket, walked up to the village.

The groceries, with a pound of steak, cost a dollar and ninety cents.

As Grit took the bundles and walked homeward, he thought to himself.

"Mr. Brandon wouldn't feel very well repaid for his trouble if he should take all I have left. He ought to be satisfied with free board, without expecting us to supply him with pocket-money besides. I wonder what he would say if he knew how much money I have deposited with Fred Lawrence?"

Grit congratulated himself that his stepfather was not likely to make this discovery, but in this he reckoned without his host.

Mr. Brandon made the discovery that same evening. How it came about will appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.
BRANDON LEARNS GRIT'S SECRET

"I had no idea the boy had grown so much," said Brandon to himself, as he directed his course toward the tavern. "I thought he was a little kid, but he's almost as big as I am. He's kind of obstinate, too, but he'll find out who's master before long. It's ridiculous, his expectin' to have the handlin' of all the money that comes into the house. Just as if he had any judgment—a boy of his age."

The chances are that Grit's judgment in the matter would have proved better than Brandon's, since the latter proposed to spend a large portion of the money for drink.

"I expect the boy makes a good thing out of his boating," resumed Mr. Brandon. "He owned up that he had almost two dollars, and it's likely he earned it all to-day."

Presently Brandon reached the tavern, and entered the barroom.

He called for whisky, and swallowed it with gusto.

"You may charge it to me," said he carelessly; "I'll pay once a week."

"We don't care to do business that way," said the barkeeper.

"You ain't afraid I won't pay you?" said Brandon, in a tone of

affected indignation.

"I don't know whether you would or not, but our terms are cash."

"Oh, well, if you're so strict as that, take it out of this quarter," said Brandon, throwing his sole remaining coin on the counter.

Fifteen cents were returned to him, and in half an hour that sum was also expended at the bar.

It might have been supposed that Brandon would be satisfied, but he was not. He made an attempt to obtain another drink on credit, but the barkeeper proved obdurate.

Then he engaged in a game of cards, and about half-past nine set out to go home, in a better condition than if he had had more money to spend.

"This will never do!" he muttered, in a discontented tone; "I can't be kept so short as this. It is humiliating to think of me, a grown man, going round without a cent in my pocket, while my stepson is reveling in money. I won't have it, and I'll let him understand it."

A few feet in front of Brandon two boys were walking. One of them was Phil Courtney, and the other Dick Graham, a poor boy, who, by proper subserviency, had earned a position as chief favorite with his companion.

Brandon could not help hearing their conversation. He heard Grit's name mentioned, and this made him listen attentively.

"I can't understand where Grit got his money," Phil was saying.

"How much did you say he had?" inquired Dick.

"Sixty dollars!"

"Whew!"

Brandon felt like saying "Whew!" too, for his amazement was great, but he wanted to hear more, and remained silent.

"Are you sure there were sixty dollars?"

"Yes; my cousin Marion counted it."

"How did Grit happen to show his money?"

"He was boasting that he had more money than I, and I challenged him to show his money."

"I suppose he did show more?"

"Yes, I had only seventeen dollars. But what I can't understand is, where did a common boatman pick up so much money?"

"Perhaps he has been saving for a long time."

"Perhaps so, but I don't believe he could save so much," answered Phil.

"Perhaps he stole it."

Phil didn't believe this, but he would like to have believed it true.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did, though I don't know where he could get the chance."

"I wonder if he'd lend me five dollars," thought Dick Graham, though he did not care to let Phil know his thought. He resolved to be more attentive to Grit, in the hope of pecuniary favors. Meanwhile, he did not forget that Phil also was well provided.

"You were pretty well fixed, too," he said. "I wonder how I'd

feel if I had seventeen dollars."

"What do I care about seventeen dollars?" said Phil discontentedly, "when a boy like Grit Morris can show more than three times as much."

"Oh, well, he'll have to spend it. He won't keep it long. By the way, Phil, will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?" asked Phil cautiously.

"Won't you lend me two dollars? I want it the worst way. I haven't got a cent to my name."

"I can't spare it," said Phil curtly.

"It will leave you fifteen–"

"I'm going to use it all. Besides, it would be the same as giving it–"

"No, I'd pay you back in a week or two."

"You've been owing me fifty cents for three months. If you'd paid that up punctually, perhaps I would have lent you. You'd better go to Grit."

"He isn't my friend, and I thought you might not like my going to him."

"Oh, you can borrow as much as you like of him—the more, the better!" returned Phil, with a laugh.

"I'll try it, then. I shall have to pretend to be his friend."

"All right. The faster he gets rid of his money, the better it will suit me."

Brandon heard no more of the conversation, for the boys turned down a side street. But he had heard enough to surprise

him.

"Grit got sixty dollars!" he repeated to himself. "Why, the artful young villain! Who'd have thought it? And he coolly refuses to let his father have a cent. He's actually rolling in riches, while I haven't got a penny in my purse. And his mother aids and abets him in it, I'll be bound. It's the blackest ingratitude I ever heard of."

What Grit had to be grateful to him for Mr. Brandon might have found it difficult to instance, but he actually managed to work himself into a fit of indignation because Grit declined to commit his money to his custody.

Brandon felt very much like a man who has suddenly been informed that a pot of gold was concealed in his back yard. Actually, a member of his family possessed the handsome sum of sixty dollars. How was he to get it into his own hands?

That was easier to ask than to answer. As he had said, Grit was a stout, strong boy, nearly his equal in size and strength, and he had already had sufficient acquaintance with his firmness, or obstinacy, as he preferred to call it, to make sure that the boy would not give up the money without a struggle. If now he could get hold of the money by stratagem, it would be easier, and make less disturbance.

Where did Grit keep the money?

"He may have given it to his mother," thought Brandon. "If so, I can find it in one of her bureau drawers. She always used to keep money there. But it is more likely that the boy keeps it

in his own pocket. I know what I'll do. I'll get up in the night, when he and his mother are asleep, and search his pockets. Gad, how astonished he'll look in the morning when he searches for it, and finds it missing!"

Brandon was very much amused by this thought, and he laughed aloud.

"Sixty dollars'll set me on my feet again," he reflected. "Let me see. I'll go to Boston, and look round, and see if I can't pick up a job of some kind. There isn't anything to do here in this beastly hole. By the way, I wonder where the boy did get so much money. He must find boatin' more profitable than I had any idea of."

At this point Brandon entered the little path that led to his wife's cottage.

"Mrs. B. is sittin' up," he said, as he saw through the window the figure of his wife in a rocking-chair, apparently occupied with some kind of work. "I'll get her off to bed soon, so that I can have a clear field."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.