Horatio Alger Jr.

The Erie Train Boy

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Alger H.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
ON THE ERIE ROAD

"Papers, magazines, all the popular novels! Can't I sell you something this morning?"

Joshua Bascom turned as the train boy addressed him, and revealed an honest, sunburned face, lighted up with pleasurable excitement, for he was a farmer's son and was making his first visit to the city of New York.

"I ain't much on story readin'," he said, "I tried to read a story book once, but I couldn't seem to get interested in it."

"What was the name of it?" asked Fred, the train boy, smiling.

"It was the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or some such name. It had pictures into it. Aunt Nancy give it to dad for a birthday present once."

"I have heard of it."

"It was a mighty queer book. I couldn't make head nor tail on't."

"All books are not like that."

"I don't feel like readin'. It's a nuff sight more interestin' lookin' out of the winder at the sights.

"I'm going to York to spend a week," added Joshua, with an air of importance.

"That's where I live," said the train boy.

"Do you? Then you might tell me where to put up. I've got ten dollars.

I reckon that ought to keep me a week."

Fred smiled.

"That is more than enough to keep me," he said, "but it costs a stranger considerable to go around. But I shall have to go my rounds."

It was a train on the Erie road, and the car had just passed Middletown. Joshua was sitting by the window, and the seat beside him was vacant. The train boy had scarcely left the car when a stylishly dressed young man, who had been sitting behind, came forward and accosted Joshua.

"Is this seat engaged?" he asked.

"Not as I know of," answered the young farmer.

"Then with your permission I will take it," said the stranger.

"Why of course; I hain't no objection. He's dreadful polite!" thought Joshua.

"You are from the country, I presume?" said the newcomer as he sank into the seat.

"Yes, I be. I live up Elmira way – town of Barton. Was you ever in Barton?"

"I have passed through it. I suppose you are engaged in agricultural pursuits?"

"Hey?"

"You are a farmer, I take it."

"Yes; I work on dad's farm. He owns a hundred and seventy-five acres, and me and a hired man help him to carry it on. I tell you we have to work."

"Just so! And now you are taking a vacation?"

"Yes. I've come to see the sights of York."

"I think you will enjoy your visit. Ahem! the mayor of New York is my uncle."

"You don't say?" ejaculated Joshua, awestruck.

"Yes! My name is Ferdinand Morris."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Morris. My name is Joshua Bascom."

"Indeed! An aunt of mine married a Bascom. Perhaps we are related."

Joshua was quite elated at the thought that he might in some way be related to the mayor of New York without knowing it, and he resolved to expatiate on that subject when he went back to Barton. He decided that his new acquaintance must be rich, for he was dressed in showy style and had a violet in his buttonhole.

"Be you in business, Mr Morris?" he asked.

"Well, ahem! I am afraid that I am rather an idler. My father left me a quarter of a million, and so I don't feel the need of working."

"Quarter of a million!" ejaculated Joshua. "Why, that's two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Just so," said Morris, smiling.

"That's an awful pile of money! Why, dad's been workin' all his life, and he isn't wuth more'n three thousand dollars at the outside."

"I am afraid three thousand dollars wouldn't last me a very long time," said Morris, with an amused smile.

"Gosh! Where can anybody get such a pile of money? That's what beats me!"

"Business, my young friend, business! Why I've made that amount of money in one day."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, by speculating in Wall Street."

"You must be smart!"

"My teachers didn't seem to think so. But life in the city is very different from life in the country."

"I wish I could make some money."

"A man must have money to make money. If now you had a little money – "

"I've got ten dollars to pay my expenses."

"Is that all?"

"No; I've got fifteen dollars to buy a shawl and dress for marm, and some shirts for dad. He thought he'd like some boughten shirts. The last marm made for him didn't fit very well."

"You must take good care of your money, Mr. Bascom. I regret to say that we have a great many pickpockets in New York."

"So I've heerd. That's what Jim Duffy told me. He went to York last spring. But I guess Jim was keerless or he wouldn't have been robbed. It would take a smart pickpocket to rob me."

"Then you keep your money in a safe place?"

"Yes, I keep my wallet in my breeches pocket;" and Joshua slapped the right leg of his trousers in a well satisfied way.

"You are right! I see you are a man of the world. You are a sharp one."

Joshua laughed gleefully. He felt pleased at the compliment.

"Yes," he chuckled, "I ain't easy taken in, I tell you, ef I was born in the woods."

"It is easy to see that. You can take care of yourself."

"So I can."

"That comes of being a Bascom. I am glad to know that we are related.

You must call on me in New York."

"Where do you live?"

"At the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Just ask for Ferdinand Morris. They all know me there."

"Is that a good place to stop?"

"Yes, if you've got money enough. I pay five dollars a day for my board, and some extras carry it up to fifty dollars a week."

"Gosh all hemlock!" ejaculated Joshua, "I don't want to pay no more'n five dollars a week."

"You can perhaps find a cheap boarding-house for that sum – with plain board, of course."

"That's what I'm used to. I'm willin' to get along without pie."

"You like pie, then?"

"We ginerally have it on the table at every meal, but I can wait till I get home."

"I will see what I can do for you. In fact, all you've got to do is to buy a morning paper, and pick out a boarding-house where the price will suit you. You must come and dine with me some day at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"Thank you! You're awful kind, but I'm afraid I ain't dressed up enough for such a stylish place."

"Well, perhaps not, but I might lend you a suit to go to the table in.

We are about the same build."

"If you've got an extra suit – "

"An extra suit? Mr. Bascom, I have at least twenty extra suits."

"Gee-whillikens! What do you want with so many clothes?"

"I never wear the same suit two days in succession. But I must bid you good morning, Mr. Bascom. I have a friend in the next car."

Morris rose, and Joshua, feeling much flattered with his polite attentions, resumed his glances out of the window.

"Apples, oranges, bananas!" called the train boy, entering the car with a basket of fruit.

"How much do you charge?" asked Joshua. "I feel kind of hungry, and I haven't ate an orange for an age. Last time I bought one was at the grocery up to hum."

"The large oranges are five cents apiece," said Fred. "I can give you two small ones for the same price."

"I'll take two small ones. It seems a great deal of money, but I'm traveling and that makes a difference."

"Here are two good ones!" said Fred, picking out a couple.

"All right! I'll take 'em!"

Joshua Bascom thrust his hand into his pocket, and then a wild spasm contracted his features. He explored it with growing excitement, and a sickly pallor overspread his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Fred.

"I've been robbed. My wallet's gone!" groaned Joshua in a husky voice.

CHAPTER II.
A FAIR EXCHANGE

"Who can have robbed you?" asked the train boy, sympathetically.

"I dunno," answered Joshua sadly.

"How much have you lost?"

"Twenty-five dollars. No," continued Mr. Bascom with a shade of relief.

"I put dad's fifteen dollars in my inside vest pocket."

"That is lucky. So you've only lost ten."

"It was all I had to spend in York. I guess I'll have to turn round and go back."

"But who could have taken it? Who has been with you?"

"Only Mr. Morris, a rich young man. He is nephew to the mayor of New York."

"Who said so?"

"He told me so himself."

"How was he dressed?" asked Fred, whose suspicions were aroused. "Did he wear a white hat?"

"Yes."

"And looked like a swell?"

"Yes."

"He got off at the last station. It is he that robbed you."

"But it can't be," said Joshua earnestly. "He told me he was worth quarter of a million dollars, and boarded at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"And was nephew of the mayor?"

"Yes."

Fred laughed.

"He is no more the mayor's nephew than I am," he said. "He is a confidence man."

"How do you know?' asked Joshua, perplexed.

"That is the way they all act. He saw you were a countryman, and made up his mind to rob you. Did you tell him where you kept your money?"

"Yes, I did. He told me there was lots of pickpockets in New York, and said I ought to be keerful."

"He ought to know."

"Can't I get my money back?" asked Mr. Bascom anxiously.

"I don't think there's much chance. Even if you should see him some time, you couldn't prove that he robbed you."

"I'd like to see him – for five minutes," said the young farmer, with a vengeful light in his eyes.

"What would you do?"

"I'd give him an all-fired shakin' up, that's what I'd do."

Looking at Mr. Bascom's broad shoulders and muscular arms, Fred felt that he would be likely to keep his word in a most effectual manner.

"I don't know what to do," groaned Joshua, relapsing into gloom.

As he spoke he slid his hand into his pocket once more, and quickly drew it out with an expression of surprise. He held between two fingers a handsome gold ring set with a neat stone.

"Where did that come from?" he asked.

"Didn't you ever see it before?" inquired the train boy.

"Never set eyes on it in my life."

"That's a joke!" exclaimed Fred with a laugh.

"What's a joke?

"Why, the thief in drawing your wallet from your pocket dropped his ring. You've made an exchange, that is all."

"What is it worth?" asked Joshua, eagerly. "Permit me, my friend," said a gentleman sitting just behind, as he extended his hand for the ring. "I am a jeweler and can probably give you an idea of the value of the ring."

Joshua handed it over readily.

The jeweler eyed it carefully, and after a pause, handed it back.

"My friend," he said, "that ring is worth fifty dollars!"

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Joshua, his eyes distended with surprise. "I can't understand it. Cousin Sue has got a gold ring as big as this that only cost three dollars and a half."

"Very likely, but the stone of this is valuable. You've made money out of your pickpocket, if he only took ten dollars from you."

"But he'll come back for it."

The jeweler laughed.

"If he does, tell him where you found it, and ask how it came in your pocket. He won't dare to call for it."

"I'd rather have the ten dollars than the ring."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll advance you twenty-five dollars on the ring, and agree to give it back to you any time within a year on payment of that sum, and suitable interest."

"You can have it, mister," said Joshua promptly.

As he pocketed the roll of bills given him in exchange, his face glowed with returning sunshine.

"By gosh!" he said, "I've made fifteen dollars."

"That' isn't a bad day's work!" said Fred.

"It's more'n I ever earned in a month before," said the young farmer.

"I declare it's paid me to come to the city."

"You are lucky! Look out for pickpockets, as they don't always give anything in exchange. Now you can afford to buy some oranges."

"Give me two five-cent oranges and a banana," said Mr. Bascom with reckless extravagance. "I guess I can afford it, now I've made fifteen dollars."

"I wish that pickpocket would rob me," said Fred smiling. "Fifteen dollars would come in handy just now," and his smile was succeeded by a grave look, for money was scarce with the little household of which he was a member.

It is time to speak more particularly of Fred, who is the hero of this story. He was a pleasant-looking, but resolute and manly boy of seventeen, who had now been for some months employed on the Erie road. He had lost a place which he formerly occupied in a store, on account of the failure of the man whom he served, and after some weeks of enforced leisure had obtained his present position. Train boys are required to deposit with the company ten dollars to protect their employer from possible loss, this sum to be returned at the end of their term of service. They are, besides, obliged to buy an official cap, such as those of my readers who have traveled on any line of railroad are familiar with. Fred had been prevented for some weeks from taking the place because he had not the money required as a deposit. At length a gentleman who had confidence in him went with him to the superintendent and supplied the sum, and this removing the last obstacle, Fred Fenton began his daily runs. He was paid by a twenty per cent, commission on sales. It was necessary, therefore, for him to take in five dollars in order to make one for himself. He had thus far managed to average about a dollar a day, and this, though small, was an essential help to his widowed mother with whom he lived.

Just before reaching Jersey City, Joshua Bascom appealed to Fred.

"Could you tell me where to stop in York?" he asked. "Some nice cheap place?"

"I know a plain boarding-house kept by a policeman's wife, who lives near us," said Fred. "She would probably board you for five dollars a week."

"By hokey, that's just the place." said Joshua. "If you do it, I'll make it right with you."

"Never mind about that!" said Fred. "All you've got to do is to come with me. It will be no trouble."

CHAPTER III.
FRED'S RICH RELATION

It was seven o'clock when Fred reached home. He and his mother occupied three rooms in a tenement house, at a rental of ten dollars a month. It was a small sum for the city, but as Fred was the chief contributor to the family funds, rent day was always one of anxiety. It so happened that this very day rent was due, and Fred felt anxious, for his mother, when he left home, had but seven dollars towards it.

He opened the door of their humble home, and received a welcoming smile from Mrs. Fenton, a pleasant-looking woman of middle age.

"I am glad to see you back, Fred," she said. "The days seem long without you."

"Have you brought me a picture book, Fred?" asked his little brother.

"No, Bertie, I can't bring you picture books every day. I wish I could."

"Albert has been drawing from his last book," said Mrs. Fenton. "He really has quite a taste for it."

"We must send him to the Cooper Institute Drawing School when he gets older. Did the landlord come, mother?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Fenton, a shade passing over her face.

"What did he say? Did he make any fuss?"

"He was rough and unpleasant. He said he mast have his money promptly or we must vacate the rooms."

"Did he take the seven dollars?"

"Yes, he took it and gave me a receipt on account. He said he must have the balance to-morrow."

"I don't see how we can pay it. The company owes me more, but I shan't get paid till Saturday night."

"Don't they advance it to you?"

"It is against the rule. Besides I couldn't get it in time."

"There is a lady in Lexington Avenue owing me four dollars for sewing, but when I went there today I heard that she was out of town."

"It is very provoking to be kept out of your money when you need it so much. If we only had a little money ahead, we could get along well. Something must be done, but I don't know what."

"You might go round to Cousin Ferguson."

"I hate to ask a favor of that man, mother."

"You remember that your poor father owned a small tract of land in Colorado. When Robert Ferguson went out three months since I asked him to look after it, and ascertain whether it was of any value. As I have heard nothing from him, I am afraid it is worthless."

"I will go and ask him, mother. That is a matter of business, and I don't mind speaking to him on that subject. I will go at once."

"Perhaps he may be willing to advance a few dollars on it."

"At any rate I will go."

Robert Ferguson lived in a plain brick house on East Thirty-Ninth Street. He was a down-town merchant, and in possession of a snug competence. Mrs. Fenton was his own cousin, but he had never offered to help her in any way, though he was quite aware of the fact that she was struggling hard to support her little family. He had a son Raymond who was by no means as plain in his tastes as his father, but had developed a tendency to extravagance which augured ill for his future. He had never cared to cultivate the acquaintance of his poor cousins, and whenever he met Fred treated him with ill-concealed contempt.

It so happened that he was just leaving the house as Fred ascended the steps.

"Good morning, Raymond," said Fred politely.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes," answered Fred briefly, for he did not like the style in which his cousin addressed him.

"What do you want round here?"

"I want to see your father."

"I guess he's busy."

"I want to see him on business," said Fred, pulling the bell.

"If you want to borrow any money it's no use. I struck him for ten dollars just now, and he only gave me two."

"Did I say I wanted to borrow any money?"

"No, you didn't say so, but I couldn't think of any other business you could have."

Fred did not have occasion to answer, for here the door opened, and the servant stood on the threshold.

"Is Mr. Ferguson at home?" he asked.

"Yes; will you come in?"

Fred followed the girl into the back parlor where Robert Ferguson sat reading the evening paper.

He looked up as Fred entered.

"Good evening, Mr. Ferguson," he said.

"Good evening, Frederick," said his relative coldly.

"My mother asked me to call and inquire whether you heard anything of father's land in Colorado."

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Ferguson. "I hope she built no day dreams on its possible value."

"No sir; but she hoped it might be worth something – even a small sum would be of value to us."

"The fact is, these Western lands are worth little or nothing."

"Father used to say that some time or other the land would be worth a good sum."

"Then I don't think much of your father's judgment. Why, I don't believe you could give it away. Let me see, how much was there?"

"A hundred and twenty-five acres."

"How did you father get possession of it?"

"There was a man he took care of in his sickness, who gave it to him out of gratitude."

Robert Ferguson shrugged his shoulders.

"It would have been better if he had given him the same number of dollars," he said.

"Then you don't think it worth as much as that?"

"No, I don't."

Fred looked disappointed. In their darkest days, he and his mother had always thought of this land as likely some time to bring them handsomely out of their troubles, and make a modest provision for their comfort. Now there seemed to be an end to this hope.

"I would have sent your mother word before," said Robert Ferguson, "but as the news was bad I thought it would keep. I don't see what possessed your father to go out to Colorado."

"He was doing poorly here, and some one recommended him to try his chances at the West."

"Well, he did a foolish thing. If a man improves his opportunities here he needn't wander away from home to earn a living. That's my view."

"Then," said Fred slowly, "you don't think the land of any value?"

"No, I don't. Of course I am sorry for your disappointment, and I am going to show it. Let your mother make over to me all claim to this land, and I will give her twenty-five dollars."

"That isn't much," said Fred soberly.

"No, it isn't much, but it's better than nothing, and I shall lose by my bargain."

Fred sat in silence thinking over this proposal. The land was the only property his poor father had left, and to sell it for twenty-five dollars seemed like parting with a birthright for a mess of pottage.

On the other hand twenty-five dollars would be of great service to them under present circumstances.

"I don't know what to say," he answered slowly.

"Oh, well, it is your lookout. I only made the offer as a personal favor."

Mr. Ferguson resumed the perusal of his paper, and thus implied that the interview was over.

"Cousin Ferguson," said Fred, with an effort, "our rent is due to-day, and we are a little short of the money to meet it. Could you lend me three dollars till Saturday night?"

"No," answered Robert Ferguson coldly. "I don't approve of borrowing money. As a matter of principle I decline to lend. But if your mother agrees to sell the land she shall have twenty-five dollars at once."

Fred rose with a heavy heart.

"I will tell mother what you propose," he said. "Good evening!"

"Good evening!" rejoined Mr. Ferguson without raising his eyes from the paper.

"Twenty-five dollars would be very acceptable just now," said Mrs.

Fenton thoughtfully, when Fred reported the offer of his rich relative.

"But it wouldn't last long, mother."

"It would do us good while it lasted."

"You are right there, mother, but I have no doubt the land is worth a good deal more."

"What makes you think so? Cousin Ferguson – "

"Wouldn't have made the offer he did if he hadn't thought so, too."

"He might have done it to help us."

"He isn't that kind of a man. No, mother, it is for our interest to hold on to the land till we know more about it."

"How shall we manage about the rent?"

Fred looked troubled.

"Something may turn up to-morrow. When the landlord comes, ask him to come again at eight o'clock, when I shall be home."

"Very well, Fred."

Mrs. Fenton was so much in the habit of trusting to her son that she dismissed the matter with less anxiety than Fred felt. He knew very well that trusting for something to turn up is a precarious dependence, but there seemed nothing better to do.

CHAPTER IV.
ZEBULON MACK

At twelve that day the landlord, Zebulon Mack, presented himself promptly at the door of Mrs. Fenton's room.

He was a small, thin, wrinkled man, whose suit would have been refused as a gift by the average tramp, yet he had an income of four thousand dollars a year from rents. He was now sixty years of age. At twenty-one he was working for eight dollars a week, and saving three-fifths of that. By slow degrees he had made himself rich, but in so doing he had denied himself all but the barest necessaries. What he expected to do with his money, as he was a bachelor with no near relatives, was a mystery, and he had probably formed no definite ideas himself. But it was his great enjoyment to see his hoards annually increasing, and he had no mercy for needy or unfortunate tenants who found themselves unable to pay their rent promptly.

Mrs. Fenton opened the door with a troubled look.

"I've come for that other three dollars, ma'am," said Zebulon Mack, standing on the threshold.

"I'm very sorry, sir – " began the widow.

"What! haven't you got the money?" snarled Mack, screwing up his features into a frown that made him look even more unprepossessing.

"My son Fred will be paid on Saturday night, and then – "

"Saturday night won't do. Didn't you promise it to-day?"

"Yes; and Fred tried to get an advance, but could not."

"Where is he working?"

"On the Erie road."

"Most likely he spends all his money for beer and cigarettes. I know him. He looks like it."

"You are very much mistaken, sir," said Mrs. Fenton, indignantly.

"Oh, you think so, of course," sneered the landlord. "Mothers don't know much about their boys, nor fathers either. I am glad I haven't a son."

"I wouldn't be your son for a million dollars," said little Albert, who resented the allusion to his big brother.

"Hey?" snarled Mack, opening his mouth and showing his tobacco-stained tusks. "What business has a whipper-snapper like you to put in your oar?"

"I ain't a whipper-snapper!" retorted Albert, who did not know the meaning of the word, but concluded that it was not complimentary.

"Well, ma'am, what are you going to do? I can't stay here all day."

"Fred thought he would have the money by to-night. He asked if you would call round after he got home."

"When is that?"

"He generally gets home at seven o'clock."

"Then I'll be here at seven, but if you haven't the money, then out you go! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then mind you remember it. With so many swindling tenants a landlord has a hard time."

He shambled off, and Mrs. Fenton breathed a sigh of temporary relief. All the afternoon she felt troubled and anxious, and her anxiety increased as the hours wore away.

"If Fred should be late as he sometimes is," she said to Bertie about six o'clock, "I am afraid Mr. Mack will carry out his threat and turn us out on the street."

"I won't let him," said Albert manfully.

"We can't help it," said Mrs. Fenton. "Do you think you could find your way to the depot to meet Fred and hurry him home?"

"Oh, yes," answered the little boy. "I went there with Fred last week."

"You are sure you won't get lost?"

"What do you take me for, mother? I'd be ashamed to get lost anywhere round the city."

"Then go, and tell Fred to hurry up. Mr. Mack is so strict and severe that I am sure he won't wait a minute."

At seven o'clock precisely Mr. Mack returned and, looking at his watch, said, "Time's up, ma'am."

"Wait just a few minutes!" pleaded Mrs. Fenton. "I expect Fred home every minute."

"My time's valuable, ma'am. It is not likely the boy will have the money any way.

"Won't you wait, then?

"Do you take me for a fool, ma'am? Here, Finnegan."

He had brought with him a man in his employ who for starvation wages helped him move out tenants, and made himself useful in a general way.

"Here I am, Mr. Mack," said Finnegan.

"Just give me a hand with this bureau. We'll take that first."

"Oh, sir," pleaded Mrs. Fenton, "how can you be so merciless? In a few minutes Fred will be here."

"I'm not a fool, ma'am. I told you I'd move you at seven o'clock, and I'm a man of my word."

"Wait a minute and I'll see if I can borrow the money of Mrs. Sheehan."

"You ought to have thought of that before. I'll give you two minutes."

Mrs. Fenton sped down lo the rooms of Mrs. Sheehan on the next lower floor.

"Can you lend me three dollars, Mrs. Sheehan?" asked Mrs. Fenton, breathless. "Mr. Mack threatens to turn us out on the sidewalk."

"I wish I could, Mrs. Fenton," said Mrs. Sheehan heartily, "but I bought my John a suit yesterday, and it's taken all my money except seventy-five cents. I'd be glad to oblige you, indeed I would."

"I've no doubt of it," sighed the widow, for it was her last hope.

"Well, have you got the money?" asked Zebulon Mack, as she reappeared.

"No, sir."

"Just what I thought. Go ahead, Finnegan."

They took up the bureau and slowly moved to the door, and down the staircase with it.

"It's a shame!" said Mrs. Sheehan, standing at her door.

"You'd better look out, ma'am! It may be your turn next," said the landlord with a scowl. "If it is I won't wait for you a minute."

"It's a hard man, you are, Mr. Mack."

"I need to be," said Zebulon Mack grimly. "If I wasn't it's precious little rent I'd get in."

The outlook for the Fentons was dark indeed.

CHAPTER V.
AN ADVENTURE ON THE TRAIN

Fred was on board his regular train that same morning at the usual hour, and started on his round of duty. He sold four morning papers, but trade seemed rather dull. About eleven o'clock he went through the first car distributing some packages of candy to the various passengers. On reaching the end of the car he returned, collecting the money for those purchased, and reclaiming those not wanted.

About midway of the car was a man of middle age, with small, insignificant features, and a mean look. He seemed very much absorbed in reading a penny paper when the train boy came up.

"Will you buy the package of candy?" asked Fred.

"What package?" asked the passenger, looking up.

"The one I left with you when I passed through the car."

"I don't know what you mean. You left no package with me."

"I remember distinctly leaving you a package."

"You are thinking of some other man."

"No, I am not."

"You are mistaken!" said the passenger, frowning.

"Will you be kind enough to get up and let me see if it is on the seat, or has fallen underneath?"

"No, I won't."

Fred was convinced that the passenger had secreted the package, and was scheming to cheat him out of the dime. He was a boy of spirit, and he did not propose to be swindled.

"Sir," he said in a louder tone, "I am a poor boy trying to earn an honest living. If you don't pay for this package I shall have to."

"That is none of my business. I shall not pay for what I haven't got. Boy, you are very impertinent. I shall report you to the president of the road."

"You may do so if you want to. I can't afford to give away my stock in trade."

"Boy," interposed a pompous gentleman sitting opposite, "I quite agree with this gentleman. You are not employed to insult passengers."

"Or to be cheated by them," said Fred hotly.

"If you treated me in this way, I would make it my business to have you discharged."

"Even if I was right?"

"Of course you are not right. This gentleman's word outweighs yours."

"Why should it?"

"He is a respectable gentleman, and you are only a poor train boy."

"That may be, sir, but I always tell the truth."

"Like George Washington," sneered the stout gentleman.

Fred felt that he was losing his case, and the mean passenger smiled with satisfaction. But his triumph was short-lived. The train boy found an unexpected defender.

"The boy is right," said a young lady sitting directly behind the passenger with whom Fred had his difficulty. "I saw this man take the package and put it in his pocket. I have waited with some curiosity to see whether he would persist in his attempt to cheat the boy out of his money."

There was an instant revulsion of feeling. The attempted swindler looked as if a bombshell had exploded at his feet.

"There is some error," he stammered. "The young lady is mistaken."

"I am not mistaken," said the young lady positively "If this man will allow his pockets to be examined, the package will be found."

The man rose from his seat and prepared to leave the car.

"I ain't used to being insulted," he said.

"Gentlemen," said the young lady, "you have only to look at this man's side-pocket to see that it contains the package."

The passenger wore a sack coat, and it was plain to all that the young lady was right.

"I will pay for the package if the passenger is not honest enough to do it himself."

"No, miss," said a rough-looking man who looked like a western miner.

"This man must pay, or I'll pitch him out of the car myself."

"I think you had better pay, sir," said the pompous looking man with an air of disgust. "I took your part, because I supposed you were a gentleman."

The other, without a word, drew out a dime from his pocket and handed it to Fred. Then, looking very ill at ease, he left the car hurriedly, and went as far forward as possible.

"Do you have many experiences like this?" asked the young lady, with a smile.

"Yes, miss, quite frequently," aid Fred, "and it isn't the poor passengers that try to cheat me. Sometimes I travel on emigrant trains, but I never lost a cent by an emigrant. It is those who are able to pay, like this man, who try to take advantage of me."

"Do you make good pay?"

"I average about a dollar a day."

"I suppose that is fair pay for a boy of your age."

"Yes, it is; but I need it all. I have a mother and brother to support."

"Have you, indeed?" said the young lady sympathetically. "You can't all three live on six dollars a week."

"Mother earns a little by sewing, but that isn't paid very well."

"Very true. So you sometimes get into difficulties?"

"We are in difficulties now. The rent is due, and we lack three dollars to make it up."

"That is easily remedied," said the young lady. "It is my birthday to-day, and I shall allow myself the luxury of doing good. Here are five dollars which you will use to pay the landlord."

"Thank you, miss," said Fred gladly. "You have lifted a weight from my mind. Our landlord is a strict man, and I was afraid we would be turned out on the street."

"Miss, will you let me shake hands with you? You're a trump!"

It was the western miner who spoke, and he had come forward impulsively from his seat, and was extending a rough, sunburned hand to the young lady.

She did not hesitate a moment, but with a pleasant smile placed her hand in his.

"I wish all high-toned gals was like you, miss," said the miner, as he shook her hand heartily.

"I am sure you would do the same, sir," said Isabel Archer.

"Yes, I would, and I meant to if you hadn't got the start of me. You'll excuse the liberty I took," said the miner.

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"I'm a rough miner, but – "

"You are a kind-hearted man. You may hereafter have it in your power to help the boy."

"So I can," and the miner retreated to his seat.

Arrived at the Erie depot, Fred found his little brother waiting for him.

"Oh, Fred," he said, "I hope you've got money for the rent. The landlord said he would turn us out at seven o'clock if we didn't pay."

"And I am a little late," said Fred, anxiously.

"Let me go with you!" said the miner, "I want to see what sort of a critter your landlord is. The mean scoundrel! It would do me good to shake him out of his boots."

Zebulon Mack and his assistant had just succeeded in placing the bureau on the sidewalk when Fred and his mining friend turned the corner of the street.

"There's mother's bureau!" exclaimed Fred in excitement. "He's begun to move us out."

"He has, hey?" said Sloan the miner. "We'll soon stop that."

"What are you doing here?" demanded Fred, hurrying up.

Zebulon Mack turned round, and eyed the boy with an ugly frown.

"I told your mother I'd move her out, and I've done it."

"Why didn't you wait for me? I've got the money."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have."

"Pay it over, then."

Fred was about to do so when the miner interposed.

"Don't pay him till he carries back the bureau!" said Sloan.

"You and your friend can do that!" said the landlord.

"If you don't catch hold of that bureau and take it back I'll wring your neck, you mean scoundrel!" said the miner sternly.

Zebulon Mack looked into the miner's face and thought it wisest to obey.

"Here, Finnegan!" he said sullenly. "Take hold, and don't be all night about it."

When the bureau was in place, Fred, who had changed the five-dollar bill, handed Mr. Mack the three dollars.

"Now, my friend," said the miner, "you can reckon up how much you made by your meanness. You and that understrapper of yours must enjoy moving bureaus. I only wish you'd got down the rest of the furniture, so that I might have the satisfaction of seeing you carry it back."

The landlord glared at Tom Sloan as if he would like to tear him to pieces. But he took it out in looks.

"Good night, sir," said the miner, "we don't care to have the pleasure of your company any longer."

"I'll be even with you for all this," growled Mack.

"Don't feel bad, squire. You've got your money."

"Mother," said Fred, "this is my friend, Mr. Sloan."

"I am glad to see any friend of my boy," said Mrs. Fenton. "Won't you stay and take supper with Fred?"

"I'd like to, ma'am, if it won't be intruding."

"Not at all," said Fred cordially. "I've had luck to-day, mother. A beautiful young lady gave me five dollars."

"God bless her!" said Mrs. Fenton. "She couldn't have given it at a better time."

CHAPTER VI.
MR. BASCOM'S PERIL

Tom Sloan made himself very much at home with the Fentons. The widow sent out for a steak, and this, with a cup of tea and some fresh rolls, furnished a plain but excellent repast.

"I haven't eaten so good a supper for a long time," said the miner. "It seems just like the suppers I used to get at home in Vermont."

"It was very plain," said Mrs. Fenton, "but probably you had a good appetite."

"You are right there, ma'am."

Mr. Sloan remained chatting for a couple of hours. He told his new friends that he had been away two years, spending the time in Nevada and California.

"I hope you have had good luck, Mr. Sloan," said Fred.

"Yes, I've made a few thousand dollars, but I'm going back again next month."

"To California?"

"No, to Colorado."

Fred and his mother exchanged looks.

"My father left us some land in Colorado," said the train boy – "a hundred and twenty-five acres – but we can't find out whether it has any value or not."

"Let me know where it is," said the miner, "and I'll find out and send you word."

"Thank you! It will be a great favor," said Mrs. Fenton warmly. "A cousin of my husband went out there three months since, and visited the land. He reports that it is of no value, but offers to buy it for twenty-five dollars. Fred thinks he wouldn't make the offer if it was not worth a good deal more."

"That's where Fred's head is level. Depend upon it your cousin is foxy and wants to take you in. I'll tell you just how the matter stands."

Mrs. Fenton produced her husband's papers, and Mr. Sloan made an entry of the location in a small note-book which he carried.

"Don't worry about it any more, ma'am,'" he said. "I'll do all I can for you, and I hope for your sake there's a gold mine on the land."

Mrs. Fenton smiled.

"I shall be satisfied with less than that," she answered.

"How long are you going to stay in New York?" asked Fred.

"I am going to Vermont to-morrow, and, likely as not I shan't come back this way, but go West from Boston. Anyway you'll hear from me occasionally. I ain't much of a writer, but I guess you can make out my pot-hooks."

"I'll take the risk, Mr. Sloan," said Fred, "I am no writing master myself, but my little brother Albert can draw nicely, and writes a handsome hand. Bertie, bring your last writing-book."

The little boy did so, and exhibited it to the miner.

"Why, the kid beats my old teacher all hollow," said Sloan. "I've a great mind to take him with me to Vermont, and have him start a writing school."

"I'm afraid Albert couldn't keep order among the big boys."

"Well, there might be some trouble that way. How much do you weigh, kid?"

"Ninety pounds," answered Albert.

"Well, that isn't exactly a heavy weight. But, Fred, I must be going out and finding a room somewhere. Do you know of any good place?"

"There's a hotel close by. I'll go with you."

"Good evening, ma'am," said the miner, as he rose to go. "I may not see you again just at present, but I'll look after that business of yourn. Come here, kid, you ought to get a prize for your writing. Here's something for you," and he handed the delighted boy a five-dollar gold piece.

"Oh, ma, now may I have a new suit?" asked Albert.

"If you want a new suit," said the miner, "I haven't given you enough.

Here's another five to help along."

"You are very kind, sir," said Mrs. Fenton. "Albert is really in need of clothes, and this will buy him something more than a suit."

"All the better, ma'am. I'm glad to have the chance of doing a little good with my money."

"I wish all who have money were like you. I wish you health and good fortune, and a safe return to your friends."

"Those are three good things, ma'am. If I get there I won't kick."

"Do you ever kick?" asked Albert, puzzled.

"I see you don't understand me, kid. It's a slang term we miners use. I won't complain. That's a little better English, isn't it?"

Fred conducted Mr. Sloan to the hotel nearby and saw him secure a good room. Then he was about to retire.

"Hold on a minute!" said the miner. "Come up to my room. I want to talk a little to you on business."

"Certainly, Mr. Sloan."

Reaching the chamber, the miner unbuckled a belt that spanned his waist, and drew therefrom a large sum in gold pieces. He counted out five double eagles – a hundred dollars – and turning to Fred, said: "I want you to keep that money for me till I come back."

"But, Mr. Sloan," said Fred surprised, "why not leave it with your other money? I might lose it."

"I want you to put it in some savings bank in your own name, and, if you need it, to draw out any part of it. I don't want that mean scamp, the landlord, to get a chance to turn you out into the street."

"But I might not be able to pay it back, Mr. Sloan."

"I'll take the risk. I lend it to you without interest for a year, and if you have to use any of it I won't sue you."

"You are very kind! It will make me feel much more easy in mind. I wouldn't mind being turned into the street on my own account, but mother couldn't stand it."

"Just so, Fred. You've got a good mother, and you must look out for her."

"I don't often meet a good friend like you, Mr. Sloan."

"Oh, pshaw! you mustn't make too much of a little thing," said the miner modestly. "I'm only giving you the interest on a hundred dollars."

Fred walked slowly homeward, feeling very cheerful. He hoped he should not need to use any of Mr. Sloan's kind loan, but it gave him a feeling of relief to know that he had a fund to draw from in case of need.

On his way home, in passing a drinking saloon, Fred's attention was drawn to two men who came out, arm in arm, both of whom appeared to be under the influence of liquor. Something in the dress and figure of one looked familiar. Coming closer Fred recognized his country friend, Joshua Bascom.

"What, Mr. Bascom! Is this you?"

"Why, it's Fred!" said Bascom stopping short and trying to stand erect.

"Oh, come along!" said his companion impatiently.

"No, I want to see the train boy. Good night, old fellow!"

The other angrily protested against being shaken off, but Joshua dropped his arm, and took Fred's instead.

"How came you with that man?" asked Fred.

"He's a jolly, sociable chap. Wanted to take me to a little card party, but I guess it's too late."

"Did he meet you in the saloon?"

"No; he took me in there, and treated me to three glasses of milk punch. I guess it's got into my head. Do you think I am – intoxicated, Fred?"

"It looks very much like it, Mr. Bascom."

"I hope they won't hear of it at home. Dad would get the minister to come and give me a talkin' to."

"I hope this stranger didn't get any of your money?"

"No; he wouldn't let me pay for a thing."

"He meant to get the money back. He was carrying you to some gambling house, where he would have won all your money."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Joshua, panic-stricken. "I thought he was a nice fellow."

"Be careful how you trust strangers, and don't go to any more drinking saloons!"

"I won't," said Mr. Bascom, fervently.

"I will take you to your room, and you had better take a good long sleep. If you want to go round, I'll call to-morrow evening, and go to some place of amusement with you."

"I think Mr. Bascom had better go back to his farm soon," thought Fred, as he returned from piloting Joshua home. "If he doesn't he is likely to get into trouble."

CHAPTER VII.
FERDINAND MORRIS

When Ferdinand Morris left the train after robbing Joshua Bascom, as described in the first chapter, he was in excellent spirits. He had effected his purpose, and got off scot free. He walked briskly away from the station at which he got out, and didn't stop to examine the wallet till he had got half a mile away.

When he discovered that it contained only ten dollars, he was filled with disgust.

"What could the fellow mean by coming to the city with only ten dollars in his pocketbook?" he muttered. "It's a regular imposition. It wasn't worth taking. Here I am, stranded in the country, and my ticket of no value, for only ten dollars! I should like to see my rural friend's wo-begone look when he discovers the loss of his wallet, though."

This thought helped to reconcile Morris to the situation. The picture which he had conjured up tickled his fancy, and he laughed heartily. But his merriment was short-lived. Incidentally he noticed the loss of the ring, and his countenance changed.

"My ring gone!" he exclaimed. "What can have become of it? It was worth fifty dollars at least. I must have dropped it into that fellow's pocket when I took his wallet. That's a pretty bad exchange. What an unlucky chap I am! I am about forty dollars out of pocket."

The satisfaction of Mr. Morris was quite destroyed. There seemed little hope of his recovering the ring, for he could not make known its loss without betraying himself.

"I may as well be going back to New York," he said moodily. "If I meet that fellow again, I must get up some scheme for recovering the ring from him. He is a countryman and I can frighten him into giving it to me. The worst of it is, the ring is not mine, and the owner will make a fuss about it. She is inclined to be suspicious, and I shall find it hard work to explain."

In a house on Lexington Avenue lived a maiden lady, close upon forty years of age, though she called herself thirty-one. Miss Josephine Harden had been left independent through the will of an aunt who had left her the sum of thirty-five thousand dollars. She had been for eight years an humble attendant, subject to the numerous whims and caprices of her relative, but two years since had been repaid by a legacy. Ever since Miss Marden had been looking about for a suitable matrimonial partner. There were some difficulties in the way, for she was thin, long-nosed, and with a yellow complexion. Three impecunious bachelors, lured by her money, had paid her some attentions, but their courage failed at last, and they silently slunk away. At length, however, Ferdinand Morris met Miss Harden, and conceived the idea of marrying her for her money. When he had once got possession of her fortune, he proposed to leave her in the lurch.

Morris was a stylish-looking man, and the spinster received his attentions very favorably. She knew very little about him except that he was in some mysterious business about which he did not speak definitely, except that it required him to travel constantly. Matters progressed until they became engaged. At this point, rather reversing the usual order of things, Miss Marden gave her suitor the ring which he had now lost.

"If we don't marry," she said cautiously, "I shall expect you to give it back."

"Certainly, my dear Josephine," said Morris, "but I shall hold you to your promise."

"You might see some girl younger and fair," said Hiss Marden coyly.

"How could that be?" said Morris with mock ardor, as he bent over her hand and kissed it with secret facial contortions. "Do you doubt my love?"

"I try not to, Ferdinand, but I am no longer in my first youth. I shudder to say it I am twenty nine."

"You were two years older last week," thought Morris.

"I – I don't feel so old," said the spinster, "but I am afraid it is a fact."

"I don't believe you will ever be forty again," thought Morris. "By the way, Josephine, have you thought of that investment I spoke to you about? I can get a hundred shares of mining stock for you, at five dollars a share – the inside price – while to the general public it is only sold at ten."

"It may be as you say, Ferdinand, but my aunt lost money in mining stocks, and I shall hardly dare to venture."

"Confound your aunt!" said Morris to himself. "I assure you, Josephine, this is a chance to double your money in three months."

"Have you invested in it yourself, Ferdinand?"

"Oh, yes," answered Morris, glibly, "I have a hundred and fifty shares."

Suspicious as she was, Miss Morris believed her suitor to be a man of means, and did not doubt his statement.

"Then I hope for your sake it will prove a good investment."

"Confound her!" thought Morris, "there seems no chance to make her open her purse strings. She has got to come down liberally, or I won't marry her."

It was at Miss Marden's door that Ferdinand Morris rang on the evening after the loss of the ring. He would have kept away, but he had promised to call, and Miss Morris was very strict in requiring him to keep his engagements.

He had hardly entered the room when she discovered the loss of the ring.

"What has become of the ring, Ferdinand?" she asked quickly.

"I thought you would miss it," he replied in some confusion.

"Where is it?" I asked Miss Harden peremptorily.

"Plague take the old cat," thought Morris. "I suppose I may as well tell the truth."

"The fact is," he stammered, "it was stolen from me on an Erie train to-day by a pickpocket."

"And you let him do it? What could you be thinking of, Ferdinand?"

"You have no idea how expert these fellows are, Josephine," said Morris, who certainly ought to know.

"I think a man must be inexcusably careless or simple," returned the spinster, "to allow a man to steal a ring from his finger. Do you suspect anybody?"

"Yes; I sat beside a young man dressed up as a countryman. He was such a good imitation, that I was positively taken in. He looked as if he had been driving the plow all his life."

"And he stole the ring?"

"He must have done it. There was no one else near who had the chance."

"But how could he slip it off your finger without your knowing it?"

"The fact is, I fell into a doze, and when I was half asleep the ring was taken. After he had got it he got out at some station, and I am afraid I never shall see him again."

"I am not satisfied with your explanation, Ferdinand."

"You don't mean to say you doubt my word, Josephine?"

"I paid fifty dollars for that ring at a jeweler's on Sixth Avenue, and I don't feel like losing so much money."

"But it is my loss, as you gave it to me."

"You forget that in case our engagement was broken, it was to be returned."

"But you really don't think of breaking the engagement? You don't want to drive me to despair?"

"Do you really love me so much, Ferdinand?" said the spinster, smiling complacently.

"Can you doubt it? It makes me very unhappy to have you find fault with me."

"But you must admit that you were very careless."

"I confess it, but the man looked so innocent."

"Do you think you shall ever meet him again?"

"I think so. He may be in another disguise."

"I will give you four weeks to do so, Ferdinand. If you don't succeed I shall require you to buy another in its place."

"I will do my best," said Morris.

"I really thought you were sharper, Ferdinand. No pickpocket could rob me."

"I may try it some time," thought Morris. "It would be rather a satisfaction to do it too."

"I wonder if I shall meet that country fellow again," thought Morris as he left the house. "If I do I'll see if I can't frighten him into returning my ring."

The very next evening, in passing the Standard Theater, near the corner of Thirty-Third Street Morris saw and instantly recognized the tall, rustic figure and slouching walk of Joshua Bascom. He paused a moment in indecision, then summoning up all his native bravado, he stepped forward, and laid his hand on Joshua's shoulder.

"Look here, my friend," he said in tone of authority, "I have some business with you."

CHAPTER VIII.
MR. BASCOM'S SAD PLIGHT

Joshua turned in alarm, fearing that he was in the hands of a policeman.

"What have I done?" he began. Then recognizing Morris, he said, "Why, it's the man who stole my wallet."

"You must be crazy," rejoined Morris. "I charge you with theft."

"Well, that beats all!" ejaculated Joshua. "Just give me back my ten dollars."

"I admire your cheek, my friend," said Morris, "but it won't go down.

Where is that ring you stole from my finger?"

"You left it in my pocket when you put in your hand and stole my wallet."

"Ha, you confess that you have got it. Where is it?"

"Give me back my wallet and I may tell you."

"My rural friend, you are in great danger. Do you see that policeman coming up the street? Well, I propose to give you in charge unless you give me back my ring."

"I haven't got it," said Joshua, beginning to feel uneasy.

"Then give me fifty dollars, the sum I paid for it."

"Gosh all hemlock!" exclaimed Joshua impatiently. "You talk as if I was a thief instead of you."

"So you are."

"It's a lie."

"Of course you say so. If you haven't fifty dollars, give me all you have, and I'll let you off."

"I won't do it."

"Then you must take the consequences. Here, policeman, I give this man in charge for stealing a valuable ring from me."

"When did he do it – just now?"

"Yes," answered Morris, with unexpected audacity. "He looks like a countryman but he is a crook in disguise."

"Come along, my man!" said the policeman, taking Joshua in tow. "You must come with me."

"I hain't done nothing," said Joshua. "Please let me go, Mr.

Policeman."

"That's what they all say," remarked Morris, shrugging his shoulders.

"I see, he's an old offender," said the intelligent policeman, who had only been on the force three months.

"He's one of the most artful crooks I ever met," said Morris. "You'd swear he was a countryman."

"So I be," insisted Joshua. "I came from Barton, up Elmira way, and I've never been in the city before."

"Hear him!" said Morris, laughing heartily. "Ask him his name."

"My name's Joshua Bascom, and I go to the Baptist church reg'lar – just write and ask Parson Peabody, and he'll tell you I'm perfectly respectable."

"My friend," said Morris, "you can't fool an experienced officer by any such rigmarole. He can read you like a book."

"Of course I can," said the policeman, who felt the more flattered by this tribute because he was really a novice. "As this gentleman says, I knew you to be a crook the moment I set eyes on you."

They turned the corner of Thirtieth Street on their way to the station house. Poor Joshua felt keenly the humiliation and disgrace of his position. It would be in all the papers, he had no doubt, for all such items got into the home papers, and he would not dare show his face in Barton again.

"Am I going to jail?" he asked with keen anguish.

"You'll land there shortly," said Morris.

"But I hain't done a thing."

"Is it necessary for me to go in?" asked Ferdinand Morris, with considerable uneasiness, for he feared to be recognized by some older member of the force.

"Certainly." replied the policeman, "you must enter a complaint against this man."

Morris peered into the station house, but saw no officer likely to remember him, so he summoned up all his audacity and followed the policeman and his prisoner inside. There happened to be no other case ahead, so Joshua was brought forward.

"What has this man done?" asked the sergeant.

"Stolen a ring from this gentleman here," answered the policeman.

"Was the ring found on his person?"

"No, sergeant. He has not been searched."

"Search me if you want to. You won't find anything," said Joshua.

"He has probably thrown it away," said Ferdinand Morris, *sotto voce.*

"No, I hain't."

"What is your name, sir?" asked the sergeant, addressing Morris.

"My name is Clarence Hale," answered Morris, boldly, taking the name of a young man of respectable family whom he had met casually.

"Where do you live?"

"On Fourth Avenue, sir, near Eleventh Street."

"Do you swear that this man stole your ring?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"In front of the Standard Theater."

"How could he do it?" continued the sergeant. "He could not take it from your hand?"

"It was in my pocket. I found him with his hand in my pocket," answered Morris, glibly.

"By gracious!" ejaculated Joshua, his eyes distended with amazement, "I never heard a fellow lie so slick before, in all my life."

"Silence!" said the sergeant. "Mr. Hale, will you appear to-morrow morning at Jefferson Market, and testify against this man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Officer, have you ever arrested this man before?" went on the sergeant.

"I'm not quite sure, sir. You see he's in disguise now. I think he's*wan* of the gang."

Things began to look bad for poor Joshua, who was in a fair way to be railroaded to the penitentiary, as no doubt more than one innocent man has been before now, through an unfortunate complication.

"I wish I had some friend to speak up for me," he said, almost sobbing.

"This is awful!"

"So you have!" said an unexpected voice.

Joshua turned, and to his inexpressible relief saw Fred standing on the threshold.

"It's the train boy!" he exclaimed joyfully.

Fred had set out to call upon Joshua that evening, and had chanced to see him going into the station house with the confidence man. He had followed to find out what it meant.

There was one who was not so well pleased to see him. Ferdinand Morris turned pale, and tried to make his escape.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am faint, and must get out into the air."

But Fred stood in his way.

"Not so fast, Mr. Ferdinand Morris," he said. "What trick are you up to now?"

"Do you know this man, Fred?" asked the sergeant, who had known the train boy for three years, for he lived only one block away on the same street.

"Yes, sir, he stole the wallet of this young man on my train on the Erie less than a week since."

"But he said the prisoner stole his ring."

"He left the ring in Mr. Bascom's pocket, when he was feeling for the wallet."

"This is a great mistake," said Morris, hurriedly. "I never saw this train boy before, and haven't traveled on the Erie road for a year."

"This man is telling a falsehood," said Fred.

"Will you swear that he was on your train and robbed this countryman?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any officer who recognizes him?" the sergeant inquired, looking round the room.

"I do," answered a stout policeman, who just then entered the station house. "I arrested him six months since, but he managed to slip away."

"The prisoner is discharged," said the sergeant. "Hold the complainant instead."

To his great joy Joshua was set free, and Mr. Morris, alias Hale, was collared by a policeman, though he made a desperate struggle to escape.

"I'll get even with you, boy!" said Morris savagely, addressing Fred.

"Come along, Mr. Bascom," said Fred. "I presume you don't care to stay here any longer."

"Not if I know it," said Joshua, fervently. "If I live till to-morrow morning, I'll start back to Barton. I've seen all I want to of York. I won't feel safe till I get home, in sight of the old meetin' house. I wouldn't have dad know I'd been arrested for a load of pumpkins."

CHAPTER IX.
A LONG TRIP

Fred appeared at the depot the next morning the superintendent said to him, "I shall have to change your train to-day. You will wait for the nine o'clock train for Suspension Bridge."

"When shall I get there?"

The superintendent, referring to his schedule of trains, answered, "At 11.44 to-night. The boy who usually goes on this train is sick."

"When shall I return?"

"Let me see, it is Saturday. If you would like to stay over a day and see Niagara Falls, you can do so, and start on your return Monday morning at 8.35. How do you like the arrangement?"

"Very much. I was only thinking how I could get word to my mother. She will feel anxious if I am not back at the usual time."

"You might send her a note by a telegraph messenger."

At this moment Fred espied a boy of his acquaintance in the street outside.

"Here, Charlie Schaeffer," he called, "do you want to earn a quarter?"

"Yes," answered the boy quickly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take a note to my mother."

"It'll cost me almost a quarter for expenses."

"I will pay that besides."

"All right! Give me the letter."

Fred scribbled these few lines:

DEAR MOTHER,

I am sent to Suspension Bridge and shall not probably be back till late Monday evening, or perhaps Tuesday morning. Don't worry.

FRED.

Charlie Schaeffer, a stout German boy, who was temporarily out of work, was glad of the chance of earning a quarter for himself, and started at once on his errand. Fred, quite elated at the prospect of seeing Niagara Falls, prepared for his trip. He had to carry a larger supply of stock on account of the length of the journey, and was instructed to lay in a fresh supply at Buffalo for the home trip.

He was about to enter the car at ten minutes of nine when Joshua Bascom appeared on the platform with a well-worn carpet-bag in his hand.

"Are you going back, Mr. Bascom?" asked the train boy.

"Yes," answered Joshua. "I don't want to go to no more station houses. I shan't rest easy til I'm back in Barton. You hain't seen any policeman lookin' for me, have you?"

"No; you haven't done anything wrong, have you?"

"Not as I know of, but them cops is very meddlesome. I thought that pickpocket might have set 'em on my track."

"You are safe here. This is New Jersey, and a New York policeman can't arrest you here."

"That's good," said Joshua with an air of relief. "Where are you going to-day?"

"I'm going all the way with you."

"You ain't goin' as far as Barton?"

"Yes, I am, and farther too. I'm going to Niagara."

"You don't say? And you don't have to pay a cent either?"

"No, I get paid for going."

"I wish I was goin' to Niagara with you. By hokey, wouldn't the folks stare if I was to come home and tell 'em I'd seen the Falls!"

"Can't you go?"

"No, I've spent all the money I can afford. I must wait till next year."

"Did you spend all of your money, Mr. Bascom?"

"No," chuckled Joshua. "I've only spent the fifteen dollars I got for that ring, and shall carry home the ten dollars."

"You are an able financier, Mr. Bascom. You've made your expenses, and can afford to go again. You must tell your father how you got the best of a pickpocket."

"So I will. I guess he'll think I'm smarter than he reckoned for."

At about half-past four in the afternoon, Fred was called upon to bid his country friend good-by. Looking from the door of the car, he saw Joshua climb into a hay wagon driven by an elderly man whose appearance led him to conclude that he was the "dad" to whom Joshua had frequently referred.

The sun sank, the darkness came on, but still the train sped swiftly over its iron pathway. The passengers settled back in their seats, some fell asleep, and the hum of conversation ceased. Fred too gave up his trips through the cars, and stretching himself out on a seat, closed his eyes. Presently the train came to a stop, and the conductor, putting in his head at the door, called out "Niagara Falls."

Fred rose hastily, for he had made up his mind to get out at this point. He descended from the train, and found himself on the platform of the station.

He had already selected the hotel, a small one where the rate was very moderate, and as there was no carriage representing it at the train he set out to walk. It was a small, plain-looking inn, of perhaps thirty rooms, named after the proprietor:

THE LYNCH HOUSE.

On the road thither he was overtaken by a stranger, whom he remembered as one of the passengers on the second car. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and though it was a warm summer evening he was muffled up about the neck.

"Are you going to stop here over night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You are the train boy, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What hotel shall you put up at?"

"One recommended to me by the conductor – the Lynch House."

"I think I will stop there too."

"You may not like it. It is a small, cheap house."

"It doesn't matter. I am well provided with money, but I don't care for style or fashion. I am an invalid, and I prefer the quiet of a small hotel. There will be less noise and confusion."

"Very well, sir. I think that is the hotel yonder."

Such proved to be the case. It was large on the ground, but only three stories in height. Over the portico was a sign, bearing the name. It was by no means fashionable in its appearance, but looked comfortable.

Fred and the stranger entered. A sleepy-looking clerk sat behind the desk. He opened his eyes, and surveyed the late comers.

"Can you give me a room?" asked Fred.

"I would like one too," said the other.

"We've only got one room left," said the clerk. "That's a back room on the second story. Are you gentlemen in company?"

"No," answered Fred. "We are strangers to each other."

"Then I can't give but one of you a room. If you don't mind rooming together, you can both be accommodated."

"Are there two beds in a room?" asked the stranger.

"Yes."

"Then I don't object to occupying it with this young man. He is a stranger to me, but I watched him on board the train, and I am sure he is all right."

"Thank you, sir," said Fred.

"Well," said the clerk, "what does the boy say?"

Fred looked curiously at his companion. He was so muffled up that he could only see a pair of black eyes, a long sallow nose, and cheeks covered with dark whiskers. The train boy did not fancy his looks much, but could think of no good reason for declining him as a room companion. He felt that the gentleman had paid him a compliment in offering to room with him, particularly when, as he stated, he had a considerable amount of money about him. He paused a moment only, before he said, "Perhaps we may as well room together, then."

"All right! I will go up with you, as the hall boy has gone to bed. I hardly expected any guests by this late train."

The clerk took the stranger's valise – Fred had only a small paper parcel in his hand, containing a clean shirt and a collar which he had bought in Jersey City before taking passage on the train. Up one flight of stairs the clerk preceded them and paused in front of No. 21, the back room referred to. He unlocked the door, and entering, lighted the gas.

It was a room about twelve feet wide by twenty in depth. At each end was a single bedstead.

"I think you will be comfortable," said the clerk. "Is there anything you want before retiring?"

"No," answered both.

CHAPTER X.
WHAT TOOK PLACE IN NO. 21

The clerk closed the door, leaving Fred alone with the stranger.

The latter sat down in one of the two chairs with which the room was provided.

"I am not sleepy," he said. "Are you?"

"Yes," answered Fred, gaping. "I am not used to late hours. Besides, I was up early this morning."

"That makes a difference. I didn't get up till eleven. I was about to propose a game of cards."

"I don't care for playing cards," said Fred. "Besides, I am sleepy."

"All right! You won't object to my sitting up awhile and reading?"

Fred would have preferred to have his companion go to bed, as he was not used to sleep with a light burning. He did not wish to be disobliging, however, and answered that he didn't mind.

The stranger took from his hand-bag a paper-covered novel, and seating himself near the gas jet, began to read.

Fred undressed himself and lay down. He remembered with a little uneasiness that he had with him the hundred dollars in gold which had been intrusted to him by the miner. He had had no opportunity as yet to deposit it in the Union Dime Savings Bank, as he had decided to do, and had not thought to leave it with his mother. He wished now that he had done so, for he was about to pass several hours in the company of a man whom he knew nothing about. Still, the man had plenty of money of his own, or at least he had said so, and was not likely therefore to be tempted to steal.

Fred took his place in bed, and looked over toward the stranger with some uneasiness.

"Are you a good sleeper?" asked his companion carelessly.

"Yes," answered Fred.

"So am I. I don't feel sleepy just at present, but presume I shall within twenty minutes. I hope I don't inconvenience you by sitting up."

"No," answered Fred slowly.

"I've got my book nearly finished – I began to read it on the train.

When do you expect to go back?"

"Monday morning," Fred answered.

"That's good! We will go and see the Falls together to-morrow. Ever seen them?"

"No, sir; this is my first visit to Niagara."

"I have been here several times, so I know the ropes. I shall be glad to show you just where to go. But pardon me. I see you are sleepy. I won't say another word. Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

"Good night."

The stranger continued to read for twenty minutes. At any rate he appeared to do so. Occasionally he glanced over toward Fred's bed. The train boy meant to keep awake till his companion got ready to go to bed, but he was naturally a good sleeper, and his eyes would close in spite of him; and finally he gave up all hope of resistance, and yielded to the inevitable.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.