

ALGER

HORATIO JR.

THE YOUNG MUSICIAN;
OR, FIGHTING HIS WAY

Horatio Alger

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Or, Fighting His Way**

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Alger H.

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Содержание

CHAPTER I. A CANDIDATE FOR THE POORHOUSE	5
CHAPTER II. PHILIP AT HOME	8
CHAPTER III. NICK HOLDEN'S CALL	11
CHAPTER IV. THE AUCTION	14
CHAPTER V. AN ALLIANCE AGAINST PHILIP	17
CHAPTER VI. FUSS ABOUT A FIDDLE	20
CHAPTER VII. MR. JOE TUCKER	23
CHAPTER XIII. IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS	26
CHAPTER IX. THE POORHOUSE	28
CHAPTER X. BAD TIDINGS	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	32

Horatio Alger, Jr.

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CHAPTER I. A CANDIDATE FOR THE POORHOUSE

“As for the boy,” said Squire Pope, with his usual autocratic air, “I shall place him in the poorhouse.”

“But, Benjamin,” said gentle Mrs. Pope, who had a kindly and sympathetic heart, “isn’t that a little hard?”

“Hard, Almira?” said the squire, arching his eyebrows. “I fail to comprehend your meaning.”

“You know Philip has been tenderly reared, and has always had a comfortable home—”

“He will have a comfortable home now, Mrs. Pope. Probably you are not aware that it cost the town two thousand dollars last year to maintain the almshouse. I can show you the item in the town report.”

“I don’t doubt it at all, husband,” said Mrs. Pope gently. “Of course you know all about it, being a public man.”

Squire Pope smiled complacently. It pleased him to be spoken of as a public man.

“Ahem! Well, yes, I believe I have no inconsiderable influence in town affairs,” he responded. “I am on the board of selectmen, and am chairman of the overseers of the poor, and in that capacity I shall convey Philip Gray to the comfortable and well-ordered institution which the town has set apart for the relief of paupers.”

“I don’t like to think of Philip as a pauper,” said Mrs. Pope, in a deprecating tone.

“What else is he?” urged her husband. “His father hasn’t left a cent. He never was a good manager.”

“Won’t the furniture sell for something, Benjamin?”

“It will sell for about enough to pay the funeral expenses and outstanding debts—that is all.”

“But it seems so hard for a boy well brought up to go to the poorhouse.”

“You mean well, Almira, but you let your feelings run away with you. You may depend upon it, it is the best thing for the boy. But I must write a letter in time for the mail.”

Squire Pope rose from the breakfast-table and walked out of the room with his usual air of importance. Not even in the privacy of the domestic circle did he forget his social and official importance.

Who was Squire Pope?

We already know that he held two important offices in the town of Norton. He was a portly man, and especially cultivated dignity of deportment. Being in easy circumstances, and even rich for the resident of a village, he was naturally looked up to and credited with a worldly sagacity far beyond what he actually possessed.

At any rate, he may be considered the magnate of Norton. Occasionally he visited New York, and had been very much annoyed to find that his rural importance did not avail him there, and that he was treated with no sort of deference by those whom he had occasion to meet. Somehow, the citizens of the commercial metropolis never suspected for a single moment that he was a great man.

When Squire Pope had finished his letter, he took his hat, and with measured dignity, walked to the village post-office.

He met several of his neighbors there, and greeted them with affable condescension. He was polite to those of all rank, as that was essential to his retaining the town offices, which he would have been unwilling to resign.

From the post-office the squire, as he remembered the conversation which had taken place at the breakfast-table, went to make an official call on the boy whose fate he had so summarily decided.

Before the call, it may be well to say a word about Philip Gray, our hero, and the circumstances which had led to his present destitution.

His father had once been engaged in mercantile business, but his health failed, his business suffered, and he found it best-indeed, necessary—to settle up his affairs altogether and live in quiet retirement in Norton.

The expenses of living there were small, but his resources were small, also, and he lived just long enough to exhaust them.

It was this thought that gave him solicitude on his death-bed, for he left a boy of fifteen wholly unprovided for.

Let us go back a week and record what passed at the last interview between Philip and his father before the latter passed into the state of unconsciousness which preceded death.

“Are you in pain, father?” asked Philip, with earnest sympathy, as his father lay outstretched on the bed, his face overspread by the deathly pallor which was the harbinger of dissolution.

“Not of the body, Philip,” said Mr. Gray. “That is spared me, but I own that my mind is ill at ease.”

“Do you mind telling me why, father!”

“No; for it relates to you, my son, or, rather, to your future. When my affairs are settled, I fear there will be nothing left for your support. I shall leave you penniless.”

“If that is all, father, don’t let that trouble you.”

“I am afraid, Philip, you don’t realize what it is to be thrown upon the cold charities of the world.”

“I shall work for my living,” said Philip confidently.

“You will have to do that, I’m afraid, Philip.”

“But I am not afraid to work, father. Didn’t you tell me one day that many of our most successful men had to work their way up from early poverty!”

“Yes, that is true; but a boy cannot always get the chance to earn his living. Of one thing I am glad; you have a good education for a boy of your age. That is always a help.”

“Thanks to you, father.”

“Yes; though an invalid, I have, at all events, been able to give private attention to your education, and to do better for you than the village school would have done. I wish I had some relative to whom I might consign you, but you will be alone in the world.”

“Have I no relatives?” asked Philip.

“Your mother was an only child, and I had but one brother.”

“What became of him, father?”

“He got into trouble when he was a young man, and left the country. Where he went to I have no idea. Probably he went first to Europe, and I heard a rumor, at one time, that he had visited Australia. But that was twenty years ago, and as I have heard nothing of him since, I think it probable that he is dead. Even if he were living, and I knew where he was, I am not sure whether he would make a safe guardian for you.”

“Have you any advice to give me, father?” asked Philip, after a pause. “Whatever your wishes may be, I will try to observe them.”

“I do not doubt it, Philip. You have always been an obedient son, and have been considerate of my weakness. I will think it over, and try to give you some directions which may be of service to you. Perhaps I may be able to think of some business friend to whom I can commend you.”

“You have talked enough, father,” said Philip, noticing his father’s increasing pallor and the evident exertion with which he spoke. “Rest now, and to-morrow we can talk again.”

Mr. Gray was evidently in need of rest. He closed his eyes and apparently slept. But he never awoke to consciousness. The conversation above recorded was the last he was able to hold with his son. For two days he remained in a kind of stupor, and at the end of that time he died.

Philip's grief was not violent. He had so long anticipated his father's death that it gave him only a mild shock.

Friends and neighbors made the necessary arrangements for the funeral, and the last services were performed. Then, at length, Philip realized that he had lost his best earthly friend, and that he was henceforth alone in the world. He did not as yet know that Squire Pope had considerately provided him with a home in the village poorhouse.

CHAPTER II. PHILIP AT HOME

When the funeral was over, Frank Dunbar, whom Philip regarded as his most intimate friend, came up to him.

“Philip,” he said, “my mother would like to have you spend a few days with us while you are deciding what to do.”

“Thank you, Frank!” answered Philip. “But until the auction I shall remain at home. I shall soon enough be without a home.”

“But it will be very lonely for you,” objected Frank.

“No; I shall have my thoughts for company. When I am alone I can think best of my future plans.”

“Won’t you come to our house to meals, then?”

“Thank you, Frank! I will do that.”

“When is the auction to be?”

“To-day is Monday. It is appointed for Thursday.”

“I hope there will be something left for you.”

“There will be about enough left to pay my father’s small debts and his funeral expenses. I would not like to have him indebted to others for those. I don’t think there will be anything over.”

Frank looked perplexed.

“I am sorry for you, Phil,” he said. “I wish we were rich, instead of having hard work to make both ends meet. You would not lack for anything then.”

“Dear Frank,” said Philip earnestly, “I never doubted your true friendship. But I am not afraid that I shall suffer. I am sure I can earn my living.”

“But why do you shut yourself up alone, Philip?” asked Frank, not satisfied to leave his friend in what he considered the gloomy solitude of a house just visited by death.

“I want to look over my father’s papers. I may find out something that I ought to know, and after the auction it will be too late. Father had some directions to give me, but he did not live long enough to do it. For three days I have the house to myself. After that I shall perhaps never visit it again.”

“Don’t be downhearted, Philip,” said Frank, pressing his hand with boyish sympathy.

“I don’t mean to be, Frank. I am naturally cheerful and hopeful. I shall miss my poor father sadly: but grieving will not bring him back. I must work for my living, and as I have no money to depend upon, I cannot afford to lose any time in forming my plans.”

“You will come over to our house and take your meals!”

“Yes, Frank.”

Frank Dunbar’s father was a small farmer, who, as Frank had said, found it hard work to make both ends meet. Among all the village boys, he was the one whom Philip liked best, though there were many others whose fathers were in hotter circumstances. For this, however, Philip cared little. Rich or poor, Frank suited him, and they had always been known as chums, to adopt the term used by the boys in the village.

It may be thought that as Philip’s circumstances were no better, such an intimacy was natural enough. But Philip Gray possessed special gifts, which made his company sought after. He was a fine singer, and played with considerable skill on the violin—an accomplishment derived from his father, who had acted as his teacher. Then he was of a cheerful temperament, and this is a gift which usually renders the possessor popular, unless marred by positive defects or bad qualities. There were two or three young snobs in the village who looked down upon Philip on account of his father’s poverty, but most were very glad to associate with our hero, and have him visit their homes. He was courteous to all, but made—no secret of his preference for Frank Dunbar.

When Philip parted from Frank, and entered the humble dwelling which had been his own and his father's home for years, there was a sense of loneliness and desolation which came over him at first.

His father was the only relative whom he knew, and his death, therefore, left the boy peculiarly, alone in the world. Everything reminded him of his dead father. But he did not allow himself to dwell upon thoughts that would depress his spirits and unfit him for the work that lay before him.

He opened his father's desk and began to examine his papers. There was no will, for there was nothing to leave, but in one compartment of the desk was a thick wallet, which he opened.

In it, among some receipted bills, was an envelope, on which was written, in his father's well-known hand:

"The contents of this envelope are probably of no value, but it will be as well to preserve the certificate of stock. There is a bare possibility that it may some day be worth a trifle."

Philip opened the envelope and found a certificate for a hundred shares of the Excelsior Gold Mine, which appeared to be located in California. He had once heard his father speak of it in much the same terms as above.

"I may as well keep it," reflected Philip. "It will probably amount to nothing, but there won't be much trouble in carrying around the envelope." He also found a note of hand for a thousand dollars, signed by Thomas Graham.

Attached to it was a slip of paper, on which he read, also in his father's writing:

"This note represents a sum of money lent to Thomas Graham, when I was moderately prosperous. It is now outlawed, and payment could not be enforced, even if Graham were alive and possessed the ability to pay. Five years since, he left this part of the country for some foreign country, and is probably dead, and I have heard nothing from him in all that time. It will do no harm, and probably no good, to keep his note."

"I will keep it," decided Philip. "It seems that this and the mining shares are all that father had to leave me. They will probably never yield me a cent, but I will keep them in remembrance of him."

Philip found his father's watch. It was an old-fashioned gold watch, but of no great value even when new. Now, after twenty years' use, it would command a very small price at the coming sale.

Ever since Philip had been old enough to notice anything, he remembered this watch, which was so closely identified with his father that more than anything else it called him to mind. Philip looked at it wistfully as it lay in his hand. "I wish I could keep it," he said to himself. "No one else will value it much, but it would always speak to me of my father. I wonder if I might keep it?"

Philip had a mind to put it into his pocket, but the spirit of honesty forbade.

"It must be sold," he said, with a sigh. "Without it there wouldn't be enough to pay what we owe, and when I leave Norton, I don't want any one to say that my father died in his debt."

There was nothing else in the desk which called for particular notice or appeared to be of any special value. After a careful examination, Philip closed it and looked around at the familiar furniture of the few rooms which the house contained.

There was one object which he personally valued more than anything else. This was his violin, on which he had learned all that he knew of playing. His father had bought it for him four years before. It was not costly, but it was of good tone, and Philip had passed many pleasant hours in practicing on it.

"I can take this violin, at any rate," said Philip to himself. "It belongs to me, and no one else has a claim on it. I think I will take it with me and leave it at Frank Dunbar's, so that it needn't get into the sale."

He put back the violin into the case and laid it on one side. Then he sat down in the arm-chair, which had been his father's favorite seat, and tried to fix his mind upon the unknown future which lay before him.

He had sat there for half an hour, revolving in his mind various thoughts and plans, when he heard a tap on the window, and looking up, saw through the pane the coarse, red face of Nick Holden, a young fellow of eighteen, the son of the village butcher.

“Let me in!” said Nick; “I want to see you on business.”

CHAPTER III. NICK HOLDEN'S CALL

Philip had never liked Nick Holden. He was a coarse, rough-looking boy, his reddish face one mass of freckles, and about as unattractive as a person could be, without absolute deformity. This, however, was not the ground for Philip's dislike.

With all his unattractiveness, Nick might have possessed qualities which would have rightly made him popular. So far from this, however, he was naturally mean, selfish, and a bully, with very slight regard for truth.

Will it be believed that, in spite of his homely face, Nick really thought himself good-looking and aspired to be a beau? For this reason he had often wished that he possessed Philip's accomplishment of being able to play upon the violin.

His conversational powers were rather limited, and he felt at a loss when he undertook to make himself fascinating to the young ladies in the village. If he could only play on the violin like Philip he thought he would be irresistible.

He had therefore conceived the design of buying Philip's instrument for a trifle, judging that our hero would feel compelled to sell it.

The reader will now understand the object which led to Nick's call so soon after the funeral of Mr. Gray. He was afraid some one else might forestall him in gaining possession of the coveted instrument.

When Philip saw who his visitor was, he was not overjoyed. It was with reluctance that he rose and gave admission to Nick.

"I thought I would call around and see you, Phil," said Nick, as he sat down in the most comfortable chair in the room.

"Thank you," responded Phil coldly.

"The old man went off mighty sudden," continued Nicholas, with characteristic delicacy.

"Do you mean my father?" inquired Philip.

"Of course I do. There ain't any one else dead, is there!"

"I had been expecting my poor father's death for some time," said Philip gravely.

"Just so! He wa'n't very rugged. We've all got to come to it sooner or later. I expect dad'll die of apoplexy some time—he's so awful fat," remarked Nicholas cheerfully. "If he does, it's lucky he's got me to run the business. I'm only eighteen, but I can get along as well as anybody. I'm kinder smart in business."

"I am glad you are smart in anything," thought Philip; for he knew that Nick was a hopeless dunce in school duties.

"I hope your father'll live a good while," he said politely.

"Yes, of course," said Nick lightly. "I'd be sorry to have the old man pop off; but then you never can tell about such a thing as that."

Philip did not relish the light way in which Nick referred to such a loss as he was suffering from, and, by way of changing the subject, said:

"I believe you said you came on business, Nicholas?"

"Yes; that's what I wanted to come at. It's about your fiddle."

"My violin!" said Philip, rather surprised.

"Oh, well, fiddle or violin! what's the odds? I want to buy it."

"What for?"

"To play on, of course! What did you think I wanted it for?"

"But you can't play, can you?"

"Not yet; but I expect you could show me some—now, couldn't you?"

"What put it into your head to want to play on the violin?" asked Philip, with some curiosity.

“Why, you see, the girls like it. It would be kind of nice when I go to a party, or marm has company, to scrape off a tune or two—just like you do. It makes a feller kinder pop’lar with the girls, don’t you see?” said Nick, with a knowing grin.

“And you want to be popular with the young ladies!” said Philip, smiling, in spite of his bereavement, at the idea being entertained by such a clumsy-looking caliban as Nick Holden.

“Of course I do!” answered Nick, with another grin. “You see I’m gettin’ along—I’ll be nineteen next month, and I might want to get married by the time I’m twenty-one, especially if the old man should drop off sudden.”

“I understand all that, Nicholas—”

“Call me Nick. I ain’t stuck up if I am most a man. Call me pet names, dearest.”

And Nicholas laughed loudly at his witty quotation.

“Just as you prefer. Nick, then, I understand your object. But what made you think I wanted to sell the violin?”

It was Nick’s turn to be surprised.

“Ain’t there goin’ to be an auction of your father’s things?” he said.

“Yes; but the violin is mine, and I am not going to sell it.”

“You’ll have to,” said Nick.

“What do you mean by that, Nicholas Holden?” said Philip quickly.

“Because you’ll have to sell everything to pay your father’s debt. My father said so this very morning.”

“I think I know my own business best,” said Philip coldly. “I shall keep the violin.”

“Maybe it ain’t for you to say,” returned Nick, apparently not aware of his insolence. “Come, now, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. My father’s got a bill against yours for a dollar and sixty-four cents. I told father I had a use for the fiddle, and he says if you’ll give it to me, he’ll call it square. There, what do you say to that?”

Nicholas leaned back in his chair and looked at Philip through his small, fishy eyes, as if he had made an uncommonly liberal offer. As for Philip, he hardly knew whether to be angry or amused.

“You offer me a dollar and sixty-four cents for my violin?” he repeated.

“Yes. It’s second-hand, to be sure, but I guess it’s in pretty fair condition. Besides, you might help me a little about learnin’ how to play.”

“How much do you suppose the violin cost?” inquired Philip.

“Couldn’t say.”

“It cost my father twenty-five dollars.”

“Oh, come, now, that’s too thin! You don’t expect a feller to believe such a story as that?”

“I expect to be believed, for I never tell anything but the truth.”

“Oh, well, I don’t expect you do, generally, but when it comes to tradin’, most everybody lies,” observed Nick candidly.

“I have no object in misrepresenting, for I don’t want to sell the violin.”

“You can’t afford to keep it! The town won’t let you!”

“The town won’t let me?” echoed Philip, now thoroughly mystified.

“Of course they won’t. The idea of a pauper bein’ allowed a fiddle to play on! Why, it’s ridiculous!”

“What do you mean?” demanded Philip, who now began to comprehend the meaning of this thick-witted visitor. “What have I got to do with the town, or with paupers?”

“Why, you’re goin’ to the poorhouse, ain’t you?”

“Certainly not!” answered Philip, with flashing eyes.

“I guess you’re mistaken,” said Nick coolly. “Squire Pope was over to our shop this mornin’, and he told dad that the selectmen were goin’ to send you there after the auction.”

Philip's eyes flashed angrily. He felt insulted and outraged. Never for a moment had he conceived the idea that any one would regard him as a candidate for the poorhouse.

He had an honorable pride in maintaining himself, and would rather get along on one meal a day, earned by himself in honest independence, than be indebted to public charity even for a luxurious support.

"Squire Pope doesn't know what he's talking about," retorted Philip, who had to exercise some self-restraint not to express himself more forcibly "and you can tell him so when you see him. I am no more likely to go to the poorhouse than you are!"

"Come, that's a good one," chuckled Nick. "Talk of me goin' to the poorhouse, when my father pays one of the biggest taxes in town! Of course, it's different with you."

"You'll have to excuse me now," said Philip, determined to get rid of his disagreeable companion. "I have something to do."

"Then you won't sell me the fiddle, Phil?"

"No, I won't," answered our hero, with scant ceremony.

"Then I'll have to bid it off at the auction. Maybe I'll get it cheaper."

And Mr. Nicholas Holden at length relieved Philip of his company.

CHAPTER IV. THE AUCTION

It so happened that Nick Holden met Squire Pope on the village street, and, being rather disappointed at the result of his negotiations with Philip, thought it might be a good idea to broach the subject to the squire, who, as he knew, had taken it upon himself to superintend the sale of Mr. Gray's goods.

"I say, squire, I've just been over to see Phil Gray."

"Ahem! Well, how does he seem to feel?"

"Kinder stuck up, I reckon. He said he wouldn't go to the poorhouse, and I might tell you so."

"I apprehend," said the squire, in his stately way, "he will be under the necessity of going, whether he likes it or not."

"Just so; that's what I told him!" interjected Nick.

"And he should be grateful for so comfortable a home," continued the public man.

"Well, I dunno," said Nick. "They do say that old Tucker most starves the paupers. Why his bills with dad are awful small."

"The town cannot afford to pamper the appetites of its beneficiaries," said the squire. "Where is Philip now?"

"I guess he's at home. I offered to buy his fiddle, but he said he was going to keep it. I offered him a dollar and sixty-four cents—the same as dad's bill against his father, but he wouldn't take it."

"Really, Nicholas, your offer was very irregular—extremely irregular. It should have been made to me, as the administrator of the late Mr. Gray, and not to a boy like Philip."

"Will you sell me the fiddle for dad's bill, squire?" asked Nicholas eagerly.

"You are premature, Nicholas—"

"What's that?"

"I mean you must wait till the auction. Then you will have a chance to bid on the instrument, if you want to secure it."

"Phil says it's his, and won't be for sale at the auction."

"Then Philip is mistaken. He is only a boy. The estate will be settled by those who are older and wiser than he."

"I guess you'll find him hard to manage, squire," said Nick, laughing.

"We shall see—we shall see," returned the squire.

And, with a dignified wave of the hand, he continued on his walk.

After the visit of Nicholas, Philip thought it most prudent to convey the violin which he prized so much to the house of his friend, Frank Dunbar, where he had been invited to take his meals.

He was willing to have the furniture sold to defray his father's small debts, but the violin was his own. It had not even been given him by his father. Though the latter purchased it, the money which it cost had been given to Philip by a friend of the family. He rightly thought that he had no call to sell it now.

"Frank," said he to his boy-friend, "I want you to put away my violin safely, and keep it until after the auction."

"Of course I will, Phil; but won't you want to play on it!"

"Not at present. I'll tell you why I want it put away."

And Philip told his friend about Nick's application to purchase it, and the liberal offer he had made.

"Nick's generosity never will hurt him much," said Frank, laughing. "What in the world did he want of your violin?"

"He wants to make himself popular with the girls."

“He’ll never do that, even if he learns to play like an angel!” said Frank. “You ought to hear the girls talk about him. He couldn’t get a single one of them to go home with from singing-school last winter. He teased my sister to go, but she told him every time she was engaged to some one else.”

The two days that intervened between the funeral and the auction passed, and the last scene connecting Philip with the little cottage which had been his home was to take place.

In a country town, an auction-however inconsiderable-draws together an interested company of friends and neighbors; and, though no articles of value were to be sold, this was the case at the present sale.

Philip didn’t at first mean to be present. He thought it would only give him pain; but at the last moment he came, having been requested to do so by Squire Pope, as information might be required which he could give.

The bulk of the furniture was soon disposed of, at low prices, to be sure, but sufficiently high to make it clear that enough would be realized to pay the small bills outstanding.

Philip’s lip quivered when his father’s watch was put up. He would have liked to buy it, but this was impossible; for he had only about a dollar of his own.

Nick Holden’s eyes sparkled when he saw the watch. He had forgotten about that, but as soon as he saw it he coveted it. He had a cheap silver watch of his own, which he had bought secondhand about three years before. He had thought that he might some day possess a gold watch, but he was not willing to lay out the necessary sum of money.

By dint of actual meanness, he had laid up two hundred dollars, which he now had in the savings-bank in the next village, and he could therefore have bought one if he had chosen; but, like Gilpin,

“Though on pleasure bent, he had a frugal mind.”

Now, however, there seemed a chance of getting a gold watch at a low price. Nick reasoned rightly that at an auction it would go much below its value, and it would be a good thing for him to buy it—even as an investment—as he would probably have chances enough to trade it off at a handsome profit.

“I shouldn’t wonder if I could double my money on it,” he reflected.

Accordingly, when the watch was put up, Nick eagerly bid two dollars.

Philip’s lip curled when he heard this generous bid, and he heartily hoped that this treasured possession of his dead father might not fall into such hands.

Nick rather hoped that no one would bid against him, but in this he was destined to be disappointed.

“Five dollars!” was next heard.

And this bid came from Mr. Dunbar, the father of his friend Frank. Philip’s eyes brightened up, for there was no one he would sooner see the possessor of the watch than his kind friend.

Nick looked chopfallen when he heard this large increase on his original bid, and hesitated to continue, but finally mustered up courage to say, in a rather feeble tone:

“Five and a quarter.”

“Five dollars and a quarter bid!” said the auctioneer. “Do I hear more?”

“Six dollars,” said Mr. Dunbar quietly.

The bid was repeated, and the auctioneer waited for a higher one, but Nick retired ignominiously from the contest.

He wasn’t sure whether he could get much over six dollars for it himself, and he foresaw that Mr. Dunbar intended to have it, even if it cost considerable more.

“It’s kinder hard on a feller,” he complained to the man standing next him. “What does Mr. Dunbar want of the watch? He’s got one already.”

“Perhaps he thinks it is a good bargain at the price.”

“It’s what I’ve been wantin’ all along,” said Nick. “He might have let me have it.”

“Why don’t you bid more?”

“I wanted to get it cheap.”

“And the auctioneer wants to get as much as he can for the articles, and so do Philip’s friends,” This was a consideration which, of course, had no weight with Nicholas. However, he had one comfort. He would bid on the violin, and probably no one else would bid against it. He did not see it, to be sure, but concluded, of course, that it would be bid off. When the sale drew near the end, he went to Philip, and said:

“Whereabouts is the fiddle, Phil?”

“It isn’t here,” answered our hero.

“Ain’t it goin’ to be sold?”

“Of course not! It’s mine. I told you that once already.”

“We’ll see!” said Nicholas angrily.

And going up to Squire Pope, he held a brief conversation with that gentleman.

The squire nodded vigorously, and walked over to Philip.

“Philip,” said he, “go and bring your violin.”

“What will I do that for!” asked our hero quietly.

“So that it may be sold.”

“It is not to be sold,” returned Philip quietly. “It belongs to me.”

“Nothing belongs to you except your clothes!” said the squire angrily. “I require you to go and fetch the instrument.”

“And I decline to do it,” said Philip.

“Do you know who I am,” demanded the squire, with ruffled dignity.

“I know you perfectly well,” answered Philip “but I am the owner of the violin, and I don’t mean to have it sold.”

“YOU will repent this!” said Squire Pope, who felt that his lawful authority and official dignity were set at naught.

Philip bowed and left the house. He did not know what steps the squire might take, but he was resolved not to give up his cherished violin.

CHAPTER V. AN ALLIANCE AGAINST PHILIP

Squire Pope was not a bad man, nor was he by nature a tyrant, but he was so fully convinced of his own superior judgment that he was in all things obstinately bent on having his own way. He had persuaded himself that our young hero, Philip, would be better off in the poorhouse than in a place where he could earn his own living, and no one could convince him to the contrary.

As to the boy's feelings on the subject, he considered those of no importance. He had good reason to know that Philip would object to being an inmate of the almshouse, but he was determined that he should go there.

In like manner, before the auction was over, he saw clearly that it would realize a sum more than sufficient to pay the funeral expenses of the late Mr. Gray and the few small bills outstanding against his estate, and that there was no necessity that Philip's violin should be sold, but none the less he resolved that it should be sold.

"Shall I allow a young lad to dictate to me?" Squire Pope asked himself, in irritation. "Certainly not! I know better what is right than he. It is ridiculous that a town pauper should own a violin. Why, the next thing, we shall have to buy pianos for our almshouses, for the use of the gentlemen and ladies who occupy them. A violin, indeed!"

This Squire Pope regarded as irresistible logic and withering sarcasm combined.

He saw Philip go out of the cottage, but, as the sale was not over, he was unable to follow him.

"Never mind, I'll fix him as soon as I have time," he said to himself.

"Back so soon? Is the auction over!" asked his friend, Frank Dunbar, who was engaged in splitting wood in the rear of the house.

"No, Frank, not quite; but it's almost over..Who do you think bid on father's gold watch?"

"I don't know."

"Nick Holden."

"He didn't get it, did he?"

"I am glad to say not. Your father bought it."

"Did he! Why, he's got one watch already."

"I am glad he's got it. I couldn't bear to think of Nick Holden carrying my father's watch. He was disappointed about one thing besides."

"What was that?"

"The violin. He went to Squire Pope, and complained that it was not in the sale."

"That's just like his impudence. What did the squire say?"

"He came to me and ordered me to get it, so that it might be sold."

"Shall I get it for you, then?"

"Not much!" answered Philip emphatically. "It is mine, as I have already told you. If the auction doesn't bring in enough to settle up everything, I may agree to sell it for a fair price; but I am sure, from the prices, that it won't be necessary."

"Squire Pope's a dreadful obstinate man," said Frank doubtfully. "He may insist upon your selling the violin."

"Let him do it!" said Philip contemptuously. "I should like to see him get it. Where have you put it, Frank?"

"Where Squire Pope won't be apt to find it—in an old chest up in the garret. It's full of old clothes, belonging to my grandfather, and hasn't been looked into by any one except me for years. I put it away under all the clothes at the bottom. No one knows where it is except you and me, not even mother."

"That's good. I guess we can defy the squire, then."

Half an hour later, Mr. Dunbar came home from the auction.

Philip went to meet him.

“Thank you for buying father’s watch,” he said. “But for you, Nick Holden would have had it, and I should have been sorry for it.”

“He was badly disappointed,” said Mr. Dunbar smiling. “But I didn’t buy the watch for myself, Philip.”

“For whom, then?” asked Philip, in some surprise.

“For the one that has the best right to it—for you,” and the farmer took the watch from his pocket, and handed it to Philip.

“But I haven’t the money to pay for it, Mr. Dunbar,” said our hero.

“Then I give it to you as a present,” said Mr. Dunbar.

“I am very grateful,” said Philip; “but I ought not to accept it. You are too kind to me.”

“Let me be the judge of that.”

“Besides, it wouldn’t be safe for me to take it. Squire Pope will try to get my violin away from me in order to sell it, and he would be sure to try to do the same by the watch if he found that I had it.”

“But, Philip, I don’t need the watch myself.”

“Then, Mr. Dunbar, will you be kind enough to keep it for me, and when I can afford to pay for it, and there is no danger of its being taken from me, I will ask you for it. I shall be very glad, indeed, when I am older, to carry my father’s watch, for I have seen it in his hands so often that it will constantly remind me of him.”

“Perhaps that will be the best arrangement,” said Mr. Dunbar. “You might have it stolen from you, if you carried it yourself just at present. As you request, I will keep it, subject to your order; but I would rather let it be a gift from me, and not require you to pay for it.”

“We won’t talk about that now,” said Philip, smiling. “At any rate, you must let me thank you for your great kindness to me.”

“Don’t speak of that, Phil,” said the farmer kindly. “I had a great respect and liking for your father, and I verily believe my Frank loves you as well as if you were his own brother. So, come what may, you have a friend in our family.”

“I indorse all that father says,” Frank said.

And he extended his hand to Philip, who grasped it heartily.

It warmed his heart to think that he had such good friends, though he was an orphan and alone in the world.

After supper, Mr. Dunbar went to the village store, while Frank and Philip remained at home. Suddenly Frank said:

“Philip, you are going to have a visitor, I guess.”

“A visitor!”

“Yes; I saw Squire Pope stumping along the road, nourishing his gold-headed cane. He is headed this way, and it’s likely he is going to honor you with a call. He’s got somebody with him, too. Who is it!”

Philip shaded his eyes with his hand, for the Sun was near its setting, and shining with dazzling brightness from the quarter toward which he was looking.

“It’s Nick Holden!” he said.

“So it is! What can he want?”

“I understand very well. He wants my violin. He couldn’t get it at the sale, so he has come here to see if he can’t make me give it to him.”

“And will you?”

“You ought to know me better than to ask, Frank,” said Philip firmly. “Nick might as well have stayed away, for he won’t accomplish anything.”

Nick, however, held a different opinion. After Philip left the cottage, he had gone to Squire Pope, and cunningly asked:

“Are you going to let Philip keep his fiddle in spite of you, squire?”

“What do you mean, Nicholas?” demanded the squire, in a stately way.

“Why, seems to me he’s kinder settin’ up his will agin yours. You say the fiddle shall be sold, and he says it shan’t. He told me he didn’t care what you said, he should keep it.”

“Did he say that, Nicholas?” asked the squire, who felt that his dignity was outraged by such insolence.

“I’m sartain he did. He’s pretty big feelin’, Phil is. He always wants to have his own way.”

“He will find that he can’t defy me with impunity,” said the squire stiffly.

“Just so. Then you’ll sell me the fiddle?”

“I will!” said the squire emphatically.

“You won’t ask too much, will you?” asked Nick anxiously.

Now Squire Pope, who knew nothing of the price of violins, and had a very inadequate idea of their value, after some haggling on the part of Nick, agreed to sell him the instrument for two dollars and a half, and to see that it was delivered that evening.

“Do you know where it is, Nicholas?” he asked.

“Why, Phil is staying over at Frank Dunbar’s, and I guess he’s got it there somewhere. I guess we’d better go over there and get it.”

“Very well, Nicholas. After supper, if you will come to my house, I will go over there, and see that you have the instrument.”

“All right, squire!” said Nick gleefully, “Phil will find that he can’t have his own way this time.”

“I apprehend he will,” said the squire complacently.

Now the reader understands how it happened that Squire Pope and Nick Holden made a call on Philip. As to what passed at the interview, we must refer him to the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI. FUSS ABOUT A FIDDLE

“Ahem! Good evening!” said Squire Pope to Frank Dunbar, taking no notice of Philip’s cold but polite salutation.

“Good evening! Will you go into the house?” said Frank.

“I believe not. I have not time.”

“I am sorry father isn’t home. He just started for the village.”

“Ahem! it was not to see your father that I called,” answered Squire Pope. “I wish to have a few words with this young man,” indicating Philip stiffly.

“I am at your service, Squire Pope,” said Philip, with ceremonious politeness.

“We came about the fiddle,” interrupted Nick Holden, who always wanted to have a share in the conversation.

Squire Pope frowned, for he did not relish Nick’s interference.

“Nicholas,” he said severely, “I apprehend I am competent to manage the business we have come upon.”

“Don’t get riled, squire,” said Nick, by no means abashed by this rebuke. “I thought you were kinder slow about comin’ to the point.”

“Your interruption was very indecorous. I do not require any assistance or any suggestions.”

“All right, squire!”

Squire Pope now turned to our hero, and said:

“As I was about to say, when interrupted by Nicholas, I have come to require you to give up—the Violin which, without authority and against my express command, you withheld from the auction.”

“The violin is mine, Squire Pope,” said Philip firmly, “and I mean to keep it!”

“You talk like an ignorant boy. As a minor, you had no claim to the possession of any article except your clothing. I judged it best that the violin should be sold at the auction, and it is presumptuous for you to set up your judgment against mine!”

“I don’t take that view of it,” said Philip, and then he stopped.

He knew it was of no use to argue against the squire, who was obstinate to the verge of pig-headedness, if I may be allowed to use the expression. He felt that it would be only wasting his breath.

“It is quite immaterial how you view the subject,” said the squire pompously. “My mind is made up, and my resolution is not likely to be shaken by a boy.”

“Then, sir,” answered Philip, in a respectful tone but with a slight smile, “it is hardly worth while for me to say any more.”

“I am glad you have arrived at so sensible a conclusion,” said Squire Pope. “I take it that you have the violin here.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then bring it out and give it to me.”

Now came the critical point, when Philip must array himself in determined opposition to Squire Pope. He felt that he was entirely in the right; still he regretted the necessity of the antagonism.

Philip had one thing in his favor: He had plenty of self-control, and, although he was very indignant at the course of the squire, which he regarded as unjustifiable, he made up his mind to be as respectful as circumstances would permit.

“I don’t think you understand me, Squire Pope,” he said. “I refuse to give up the violin!”

“You refuse to give up the violin!” repeated Squire Pope, scarcely believing the testimony of his ears. “Do I hear you aright?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I never see such impudence!” ejaculated Nick Holden, wishing to egg on the squire.

“Do you mean to defy me to my face?” demoded Squire Pope, growing very red.

“I don’t wish to defy you or anybody else,” returned Philip; “but I shall stand up for my rights.”

“Misguided boy!” said the squire severely; “you will yet rue this rash and heedless course. Frank,” he continued, turning to Frank Dunbar, “do you know where Philip’s violin is!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do me the favor to bring it out and place it in my hands.”

“You must excuse me, Squire Pope,” answered Frank. “It belongs to Philip, and I have no right to meddle with it.”

“If Philip has told you this, he has misrepresented,” said the squire, rather discouraged by this second rebuff. “The violin does not belong to Philip. It belongs to this young man.”

And, with a wave of his hand, he designated Nick Holden.

It was not polite, but Frank Dunbar was so surprised by this announcement that he whistled.

As for Philip, he regarded Nick calmly; but there didn’t seem to be any sign of yielding in his look.

“It belongs to Nicholas, because I have sold it to him,” continued Squire Pope doggedly.

“That’s so!” corroborated Nick complacently. “The squire sold me the fiddle for two-fifty. It’s mine now, and you’d better fetch it along out, or there’ll be trouble.”

Philip turned to Squire Pope, and said quietly:

“As you had no right to sell it, the sale amounts to nothing. If you had a right, I should say you were not very shrewd to sell an instrument that cost twenty-five dollars—and was considered a bargain at the price—for two dollars and fifty cents.”

“The violin cost twenty-five dollars!” ejaculated the squire, in genuine surprise.

For, as it has already been stated, he had no idea whatever of the usual price for a violin.

“Yes, sir.”

“Don’t you believe him, squire,” said Nicholas, afraid that he would lose what he knew to be a good bargain. “No fiddle that was ever made cost twenty-five dollars. It’s ridiculous!”

“It does seem a large price,” said the squire guardedly.

Squire Pope would doubtless have been surprised to learn that certain violins of celebrated make—such as the Cremonas—have sold for thousands of dollars. Probably he would have disbelieved it.

Nevertheless, he began to think that he had been too precipitate in accepting Nick Holden’s offer.

If he should sacrifice, or sell at an utterly inadequate price, any article belonging to the boy whom he considered his ward, he knew that he would be blamed, and he began to consider how he could recede from the bargain.

“Nicholas,” he said, “I didn’t exactly sell the violin to you. I will ascertain what is a fair price for it, and then I will consider your proposal.”

“You sold it right out, squire,” said Nick, “and I can prove it. Didn’t you just say it was mine. There, now!”

Nick turned triumphantly to Frank and Phil, but, for very good reasons, they did not care to side with him.

“I say, you haven’t treated me right,” persisted Nick, who had no particular respect nor veneration for the squire, and was not to be deterred from speaking as he felt. “I offered you two-fifty, and you said I should have it, and you got me to call at your house to come here for it.”

“I cannot sacrifice the property of my ward,” said Squire Pope. “I must ascertain how much the violin is worth.”

“A bargain is a bargain, every time!” said Nick, irritated.

“I will let you have it as cheap as anybody,” said the squire, who thought it possible that Nick might be the only one who desired to purchase it. “That ought to satisfy you. Philip, go and bring me the violin, and I will carry it home and dispose of it to the best advantage.”

“You must excuse me, Squire Pope. I shall not let it leave my possession.” Just then Squire Pope espied Mr. Dunbar returning from the village, and hailed him as a probable ally. He laid the matter before him, and requested him to compel Philip to get the violin.

“You must excuse me, squire,” said Mr. Dunbar coldly. “Philip is my guest, and he shall be protected in his rights as long as he remains here.”

Without a word, Squire Pope walked off, in angry discomfiture, in one direction, while Nick, equally dissatisfied, walked off in another.

“They don’t seem happy!” said Frank slyly.

“I wish I knew where it was going to end,” returned Philip gravely.

“It seems to me,” said Frank, “the squire is making a great fuss about a fiddle, for a man of his dignity.”

“He doesn’t care about the violin. He wants to have his own way,” said Philip, thus hitting the nail on the head.

CHAPTER VII. MR. JOE TUCKER

Before going further, I will introduce to the reader, a citizen of Norton, who filled a position for which he was utterly unfitted. This man was Joe Tucker, in charge of the almshouse.

He had not been selected by the town authorities on the ground of fitness, but simply because he was willing to work cheap. He received a certain low weekly sum for each one of his inmates, and the free use of apartments for himself and family, with the right to cultivate the ten acres of land connected with the establishment, and known as the Town Farm.

His family consisted of three persons—himself, his wife, and a son, Ezekiel, familiarly known as Zeke, now sixteen years old. The leading family trait was meanness.

Mr. Tucker supplied a mean table even for a poorhouse, and some of the hapless inmates complained bitterly. One had even had the boldness to present a complaint to the selectmen, and that body, rather reluctantly, undertook to investigate the justness of the complaint. They deputed Squire Pope to visit the poorhouse and inquire into the matter.

Now, though Squire Pope thought himself unusually sharp, it was the easiest thing in the world for a cunning person like Joe Tucker to satisfy him that all was right.

“Mr. Tucker,” said Squire Pope pompously, “I am deputed by the selectmen, and I may add by the overseers of the poor, to investigate a complaint made by one of the paupers in relation to the fare you offer them.”

“Who is it!” inquired Mr. Tucker.

“It is Ann Carter. She says you don’t allow her sugar in her tea, and only allow one slice of bread at supper, and that the meat is so bad she can’t eat it.”

“Just like the old woman!” exclaimed Mr. Tucker indignantly. “Oh, she’s a high-strung pauper, she is! Expects all the delicacies of the season for seventy-five cents a week. She’d ought to go to the Fifth Avenoo Hotel in New York, and then I’ll bet a cent she wouldn’t be satisfied.”

It is observable that even in his imaginary bets Mr. Tucker maintained his economical habits, and seldom bet more than a cent. Once, when very much excited, he had bet five cents, but this must be attributed to his excited state of mind.

“So you regard her complaints as unreasonable, do you, Mr. Tucker?” observed the investigating committee.

“Unreasonable? I should think they was. I allow, Squire Pope, we don’t live like a first-class hotel”—Mr. Tucker’s language was rather mixed—“but we live as well as we can afford to. As to sugar, we don’t allow the paupers to put it in for themselves, or they’d ruin us by their extravagance. Mrs. Tucker puts sugar in the teapot before she pours it out. I s’pose Ann Carter would put as much in one cup of tea as Mrs. T. uses for the whole teapotful, if she had her way.”

This was very probably true, as the frugal Mrs. Tucker only allowed one teaspoonful for the entire supply.

“That looks reasonable, Mr. Tucker,” said the squire approvingly. “Now about the bread and the meat?”

“The paupers has plenty of bread,” said Mr. Tucker. “Our bread bill is actually enormous.”

“And as to the meat?”

“We don’t give ‘em roast turkey every day, and we don’t buy tenderloin steaks to pamper their appetites,” said Mr. Tucker, “though we’re perfectly willing to do it if the town’ll pay us so we can afford it. Do you think the town’ll agree to pay me twenty-five cents more a week for each one, squire?”

“Certainly not. It can’t be thought of,” said the squire hastily, knowing that if the selectmen advocated such a measure they would probably lose their reelection.

“If it would, we might live a little better, so that Ann Carter wouldn’t have to complain, though, bless your soul! that woman is always complainin’.”

“Ahem! Mr. Tucker, you present the matter to me in a new light. I really feel that Ann Carter is very unreasonable in her complaints.”

“I knowed you’d do me justice, squire,” said Mr. Tucker effusively. “You’re a sharp man. You ain’t a-goin’ to be taken in by any of them paupers’ rigmarole. I always said, Squire Pope, that you was the right man in the right place, and that the town was lucky to have so intelligent and public-spirited a citizen fillin’ her most important offices.”

“Mr. Tucker,” said the squire, “you gratify me. It has ever been my aim to discharge with conscientious fidelity the important trusts which the town has committed to my charge—”

“I’ll bear witness to that, squire.”

“And your sincere tribute gives me great satisfaction.”

“I hope you’ll report things right to the board, Squire Pope?” said Mr. Joe Tucker insinuatingly.

“Be assured I will, Mr. Tucker. I consider you a zealous and trustworthy official, striving hard to do your duty in the place the town has assigned you.”

“I do, indeed, squire,” said Mr. Tucker, pulling on a red handkerchief and mopping some imaginary tears. “Excuse my emotions, sir, but your generous confidence quite unmans me. I—I—trust now that I shall be able to bear meekly the sneers and complaints of Ann Carter and her fellow paupers.”

“I will stand by you, Mr. Tucker,” said Squire Pope cordially, for the man’s flattery, coarse as it was, had been like incense to his vanity. “I will stand by you, and uphold you by my testimony.”

“Thank you, squire. With such an impartial advocate I will continue to do my duty and fear nothing.”

As Squire Pope left the almshouse, Mr. Tucker winked at himself in the glass, and said quizzically:

“I guess I’m all right now. The vain old fool thinks he’s a second Solomon, and thinks I regard him as such. Oh, it takes me to get round him!”

Squire Pope wrote an elaborate report, in which he stated that, after searching investigation, he had ascertained that the complaints of Ann Carter were absolutely groundless, and gave it as his conviction that Mr. Tucker’s treatment of her and her associate paupers was characterized by remarkable consideration and humanity.

Such officials as he have much to answer for, and yet there are plenty just as false to their responsibilities as he.

It was two days after Squire Pope’s ineffectual attempt to possess himself of Philip’s violin, that our hero was walking along a country road, on his return from an errand which, he had undertaken for his friend’s father, when his attention was drawn to the yelping of a small dog, that seemed in fear or pain.

Looking over the stone wall, Philip saw Zeke Tucker amusing himself by thrusting the dog’s head into a pool of dirty water, and holding it there till the animal was nearly strangled. The dog’s suffering appeared to yield the most exquisite amusement to the boy, who burst into peal after peal of rude laughter as he watched the struggles of his victim.

Philip, like every decent boy, had a horror of cruelty, and the sight stirred him to immediate anger and disgust.

“What are you doing there, Zeke Tucker?” he demanded sternly.

“None of your business!” answered Zeke, frowning.

“You’d better answer my question,” said Philip, who had by this time jumped over the wall.

“Then I will. I’m havin’ a little fun. What have you got to say about it?” retorted Zeke.

And once more he plunged the head of the poor dog into the filthy pool.

The next moment he found himself floundering on his back, while the dog, slipping from his grasp, was running across the meadows. “What did you do that for!” demanded Zeke, springing up, his face flaming with rage.

“I rather think you understand well enough,” answered Philip contemptuously.

“What business have you to touch me? I can have you arrested, you low pauper!”

“What’s that? What did you call me?” demanded Philip.

“I called you a pauper.”

“By what right?”

“Squire Pope told my father he was going to bring you over to the poorhouse to live. You just see if my father doesn’t give it to you then!”

“Thank you,” said Phil contemptuously; “but I don’t propose to board at your establishment, not even to obtain the pleasure of your society.”

“Maybe you can’t help yourself,” said Zeke gleefully.

For he saw what had escaped the notice of Philip, whose back was turned—namely, a four-seated carryall, containing his father and Squire Pope, which had just halted in the road, hard by.

“Mr. Tucker,” said Squire Pope, in a low tone, “now will be the best opportunity to capture the boy and carry him to the almshouse.”

“All right—I’m ready,” said Tucker readily.

For another boarder would bring him sixty cents a week more.

They stopped the horses and prepared for business.

CHAPTER XIII. IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS

Philip heard a step, and turned to see whose it was; but, when he recognized Mr. Tucker, the latter's hand was already on his collar.

"What have you been doin' to Zeke? Tell me that, you young rascal," said Mr. Tucker roughly.

"He pitched into me savage, father," answered Zeke, who had picked himself up, and was now engaged in brushing the dust from his coat.

"Pitched into ye, did he?" repeated Joe Tucker grimly. "I reckon he didn't know your father was 'round. What have you got to say for yourself, eh?"

Philip regarded his captor contemptuously, and didn't struggle to escape, knowing that he was not a match for a man five inches taller than himself. But contempt he could not help showing, for he knew very well that Zeke had inherited his mean traits largely from his father.

"I'll thank you to remove your hand from my collar, sir," said Philip. "When you have done that, I will explain why I pitched into Zeke, as he calls it."

"Don't you let go, father!" said Zeke hastily. "He'll run away, if you do."

"If I do, you can catch me between you," returned Philip coolly.

"I reckon that's so," said Mr. Tucker, withdrawing his hand, but keeping wary watch of our hero.

"Now go ahead!" said he.

Philip did so.

"I saw Zeke torturing a small dog," he explained, "and I couldn't stand by and let it go on."

"What was he doin' to him?" inquired Mr. Tucker.

"Putting the poor animal's head into this dirty pool, and keeping it there till it was nearly suffocated."

"Was you doin' that, Zeke?" asked his father.

"I was havin' a little fun with him," said Zeke candidly.

"It might have been fun to you, but it wasn't to him," said Phil.

"Why didn't you ask Zeke to stop, and not fly at him like a tiger?" demanded Mr. Tucker.

"I did remonstrate with him, but he only laughed, and did it again."

"He hadn't no right to order me," said Zeke. "It wa'n't no business of his if I was havin' a little fun with the dog."

"And I had a little fun with, you," returned Philip—"You couldn't have complained if I had dipped your head in the water also."

"I ain't a dog!" said Zeke.

"I should respect you more if you were," said Philip.

"Are you goin' to let him talk to me like that!" asked Zeke, appealing to his father.

"No, I ain't," said Mr. Tucker angrily. "You've committed an assault and battery on my son, you rascal, and you'll find there ain't no fun in it for you. I could have you arrested and put in jail, couldn't I, squire?"

"Ahem! Well, you could have him fined; but, as he is to be under your care, Mr. Tucker, you will have a chance of making him conduct himself properly."

"What do you mean by that, Squire Pope?" asked Philip quickly.

"Young man, I do not choose to be catechized," said Squire Pope, in a dignified manner; "but I have no objections to tell you that I have made arrangements with Mr. Tucker to take you into the poorhouse."

"I've heard that before, but I couldn't believe it," said Philip proudly.

"I guess you'll have to believe it pretty soon, he, he!" laughed Zeke, with a grin which indicated his high delight. "I guess dad'll make you stand round when he gits you into the poor-house."

"Don't you consider me capable of earning my own living, Squire Pope?" asked Philip.

“Ahem! Yes, you will be one of these days. You won’t have to stay in the almshouse all your life.”

“You’ll have a chance to earn your livin’ with me.” said Mr. Tucker. “I shall give you something to do, you may depend.”

“You can make him saw and split wood, father, and do the chores and milk the cow,” suggested Zeke.

“I have no objection to doing any of those things for a farmer,” said Philip, “but I am not willing to do it where I shall be considered a pauper.”

“Kinder uppish!” suggested Mr. Tucker, turning to Squire Pope. “Most all of them paupers is proud; but it’s pride in the wrong place, I reckon.”

“If it is pride to want to earn an independent living, and not live on charity, then I am proud,” continued Philip.

“Well, squire, how is it to be,” asked Mr. Tucker.

“Philip,” said Squire Pope pompously, “you are very young, and you don’t know what is best for you. We do, and you must submit. Mr. Tucker, take him and put him in the wagon, and we’ll drive over to the poorhouse.”

“What! now?” asked Philip, in dismay.

“Just so,” answered Joe Tucker. “When you’ve got your bird, don’t let him go, that’s what I say.”

“That’s the talk, dad!” said Zeke gladly. “We’ll take down his pride, I guess, when we’ve got him home.”

Joe Tucker approached Philip, and was about to lay hold of him, when our hero started back.

“You needn’t lay hold of me, Mr. Tucker,” he said. “I will get into the wagon if Squire Pope insists upon it.”

“I’m glad you’re gettin’ sensible,” said the squire, congratulating himself on finding Philip more tractable than he expected.

“And you will go to the poorhouse peaceful, and without making a fuss?” asked Joe.

“Yes, I will go there; but I won’t stay there.”

“You won’t stay there!” ejaculated the squire.

“No, sir! In treating me as a dependent on charity, you are doing what neither you nor any other man has a right to do,” said Philip firmly.

“You don’t appear to remember that I am a selectman and overseer of the poor,” said the Squire.

“I am aware that you hold those offices; but if so, you ought to save money to the town, and not compel them to pay for my support, when I am willing and able to support myself.”

Squire Pope looked a little puzzled. This was putting the matter in a new light, and he could not help admitting to himself that Philip was correct, and that perhaps his fellow citizens might take the same view.

On the other hand, the squire was fond of having his own way, and he had now gone so far that he could not recede without loss of dignity.

“I think,” he answered stiffly, “that I understand my duty as well as a boy of fifteen. I don’t mean to keep you here long, but it is the best arrangement for the present.”

“Of course it is,” said Zeke, well pleased with the humiliation of his enemy.

“Shut up, Zeke!” said his father, observing from the squire’s expression that he did not fancy Zeke’s interference.

“All right, dad,” said Zeke good-naturedly, seeing that things had turned out as he desired.

“Jump in!” said Mr. Tucker to Philip.

Our hero, without a word, obeyed. He was firmly resolved that Squire Pope should not have his way, but he did not choose to make himself ridiculous by an ineffectual resistance which would only have ended in his discomfiture.

Seated between Mr. Tucker and the squire, he was driven rapidly toward the poorhouse.

CHAPTER IX. THE POORHOUSE

There was no room for Zeke to ride—that is, there was no seat for him—but he managed to clamber into the back part of the wagon, where he sat, or squatted, rather uncomfortably, but evidently in the best of spirits—if any inference could be drawn from his expression.

The poorhouse was not far away. It was a three-story frame house, which badly needed painting, with a dilapidated barn, and shed near by.

A three-story farmhouse is not common in the country, but this dwelling had been erected by a Mr. Parmenter, in the expectation of making a fortune by taking summer boarders.

There was room enough for them, but they did not come. The situation was the reverse of pleasant, the soil about was barren, and there were no shade or fruit trees. It was a crazy idea, selecting such a spot for a summer boarding-house, and failure naturally resulted.

There had, indeed, been two boarders—a man and his wife—who paid one week's board, and managed to owe six before the unlucky landlord decided that they were a pair of swindlers. He had spent more money than he could afford on his house, and went steadily behind-hand year after year, till the town—which was in want of a poorhouse—stepped in and purchased the house and farm at a bargain. So it came to be a boarding-house, after all, but in a sense not contemplated by the proprietor, and, at present, accommodated eleven persons—mostly old and infirm—whom hard fortune compelled to subsist on charity.

Mr. Tucker had this advantage, that his boarders, had no recourse except to stay with him, however poor his fare or harsh his treatment, unless they were in a position to take care of themselves.

When Philip came in sight of the almshouse—which he had often seen, and always considered a very dreary-looking building—he was strengthened in his determination not long to remain a tenant.

Mr. Tucker drove up to the front door with a flourish.

A hard-featured woman came out, and regarded the contents of the wagon with curiosity.

“Well, Abigail, can you take another boarder!” asked Mr. Tucker, as he descended from the wagon.

“Who is it?”

“Well, it ain't likely to be Squire Pope!” said Joe facetiously; “and Zeke and I are regular boarders on the free list.”

“Is it that boy?”

“Yes; it's Phil Gray.”

“Humph! boys are a trial!” remarked Mrs. Tucker, whose experience with Zeke had doubtless convinced her of this fact.

“I sha'n't trouble you long, Mrs. Tucker,” said Philip. “I don't intend to stay.”

“You don't, hey?” retorted Joe Tucker, with a wolfish grin and an emphatic nod of the head. “We'll see about that—won't we, Squire Pope?”

“The boy is rather rebellious, Mrs. Tucker,” said the selectman. “He appears to think he knows better what is good for him than we do. You may look upon him as a permanent boarder. What he says is of no account.”

Philip said nothing, but he looked full at the squire with an unflinching gaze. If ever determination was written upon any face, it was on his.

“Come down there!” said Mrs. Tucker, addressing our hero. “You're at home now.”

“Mr. Dunbar won't know what has become of me,” said Philip, with a sudden thought. “They will be anxious. May I go back there and tell them where I am?”

“Do you think I am green enough for that?” Mr. Tucker, touching the side of his nose waggishly. “We shouldn't be likely to set eyes on you again.”

“I will promise to come back here this evening,” said Philip.

“And will you promise to stay?” asked Squire Pope doubtfully.

“No, sir,” answered Philip boldly. “I won’t do that, but I will engage to come back. Then Mr. Tucker will have to look out for me, for I tell you and him frankly I don’t mean to stay.”

“Did you ever hear such talk, squire!” asked Mr. Tucker, with a gasp of incredulity. “He actually defies you, who are a selectman and an overseer of the poor.”

“So he does, Mr. Tucker. I’m shocked at his conduct.”

“Shall we let him go?”

“No, of course not.”

“I agree with you, squire. I know’d you wouldn’t agree to it. What shall I do about his wantin’ to run away?”

“It will be best to confine him just at first, Mr. Tucker.”

“I’ll shut him up in one of the attic rooms,” said Mr. Tucker.

“I think it will be the best thing to do, Mr. Tucker.”

Philip took all this very coolly. As to the way in which they proposed to dispose of him for the present he cared very little, as he did not intend stay till morning if there was any possible chance of getting away. The only thing that troubled him was the doubt and anxiety of his good friends, the Dunbars, when he did not return to the house.

“Squire Pope,” he said, turning to that official, “will you do me a favor?”

“Ahem! Explain yourself,” said the squire suspiciously.

“Will you call at Mr. Dunbar’s and tell them where I am.”

Now, for obvious reasons, the squire did not like to do this. He knew that the Dunbars would manifest great indignation at the arbitrary step which he had adopted, and he did not like to face their displeasure, especially as his apology would perforce be a lame one.

“I don’t think I am called upon to do you a favor, seeing how you’ve acted, Philip,” he said hesitatingly. “Besides, it would be out of my way, and I ought to get home as soon as possible.”

“Then you refuse, sir?”

“Well, I’d rather not.”

“Will you get word to them, Mr. Tucker?” asked Philip, turning to him.

“I hain’t got time,” answered Mr. Tucker, who feared that the Dunbars would come for Philip and release him in the course of the evening.

Philip was nonplused. Always considerate of the feelings of others, he was unwilling that his friends should suffer anxiety on his account.

As Mr. Tucker and Squire Pope walked away together, our hero turned to Zeke.

“I suppose it’s no use to ask you to do me a favor, Zeke?” he said.

“Do you want me to tell Frank Dunbar where you are?”

“Yes, I wish you would.”

“Then I’ll do it.”

“You’re a better fellow than I thought you were, Zeke,” said Philip, surprised.

“No, I ain’t! Do you want to know why I’m willin’ to go?”

“Why?”

“I know Frank Dunbar’ll feel bad, and I hate him.”

“So that is your object, is it, Zeke?”

“You’ve got it.”

“Well, whatever your motive may be, I shall be much obliged to you if you go. Here’s ten cents for you!”

Zeke grasped at the coin with avidity, for his father was very parsimonious, and his mother no less so, and he seldom got any ready money.

“Thank you!” said Zeke, with unusual politeness. “I’ll go right off. But, I say, don’t you tell dad where I’ve gone, or he might prevent me, and don’t you let on you’ve given me this dime, or he’d try to get it away.”

“No, I won’t say anything about it,” answered Philip.

“A curious family this is!” he thought, “There doesn’t seem to be much confidence in each other.”

Zeke sauntered away carelessly, to avert suspicion but when he had got round a bend of the road he increased his speed, never looking back, lest he should see his father signaling for him.

Philip breathed a sigh of relief.

“I’ve got a messenger at last,” he said. “Now my friends will know what has become of me when I don’t come home to supper.”

He was a little curious to learn what they were going to do with him, but he was not long kept in suspense.

CHAPTER X. BAD TIDINGS

Leaving Philip for a short time in the hands of his captor, we will follow Zeke on his errand. He didn't have to go as far as Mr. Dunbar's house, for he met Frank Dunbar about a quarter of a mile this side of it.

Now, between Frank Dunbar and Zeke Tucker there was no love lost. There had been a difficulty between them, originating at school, which need not be particularly referred to. Enough that it led to Zeke's cordially disliking Frank, while the latter, who was a frank, straightforward boy, could not see anything in Mr. Tucker's promising son to enlist either his respect or his liking.

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