

Horatio Alger Jr.

The Tin Box, and What it Contained



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Alger H.

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Alger Horatio, Jr. The Tin Box, and What it Contained

THE TIN BOX

CHAPTER I A COLLISION

"Have you finished breakfast already, Harry?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, as Harry rose hurriedly from the table and reached for his hat, which hung on a nail especially appropriated to it.

"Yes, mother. I don't want to be late for the store. Saturday is always a busy day."

"It is a long day for you, Harry. You have to stay till nine o'clock in the evening."

"I am always glad to have Saturday come, for then I can get my money," replied Harry, laughing. "Well, good-by, mother – I'm off."

"What should I do without him?" said Mrs. Gilbert to herself, as Harry dashed out of the yard on the way to Mead's grocery store, where he had been employed for six months.

That would have been a difficult question to answer. Mrs. Gilbert was the widow of a sea captain, who had sailed from the port of Boston three years before, and never since been heard of.

It was supposed that the vessel was lost with all hands, but how the disaster occurred, or when, was a mystery that seemed never likely to be solved.

Captain Gilbert had left no property except the small cottage, which was mortgaged for half its value, and a small sum of money in the savings bank, which, by this time, was all expended for the necessities of life.

Fortunately for the widow, about the time this sum gave out Harry obtained a situation at Mead's grocery store, with a salary of four dollars a week. This he regularly paid to his mother, and, with the little she herself was able to earn, they lived comfortably. It was hard work for Harry, but he enjoyed it, for he was an active boy, and it was a source of great satisfaction to him that he was able to help his mother so materially.

He was now fifteen years old, about the average height for a boy of that age, with a strong frame and a bright, cheerful manner that made him a general favorite.

The part of his duty which he liked best was to drive the store wagon for the delivery of goods to customers. Most boys of his age like to drive a horse, and Harry was no exception to the rule.

When he reached the store Mr. Mead, his employer, said:

"Harness up the horse as soon as you can, Harry. There are some goods to be carried out."

"All right, sir," answered Harry, cheerfully, and made his way to the stable, which stood in the rear of the store. It was but a few minutes before he was loaded up and was on his way.

He had called at several places and left the greater part of the goods, when he found himself in a narrow road, scarcely wider than a lane. Why it had been made so narrow was unaccountable, for there was certainly land enough to be had, and that of little value, which could have been used. It was probably owing to a want of foresight on the part of the road commissioners.

Just at the narrowest part of the road Harry saw approaching him an open buggy of rather a pretentious character, driven by a schoolmate, Philip Ross, the son of Colonel Ross, a wealthy resident of the village.

I have said that Philip was, or rather had been, a schoolmate of Harry. I cannot call him a friend. Philip was of a haughty, arrogant temper. The horse and buggy he drove were his own – that

is, they had been given him by his father on his last birthday – and he was proud of them, notwithstanding some reason, for the buggy was a handsome one, and the horse was spirited and of fine appearance.

As soon as Harry saw Philip approaching, he proceeded to turn his horse to one side of the road. Philip, however, made no such move, but kept in the middle.

"Isn't he going to turn out?" thought Harry. "How does he expect to get by?"

"Why don't you turn out, Philip?" he called out.

"Turn out yourself!" retorted Philip, haughtily.

"That's what I'm doing," said Harry, rather provoked.

"Then turn out more!" said the young gentleman, arrogantly.

"I have turned out my share," said Harry, stopping his horse. "Do you expect to keep right on in the middle of the road?"

"I shall if I choose," said Philip, unpleasantly; but he, too, reined up his horse, so that the two teams stood facing each other.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, and asked, temperately:

"Then how do you expect to get by?"

"I want you to turn out as far as you can," he said authoritatively.

Harry was provoked, and not without reason.

"I have turned out my share, and shan't turn out another inch," he said, firmly. "You must be a fool to expect it."

"Do you mean to call me a fool?" demanded Philip, his eyes flashing.

"You certainly act like one."

"You'd better take care how you talk, you beggar!" exclaimed Philip, furiously.

"I'm no more a beggar than you are, Philip Ross!"

"Well, you are nothing but a working boy, at any rate."

"What if I am?" replied Harry. "I've got just as much right on this road as you."

"I'm a gentleman," asserted Philip, angrily.

"Well, you don't act like one; you'd better turn out pretty quick, for I am in a hurry and can't wait."

"Then turn out more."

"I shan't do it," said Harry, with spirit; "and no one but you would be unreasonable enough to ask me to do it."

"Then you'll have to wait," said Philip, settling himself back provokingly in his seat, and eyeing Harry with a look of disdain.

"Come, don't be obstinate, Philip," urged Harry, impatiently. "I only ask you to do your share of turning. We have equal rights here, even if you were three times the gentleman you pretend to be."

"You are insolent, Harry Gilbert. I don't take orders from such as you."

"Then you won't turn out?" asked Harry, gathering up his reins.

"Suppose I don't?" retorted Philip, in a provoking tone.

"Then I shall drive on," said Harry, resolutely.

"You wouldn't dare to!"

"Wouldn't I? You'll see. I will count ten, and if at the end of that time you don't turn out, I will drive on, and make you take the consequences."

Philip glanced at him doubtfully. Would he really do what he said?

"Pooh! I don't believe it!" he decided. "Anyway, I'm not going to give way to a working boy. I won't do it."

I am not going to decide the question whether Harry did right or not. I can only say that he claimed no more than his rights, and was notwithstanding excuse for the course he adopted.

"One – two – three!" counted Harry, and so on until he had counted ten.

Then, gathering up his reins, he said: "I ask you, Philip, for the lasttime, whether you will turn out?"

"I won't till I get ready."

"Go 'long, Dobbin!" was Harry's sole reply. And his horse was put inmotion.

The natural result followed. The grocery wagon was strongly made, andfitted for rough usage. The buggy was of light structure, built forspped, and was no match for it. The two carriages locked wheels. That ofthe wagon was unharmed, but the wheel of the buggy came off.

The horse darted forward. Philip was thrown out at the side, aiming anineffectual blow with his whip at Harry, as he found himself going, andlanded in a half stunned condition on the grass at the side.

Harry kept on until his wagon was clear of the wreck of the buggy, andthen halting it, jumped oft to find the extent of Philip's injuries.

The latter's horse, which had by a violent jerk freed himself from theshafts, was galloping up the road.

CHAPTER II

SIGNS OF A TEMPEST

"Are you hurt, Philip?" asked Harry, anxiously, as he bent over the prostrate form of his antagonist.

As he opened his eyes and saw the face of Harry bending over him, all came back to him, and his animosity revived.

"Get away from me!" he exclaimed furiously, as he staggered to his feet.

"I certainly will, if you don't need help," said Harry, glad that Philip had suffered no harm.

"Where is my horse?" demanded Philip.

"He has run away."

"And it's all your fault!" exclaimed Philip, angrily. "My buggy's broken, too, and all because you ran into me, you beggar!"

"I wouldn't allow you to call me names if you hadn't been punished already for your unreasonable conduct," said Harry, calmly. "Whatever has happened you brought upon yourself."

"Catch my horse!" ordered Philip, with the air of a master addressing a servant.

"I've got something else to do," said Harry, coolly, and he sprang into the store wagon.

"Are you going to drive off and leave me here?" demanded Philip, enraged.

"I must, for my time isn't my own. It belongs to Mr. Mead. I would help you otherwise – though you are to blame for what has happened."

"You will suffer for this!" exclaimed the rich man's son, gazing at his broken buggy in helpless anger. "You'll have to pay for all the damage you have done!"

"You can go to law about it, if you want to," said Harry, as he gathered the reins into his hands, and he drove off. "I've a good defense."

To Philip's disgust, Harry drove off, leaving him alone with his disabled carriage. It was a good time to consider whether he had acted wisely in demanding more than the law or custom allowed him, but Philip was too angry for cool consideration.

He could not persuade himself that a boy like Harry, the son of a poor widow, who had to work for his own living, had equal rights with himself.

In the end he had to go home and bring back his father's hired man to take charge of the wreck. He learned that the frightened horse had already found his way to the stable, terrifying the family with fears that Philip had been seriously hurt on the way.

Philip gave a garbled account of the affair to his father and mother, and excited the indignation of both, but especially his mother.

"I never heard of such an outrage – never!" exclaimed Mrs. Ross, emphatically. "To think that boy should deliberately run into you and endanger your life – my poor Philip!"

"That's just what he did, mother," said Philip, enjoying the indignation he had aroused.

Colonel Ross was not quite so thoroughly convinced that his son was right.

"Did you give Harry half the road?" he inquired.

"I gave him room enough to get by," answered Philip, evasively.

"The law requires that you should give him half the road."

"I hope, Mr. Ross, you don't justify that horrid boy in running into

Philip?" said Mrs. Ross, sharply.

"No, my dear; I consider that he acted very badly. But, in order to make him amenable to the law for the damage Philip's team suffered, it must appear that Philip gave him half the road."

"Then the law ought to be altered," said Mrs. Ross, with more anger than reason. "I've no doubt that Philip gave him all the room he needed."

"When you were thrown out, did the heartless boy ride on and leave you to your fate?" asked the mother.

"No; he got out and asked me if I was hurt," Philip admitted, reluctantly.

"Much he cared!" said Mrs. Ross, contemptuously.

"I suppose he was afraid he would be put in prison if I was killed," said Philip.

"Yes, that was his motive, undoubtedly. He didn't offer to help you, I suppose?"

"No; I asked him to, and he wouldn't," answered Philip, glad that he could blacken poor Harry's character.

"The unfeeling young villain!" ejaculated Mrs. Ross. "He ought to be put in the State's prison!"

"Do you think he can be?" asked Philip, eagerly.

"Of course he can, if your father exerts himself as he ought."

"Nonsense, Lucinda!" said Colonel Ross, who was not a fool. "It was a boyish misunderstanding."

"You may call it that," retorted Mrs. Ross, raising her voice. "I call it a high-handed outrage. The boy ought to be arrested. Are you going to do anything about it, Philander Ross?"

Mrs. Ross generally addressed her husband by his Christian name when she was angry with him.

"I will tell you what I will do, Lucinda. I will see Mead, and tell him that a boy who acts in that way is not fit to drive for him."

"That's right, father. Make him discharge Harry. Then he'll have to go to the poorhouse, or beg."

"And a very suitable punishment for him," said Mrs. Ross, approvingly.

"I don't quite like to take the boy's means of living away from him," said Colonel Ross, who was by no means as unfeeling as his wife and son. "That would make his mother suffer, and she has been guilty of no crime."

"She will uphold him in his iniquity, you may rest assured, Mr. Ross," said his wife, nodding emphatically. "If she had brought up the boy to be respectful to his superiors this would not have happened."

"He won't be able to pay damages if he loses his place," said Colonel Ross.

"I don't care. I want him discharged from his situation."

"Well, Lucinda," said her husband, shrugging his shoulders, "you had better undertake the management of the affair. I am very busy, and can't spare the necessary time."

"I will!" said Mrs. Ross, with alacrity. "I will call on the boy's mother, and also on Mr. Mead."

"Don't be too extreme, Lucinda. Remember, it isn't a hanging matter."

"I am not so sure but it ought to be. My poor child might have broken his neck. Oh, it makes my blood run cold when I think that he might be lying lifeless before me at this moment."

"Don't say such things, mother," said Philip, nervously, unpleasantly affected by the picture his mother had drawn.

"I can't help saying it, for it might have happened."

"Where are you going to first, mother?" asked Philip.

"I will go first and call on Widow Gilbert. I consider her responsible, for if she had brought up the boy better this would never have happened."

"May I go with you?"

"No; I would rather go alone."

If Philip had only been scarred, or had a wound to show, his mother would have taken him with her, to make her reproof more effective, but, as he showed no marks of the encounter, she saw no advantage in his presence.

"You just give it to her, mother," said Philip, in a tone of satisfaction.

"I shall know what to say, my son."

"Just frighten her, and make her think we are going to have Harry arrested."

"I shall make her understand that the boy has done a very serious thing, and has made himself amenable to the law."

"That's right, mother. Harry is too airy altogether. He seems to think that I am no better than he is – a common working boy like him!"

Mrs. Ross sailed out of the room, and dressed herself with unusual care, not out of respect for Mrs. Gilbert, but rather with the purpose of impressing her with her grandeur.

CHAPTER III

MRS. ROSS MAKES TWO UNSATISFACTORY VISITS

It was very seldom that Mrs. Ross condescended to visit her poorer neighbors, and it was, therefore, not without considerable surprise that Mrs. Gilbert called to the door about eleven o'clock, just as she had put on the potatoes to boil for dinner – recognized in the visitor on the doorstep Mrs. Colonel Ross.

"Pray come in, Mrs. Ross. I am glad to see you," said the widow.

"I will come in for five minutes," said Mrs. Ross, carefully gathering up her skirts, lest they should be soiled as she entered the humble cottage. She need not have been alarmed, for there was not a cleaner house in the village.

Mrs. Gilbert brought forward the most comfortable chair in her little sitting-room, and the visitor seated herself.

"I am come on an unpleasant errand, Mrs. Gilbert," she commenced, frigidly.

"Unpleasant!" repeated the widow, with quick apprehension. "Has anything happened to my boy to Harry?"

Improbable as it seemed that in such an event Mrs. Ross should be the messenger of ill tidings, it occurred to Mrs. Gilbert that she had come to inform her of an accident to Harry.

The visitor's lips curled. What did it matter, she thought, whether anything happened to him or not?

"Something has happened to my boy!" she said, with emphasis.

"I am very sorry," said the widow, with quick sympathy. "I hope he is not hurt."

"He might have had his neck broken," said Mrs. Ross; "and by your son," she added, spitefully.

"They haven't been fighting, have they?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, nervously.

"No; but your son deliberately and maliciously, while driving Mr. Mead's store wagon, drove into my son's light buggy, damaged it seriously, and my poor Philip was thrown out. Your son drove off, leaving him insensible by the roadside."

It will be perceived that Mrs. Ross had somewhat embellished the story, with the intention of producing a greater effect.

"Was Philip much hurt?" asked the widow, anxiously.

"He providentially escaped any serious injury, so far as we know. He may have suffered some internal injuries."

"I am sorry to hear that there has been any difficulty," said the widow, regaining her composure when she learned that neither of the two boys were hurt; "but I cannot accept your account. Harry is quite incapable of deliberately and maliciously running into Philip."

"I regret that you uphold your son in his wickedness," said Mrs. Ross, coldly; "but I am not surprised. I told my husband before I set out that you would probably do so."

"Mrs. Ross," said the widow, in a dignified tone, "I have known my boy for fifteen years, and watched him carefully, and I tell you positively that he wouldn't do what you have charged upon him."

"Do you question my statement?" demanded Mrs. Ross, haughtily.

"Did you witness the encounter?"

"No; but my son, who is the soul of truth, told me all the circumstances."

"Your son was probably angry with Harry, and could not be depended upon to give an impartial statement."

"Slander him as much as you please," said the visitor, angrily. "I have acquainted you with your son's outrageous conduct, and this is all I proposed. Of course we shall expect you or your son to pay for the damage done to the buggy, and he will be fortunate if we do not have him arrested for assault and battery."

Mrs. Gilbert did not look as much terrified as Mrs. Ross expected.

"I am very poor, as you know," she replied; "but if Harry is really to blame for what has happened, I will do all that I can to repair the injury."

"I am glad to see that you are talking more sensibly."

"Don't misunderstand me," said the widow. "I have not heard Harry's statement yet. From what I know of him, I presume that Philip was more in fault than he. Of course, in that case, I shall not feel called upon to pay anything."

"Of course!" sneered Mrs. Ross; "your son will throw all the blame on my poor boy. Fortunately, we have laws; and it will be the law that must decide this matter. It isn't for you to decide whether you will pay or not."

This was meant as a threat, but Mrs. Gilbert answered, calmly:

"You won't need to invoke the law, if you have a just claim."

Mrs. Ross rose, for there seemed no more to say. She was considerably disappointed with the result of her mission. She supposed, as a matter of course, that the widow would defend her son; but she had not supposed that she would receive so calmly her threats of having recourse to the law.

Indeed, she had expected that the widow would beg and plead for mercy, and appear panic-stricken. As it was, she felt that she was retiring from the contest decidedly worsted. She would not leave without one parting shot.

"I regret, Mrs. Gilbert," she said, seriously, "that you defend your son in this high-handed outrage. I had thought better of you. I knew you were poor, and I sympathized with you. Now I feel obliged to say that you will only have yourself to blame for the steps I am about to take."

The widow bowed, but did not gratify Mrs. Ross by inquiring what those steps were.

It was very provoking, certainly.

"I shall call on Mr. Mead, and insist on his discharging your son."

Knowing what a serious blow this would be, Mrs. Gilbert did look troubled for a moment, and her visitor sailed away, with a slight feeling of satisfaction, in the direction of the grocery store.

Meanwhile Harry, on his return to the store, had reported the accident, and submitted to a close cross-examination on the part of the storekeeper.

"Do you think I am to blame, Mr. Mead?" asked Harry.

"No; I don't see how you could do otherwise than you did. Young Ross is a disagreeable young puppy; but his family trades with me, and I don't like to offend them. Still, I shall not blame you."

It will be seen that Mr. Mead was a just man, though a politic one.

"Thank you, sir," said Harry, relieved.

"I am sorry this has occurred."

"So am I, sir; but if I hadn't done as I did I should have been there now, for Philip was determined not to budge."

"Well, we must smooth it over as well as we can. I presume that I shall have a call from Colonel Ross or his wife. I hope it will be the colonel, for he won't be so unreasonable as his lady."

It so happened that the first person whom Mrs. Ross saw when she entered the grocery store was Harry.

Her eyes flashed with resentment as they fell upon the persecutor of her poor boy, but she would not waste any words upon him.

"Where is Mr. Mead?" she asked.

"I will call him, madam," answered Harry, politely.

Mr. Mead came forward, and Mrs. Ross rehearsed her story, in terms which the reader can imagine for himself.

"I think you misapprehend the matter, Mrs. Ross," said the storekeeper, politely. "Your son maintained his position in the middle of the road and required Harry to do all the turning out. Of course you are aware that the law will not sustain any one in this."

"Who told you that my son did not turn out?" asked Mrs. Ross, hastily.

"Harry himself."

"And do you credit his story?" demanded Mrs. Ross, with a sneer.

"I have always found him to be a boy of truth."

"I believe he has wilfully deceived you. I believe he ran into my boy with the intention of injuring him," said Mrs. Ross, violently.

Harry was about to speak up, when a young man who was standing by saved him the trouble.

"I was there, Mr. Mead, and heard the whole," he said, "though neither of the boys saw me. I was in the piece to the left, behind the hedge. Phil Ross wouldn't turn out a mite, and Harry had to do as he did. When Phil was thrown out Harry got down from his team and went to see if he was hurt."

Mrs. Ross listened, pale with anger.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she said angrily. "That man is in a conspiracy with the Gilbert boy against my poor darling. I demand that you discharge Harry Gilbert from your employment!"

"I am sorry to disoblige you, Mrs. Ross, but it would be unjust," said

Mr. Mead.

"Then we shall buy our groceries elsewhere!" said Mrs. Ross, spitefully tossing her head.

"I shall be sorry to lose your custom, but I see no good reason for discharging Harry."

Angrily Mrs. Ross left the store, a second time mortified at her want of success.

"I am sorry, Mr. Mead, that you are likely to lose trade on my account," said Harry, with sincere regret.

Mr. Mead smiled.

"If Mrs. Ross leaves me she will have to go five miles for her groceries," he said quietly. "We shall have them back again before long."

CHAPTER IV

HARRY LOSES HIS PLACE, AFTER ALL

Mrs. Ross carried out her threat, and transferred her trade to a grocery in the neighboring village, but not without considerable inconvenience.

Her pride compelled her to the course, notwithstanding the extra trouble she incurred, and this, also, she laid up against Harry. Her husband was opposed to any change, not being so spiteful as his wife, but allowed her to have her way.

Meanwhile Mr. Mead, though he regretted to lose a good customer, did not show any signs of financial weakness, and there seemed to be no prospect of his failing.

Had he done so Mrs. Ross would have been overjoyed, for she was very angry at all who upheld "that low Gilbert boy," as she designated him.

It is said that all things come to him who waits, and circumstances were shaping themselves in a very gratifying way to Mrs. Ross and her schemes of revenge.

One day as Harry was driving the store wagon which bore the name of his employer he was hailed, about a mile from the store, by a boy about his own age, who carried in his hand a carpetbag, and appeared to be making a journey on foot.

"Hello!" said the traveler.

"Hello!" returned Harry.

"Are you working for my uncle?" asked the stranger.

"I can tell you better when I find out who your uncle is. If you are then nephew of General Grant, or the czar of Russia, I am not working for him."

"I see you like to joke," said the stranger. "My uncle is Mr. Mead, the storekeeper."

"That is the name of the man I work for."

"Then I guess you had better give me a lift, for I am going to my uncle's."

"All right! Glad to have your company."

"What's your name?" asked the stranger.

"Harry Gilbert. What's yours?"

"Howard Randall."

"Where do you live?"

"I used to live at Upton, but my father is dead, and mother – she's Mrs. Mead's sister – told me I'd better come to see if Uncle Reuben wouldn't give me a place in his store."

Instantly it flashed upon Harry that this new boy's arrival was likely to endanger his prospects. Mr. Mead, as he knew, had no occasion for the services of two boys, and he would naturally give his nephew the preference. He was not unjust enough to take a dislike to Howard in consequence. Indeed, the new boy had a pleasant face and manner, which led him to think he would like him for a friend.

"If I do lose my place," thought Harry, "I will put my trust in God. I don't think He will see me or mother suffer, and I won't borrow trouble until it comes."

"Were you ever employed in a store?" he asked, pleasantly.

"No; that is, not regularly. I have been in our grocery store at home for a few days at a time, when the storekeeper's son was sick."

"You look as if you were about my age."

"I am sixteen. My birthday came last month."

"Then you are a little older. I am not sixteen yet."

"You look stronger than I. I should think you were older."

Harry felt flattered. All boys like to be considered strong and large for their age, and our hero was no exception to the general rule in this respect.

"I don't know about that," he answered. "I guess we are a pretty goodmatch. How far off is Upton?"

"Fifty miles."

"You haven't walked all the way, have you?" inquired Harry, insurprise.

"Every step," said Howard, proudly. "You see, money isn't very plentywith us, and I told mother I didn't mind walking. I got a lift for a fewmiles the first day, so I haven't walked quite all the way."

"You and I seem to be situated pretty much the same way," said Harry. "Ihave no father, and we have hard work to get along."

"You seem like a tiptop fellow. I think I shall like you."

"The same to you," said Harry, smiling. "I am glad you are coming to Greenville to live."

Harry was sincere enough in his words, so far as his impressions aboutthe boy went, but when he reflected that through him he was likely tolose his place he felt a little troubled.

"Look here!" said Howard, suddenly; "will you lose your place if uncletakes me into his store?"

"I don't think he will need two boys," replied Harry, soberly.

"Then I'd better see if I can't find a place somewhere else. I don'twant to take away your place, if you are poor and need the money unclepays you."

"I do need it, but I guess something else will turn up for me. You are Mr. Mead's nephew, and ought to have it."

"I hope we shall be friends, at any rate," said Howard, warmly.

"I am sure we shall, Howard," returned Harry, cordially, who feltattracted toward his new friend, in spite of the misfortune which hisarrival would bring to him personally.

Just then, within a quarter of a mile of the store, Harry saw his youngenemy, Philip Ross, approaching him.

Philip was driving his buggy, which had been repaired since theaccident.

"I wonder if he will turn out for me?" thought Harry.

Philip had learned wisdom from experience, and did turn out for thestore wagon. He knew Harry's firmness too well to put it to the test asecond time at his own expense.

"Good-morning, Philip," said Harry, in his usual manner.

Philip did not notice Harry's salutation, but held his head very high, while his face reddened and his lip curled as he drove by his lateantagonist.

"Who is that boy?" asked Howard, whose attention was drawn to Philip'ssingular conduct.

"Philip Ross, son of Colonel Ross, a rich man in town."

"Is he deaf?"

"No."

"He didn't seem to hear you say good-morning."

"Oh, yes, he did," answered Harry, laughing; "but Philip isn't very fondof me."

"Are you enemies?"

"We had a little difficulty lately, and Philip hasn't got over it yet."

"Tell me about it."

Harry told the story, and Howard fully sustained him in what he haddone.

"He must be a mean boy."

"He thinks he has more rights than common folks, such as he considersme. He tried – or, at least, his mother did – to have Mr. Mead turn meoff, but your uncle is too just a man to go against me for doing myduty."

"I noticed he gave you half the road this time," said Howard.

"Yes," answered Harry, with a smile. "He doesn't care to have his wheeltaken off again."

By this time they had reached the store, and Howard introduced himselfto his uncle. The next day the blow fell.

"Harry," said Mr. Mead, "I've got bad news for you. My nephew stands in need of a place, and I can't afford to keep two boys. I wish I could keep you, too."

"I see how it is, Mr. Mead," said Harry, calmly, though his heart sank within him. "Howard has the best right to the place. I trust something will turn up for me."

"I have been perfectly satisfied with you, and am ready to give you the highest recommendation for honesty and fidelity."

"Thank you, Mr. Mead."

"You will stay till Saturday night, of course, unless something else should offer before that."

Poor Harry! His heart sank within him as he thought of the serious difference which the loss of his wages would make at home. The prospect of another situation was not very good, for Greenville was a small, quiet place, with very few places of business.

CHAPTER V

LOOKING FOR WORK

Harry shrank from telling his mother that he was about to lose his place, but he knew it must be done.

In the evening, when he got home from the store, he seemed so restless that his mother asked him what was the matter with him.

"This is my last week at the store, mother," he answered, soberly. "I suppose that is what makes me feel nervous."

"Has Mr. Mead been induced by Mrs. Ross to turn you away?" asked Mrs.

Gilbert, beginning to feel indignant.

"No; he isn't that kind of a man."

"Isn't he satisfied with you?"

"I ought to have told you at first that a nephew of his own needs the place, and he can't afford to employ two boys."

"I believe Mrs. Ross is at the bottom of it, after all," said Mrs.

Gilbert.

"No, mother; there you are wrong," and Harry went on to explain that

Howard's appearance was a surprise to his uncle.

"What kind of a boy is he?" asked the widow, disposed to dislike in advance the boy who had been the means of depriving her son of a place.

"He's a nice fellow. I like him already. Of course I am sorry to lose my place, but, if I must, I am willing he should have it. I think we shall be good friends."

"But what are you going to do, Harry?" asked his mother, anxiously.

"Your wages have been our dependence."

"I am sure I shall get something else to do, mother," said Harry, in a tone of confidence which he did not feel. "Tending store isn't the only thing to be done."

"I am sure, I hope so," said Mrs. Gilbert, despondently.

"Don't trouble yourself, mother, about the future. Just leave it to me, and you'll see if I don't get something to do."

Nevertheless, the widow could not help troubling herself. She knew that employment was hard to find in the village, at any rate and could not conjecture where Harry was to find it. She did not, however, say much on the subject, fearing to depress his spirits.

Saturday night came, and Harry received his wages.

"I don't know where my next week's wages are coming from, Mr. Mead," he said, soberly.

"You may be sure that I will recommend you for any employment I hear of, Harry," said Mr. Mead, earnestly. "I really wish I could afford to keep you on. You mustn't allow yourself to be discouraged."

"I won't – if I can help it," answered Harry.

The next day was Sunday, and he did not realize that he was out of a position; but, when Monday morning came, and he could lie abed as long as he pleased, with no call to work, he felt sad.

After a light breakfast, he rose from the table and took his hat.

"Where are you going, Harry?" asked his mother.

"I am going out in search of a job, mother," he replied.

The number of stores was limited, and he was pretty sure in advance that there was no opening in any one of them, but he wanted to make sure.

He applied at one after another, and without success.

"I'd take you quick enough, Harry," said Mr. Draper, the dry-goodsdealer, "but I've got all the help I need."

"So I expected, Mr. Draper, but I thought I would ask."

"All right, Harry. If I hear of anything, I will be sure to let you know," said Mr. Draper, in a friendly tone.

All this evidence of friendliness was, of course, pleasant, but the prospect of a place would have been more welcome, so poor Harry thought. At ten o'clock he reached home.

His mother looked up when he entered, but she saw, by the expression of his face, that he had not succeeded.

"You must be tired, Harry," she said. "You had better sit down and rest."

"Oh, no, I'm not tired, mother. If you'll tell me where the four-quart kettle is, I'll go and pick some blueberries."

"What will you do with so many, Harry?"

"Carry them to Mr. Mead. Every two days he sends a supply to market."

"How much does he pay?" asked the widow, brightening up at this glimpse of money to be earned.

"Eight cents a quart, payable in groceries. It won't be much, but will be better than nothing."

"So it will, Harry. I don't know but I can do better going with you than to stay at home and sew."

"No, mother; you would be sure to get a headache, exposed to the sun in the open pasture. Leave me to pick berries. It is more suitable for me."

"What time will you get home to dinner, Harry?"

"I shall not come home till the middle of the afternoon. I'll take a little lunch with me, and eat in the pasture."

So Harry started out, pail in hand, for the berry pasture. It was about a mile away, and was of large extent, comprising, probably, thirty acres of land. It was Harry's first expedition of the kind in the season, as his time had been so fully occupied at the store that he had had no leisure for picking berries.

The berries were not so plentiful as they had been somewhat earlier, but they were still to be found in considerable quantities.

Harry was not alone. Probably a dozen other persons were in the pasture, engaged in the same way as himself. All knew Harry, and some, who had not heard of his loss of place, were surprised to see him there.

"And how is it you are here, Harry?" asked Mrs. Ryan, a good-natured Irish woman, who was out, with three of her children, reaping a harvest of berries. "And how can Mr. Mead spare you?"

"Because he's got another boy," answered Harry.

"Shure it was mane to send you away, and your mother nadin' your wages."

"He couldn't help it. He had a nephew that needed the place. But, perhaps, I can make a fortune, like you, picking berries."

"And shure you'd have to live a hundred years to do that, and have berries ripe all the year round. It's hard work, Harry, and poor pay."

"You have the advantage of me, Mrs. Ryan. You've got three children to help you."

"And don't I have to buy food and clothes for the same? Shure, you're welcome to all they earn, if you'll board and clothe 'em."

"I didn't think of that. Perhaps I am better off as I am."

"And so ye are, I'm thinkin'."

Harry found that, exert himself as he might, Mrs. Ryan picked nearly as fast as he did. She was used to it, and her pail filled up rapidly.

Harry was glad he did not bring a larger pail, for to him, unaccustomed to bend over, the work was fatiguing, and when, as the town clock struck two, he saw his pail filled to the brim, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"If the pail held more, I shouldn't feel satisfied to stop," he said to himself, "so I'm glad it doesn't."

Mrs. Ryan had two pails and a basket, and each of her children carried a small pail, so that she remained in the pasture after Harry left.

It was shorter for Harry to go at once to the store, instead of going round by his home, and this he resolved to do.

About twenty rods from the store, rather to his vexation, he met Philip Ross, elaborately dressed and swinging a light cane.

Philip, who had not heard of Harry's loss of place, regarded him with surprise, not unmixed with curiosity. But for his curiosity, he would have passed him without a word. Curiosity conquered dislike, and he inquired:

"Does Mead send you out to pick berries?"

"No," answered Harry.

"Haven't you been picking berries?"

"This looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Of course. Have you a holiday?"

"Yes, a long holiday. I am not working for Mr. Mead now."

An expression of joy lighted up the face of Philip.

"Has he discharged you?" he asked.

"He has taken his nephew in my place."

"And so you have to pick berries for a living?" asked Philip, in exultation.

"Yes," answered Harry, coolly.

"I must go home and tell mother," said Philip, briskly. "Wait a minute, though. Do you want a job?"

"Yes," responded Harry, rather surprised that Philip should feel any interest in the matter.

"Then I can give you one. Come up to the house early every morning, and I'll hire you to black my shoes. I'll give – let me see – thirty cents a week."

"Thank you, but I couldn't come up to your house. Bring them down to mine every morning, and I may accept the job."

"Do you think I would demean myself by carrying dirty shoes round the village?" demanded Philip, angrily.

"I don't know," said Harry, coolly. "You'll have to do it, if you want me to black them."

Philip muttered something about impudence, but went off very well pleased, to report to his mother that she could trade at Mead's once more, as he had sent off Harry Gilbert.

CHAPTER VI

UNCLE OBED ARRIVES FROM ILLINOIS

It seemed odd to Harry to enter Mead's store, where he had been employed, merely as a customer.

Mr. Mead nodded pleasantly.

"It seems natural to see you here, Harry," he said. "Have you been berrying?"

"Yes, and I would like to sell my berries."

"Very well. You know what I pay – eight cents a quart."

"I have four quarts."

"Measure them out yourself, Harry. I will make an exception in your case, if you wish it, and give you the money for them."

Harry accepted this offer, as he did not know of what groceries his mother stood in need.

As he walked out of the store, he felt more confidence than he had done in the morning. He had not got a place, to be sure, but he had earned thirty-two cents. This was not quite half what he had been accustomed to earn at the store, but it was something.

A little way from the store, Harry passed an old man, dressed neatly, but in a well-worn suit, walking with some difficulty, with the help of a stout cane. He looked to be seventy years old, at least, and his appearance indicated that he was poor.

As Harry passed, the old man called out:

"Stop a minute, boy!"

Harry stopped, and waited respectfully to learn what the old man wanted. It is a common complaint that most boys are wanting in respect to old age, but this charge could not be brought against Harry, who was uniformly courteous to all persons older than himself.

Though he suspected the old man to be very poor, it made no difference to him.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Ross lives?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, sir. I suppose you mean Colonel Ross?"

"I believe that's what they call him. His wife is my niece."

Harry was very much surprised to hear this.

"Have you ever been there before, sir?" asked Harry.

"No; I've been living out in Illinois. But I'm getting old, and my only daughter died last month. So I've come here to visit my niece."

"I don't believe Mrs. Ross will be very glad to see her uncle," thought

Harry; "and I'm sure Philip won't."

"I will show you the way, sir, if you wish," said Harry, politely.

"I wish you would, if it isn't too much trouble," said the old man.

"Oh, no trouble at all," said Harry.

"You seem to be a very obliging boy. What is your name?"

"Harry Gilbert."

"Are your parents living?"

"My mother is living, but my father's dead – that is, we expect he is. He was a sea captain, and never came back from his last voyage."

"Did he leave your mother well off?" asked the old man, gazing attentively at Harry.

Harry thought him rather inquisitive for a stranger, but credited him with good motives, and answered, readily:

"No, sir; we are quite poor; but I have had a place where I earned four dollars a week – at the grocery store. Mr. Mead had a nephew come last week, and now I am out of work."

"That is unlucky for you."

"Yes, sir; but I shall try hard to get something else soon."

"You look like an industrious boy."

"I like to work."

"Where do you live?"

It so happened that Harry's house could be pointed out across the fields, though at least a quarter of a mile away.

"There it is," he said, pointing it out; "but, perhaps, you cannot see so far?"

"Oh, yes, I can see it."

By this time they had reached the gate of Colonel Ross, and Harry felt that he might safely leave the old man.

Out on the lawn was Philip Ross, who, with surprise and displeasure, saw Harry opening the gate for one whom he mentally designated as an old tramp.

"What do you want here?" he asked, in a tone far from courteous or respectful.

"What is your name?" asked the old man, fixing his glance on the questioner.

"My name is Philip Ross, and I am the son of Colonel Ross," answered

Philip, with an air of consequence.

"Then I am your great-uncle, Philip," said the old man, surveying his young kinsman with an interest inspired by the feeling of relationship.

"My great-uncle," repeated Philip, in mingled bewilderment and dismay.

"Yes, Philip, I'm your mother's uncle, come all the way from Illinois to visit you."

Harry was amused to see upon the face of his young antagonist a look of stupefaction.

It was a severe blow to Philip, especially in Harry's presence, to be claimed as a kinsman by a shabby, old tramp. It was upon his tongue to express a doubt as to the relationship, but he forbore.

"Is your mother at home?" asked the old man.

"You can ring the bell and see," answered Philip, deliberately turning his back and walking off.

The old man looked after him, with a shrewd glance of intelligence, but expressed no opinion of him.

"Harry," he said, turning to his young guide, "will you come with me to the door and ring the bell?"

Harry complied with his request.

The door was opened by a servant, who, on seeing the old man, said, pertly:

"We've got nothing for the likes of you," and was about to close the door on the two.

"Stop!" said Harry, in a commanding voice, for he was provoked with the girl's ill manners.

"Tell Mrs. Ross that her uncle is here. I think you'd better invite him in."

"Well, I never!" said the girl, abashed. "I hope you'll excuse me, sir."

Walk into the parlor, and I'll tell Mrs. Ross you are here."

"Won't you come in, Harry?" asked the old man, who seemed to have taken a liking to his young guide.

"No, thank you, sir. I shall see you again, if you are going to stay in the village."

"Thank you! you're a good boy," and the old man began to fumble in his pocket.

"Oh, no. I can't take anything," said Harry hurriedly.

Even if the old man had been rich, he would have declined compensation – much more when he looked very poor.

"Well, well! I'm much obliged to you, all the same."

Leaving Harry to find his way home, let us see what sort of reception the old man had from his niece.

Within five minutes Mrs. Ross sailed into the room.

"Why, Lucinda!" said the old man, heartily; "it's a long time since I met you."

"I do not remember ever having seen you," said Mrs. Ross, frigidly.

"I haven't seen you since you were a little girl, for I've been living away out in Illinoy. I'm your Uncle Obed – Obed Wilkins – brother of your mother."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Ross, coldly, eyeing the old man's shabby attire with something like disdain. "You must be an old man!"

"Seventy-two, Lucinda. I was born in October, while your mother was two years younger than I, and born in August. I didn't think to outlive her, seeing she was younger, but I have."

"I think it was imprudent in a man of your age coming so far," said Mrs.

Ross.

"I was all alone, Lucinda. My daughter died last spring, and I wanted to be near some one that was akin to me, so I've come to see the only relations I've got left on earth."

"That's very cool," thought Mrs. Ross. "He expects us to support him, I suppose. He looks as poor as poverty. He ought to have gone to the poorhouse in his old home."

To be sure, she would not like to have had it known that she had an uncle in the poorhouse; but, so far away as Illinois, it would not have been known to any of her Eastern friends, and wouldn't matter so much.

"I will speak to Colonel Ross about it, Mr. Wilkins," she said, coldly.

"You can stay to supper, and see him then."

"Don't call me Mr. Wilkins. I'm your Uncle Obed," said the old man.

"You may be my uncle, but I am not sufficiently acquainted with you yet for that," she answered.

"You can come upstairs, if you feel tired, and lie down till supper time."

"Thank you, I will," said Uncle Obed.

The offer of Mrs. Ross was dictated not so much by kindness as by the desire to get her shabby uncle well out of the way, and have a chance for a private conference with her husband, whom she expected every minute.

If the unannounced visit of Uncle Obed may be thought to need an excuse, it can easily be found. For years, when Mrs. Ross was a girl, she and her mother were mainly supported by the now despised uncle, without whom they might have become dependent upon charity.

It was not a time that Mrs. Ross, in her present luxury, liked to think about, and for years she had not communicated with the uncle to whom she owed so much.

Full of charity himself, he was unconscious of her lack of gratitude, and supposed that her failure to write was owing to lack of time. He had come in good faith, when bereft of his daughter, to renew acquaintances with his niece, never dreaming how unwelcome he would be. Philip's rudeness impressed him unpleasantly, but, then, the boy had never seen him before, and that was some excuse.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNWELCOME GUEST

"I don't believe that old tramp's my great-uncle," said Philip Ross to himself, but he felt uneasy, nevertheless.

It hurt his pride to think that he should have such a shabby relation, and he resolved to ascertain by inquiry from his mother whether there were any grounds for the old man's claim.

He came into the house just after Uncle Obed had been shown upstairs by the servant, not to the spare room, but to a small, inconvenient bedroom on the third floor, next to the one occupied by the two servants.

"Mother," asked Philip, "is it really true?"

"Is what really true?"

"That that shabby old man is any relation of ours?"

"I don't know with certainty," answered his mother. "He says he is, but I shouldn't have known him."

"Did you have any uncle in Illinois?"

"Yes, I believe so," Mrs. Ross admitted, reluctantly.

"You always said you were of a high family," said Philip, reproachfully.

Mrs. Ross blushed, for she did not like to admit that her pretensions to both were baseless. She was not willing to admit it now, even to Philip.

"It is true," she replied, in some embarrassment; "but there's always a black sheep in every flock."

Poor Obed! To be called a black sheep – a hard-working, steady-going man as he had been all his life.

"But my mother's brother, Obed, strange to say, was always rustic and uncouth, and so he was sent out to Illinois to be a farmer. We thought that the best place for him – that he would live and die there; but now, in the most vexatious manner in the world, he turns up here."

"He isn't going to stay here, is he?" asked Philip, in dismay.

"No; we must get rid of him some way. I must say it was a very cool proceeding to come here without an invitation, expecting us to support him."

This was a gratuitous assumption on the part of Mrs. Ross.

"I suppose he's very poor. He doesn't look as if he had a cent. I presume he is destitute, and expects us to take care of him."

"You'd better send him packing, mother."

"I suppose we shall have to do something for him," said Mrs. Ross, in a tone of disgust. "I shall advise your father to buy a ticket for him, and send him back to Illinois."

"That'll be the best way, mother. Start him off to-morrow, if you can."

"I won't keep him long, you may be sure of that."

By this time Colonel Ross had reached home, and his wife communicated to him the unwelcome intelligence of Uncle Obed's arrival, and advised him as to the course she thought best to pursue.

"Poor old man!" said the colonel, with more consideration than his wife or son possessed. "I suppose he felt solitary out there."

"That isn't our lookout," said Mrs. Ross, impatiently. "It's right enough to say poor old man. He looks as poor as poverty. He'll be better off in Illinois."

"Perhaps you are right, but I wouldn't like to send him off empty-handed. I'll buy his ticket, and give him fifty dollars, so that he need not suffer."

"It seems to me that is too much. Twenty dollars, or ten, would be liberal."

The cold-hearted woman seemed to forget the years during which her uncle had virtually supported her.

"No, Lucinda; I shall give him fifty."

"You should think of your son, Colonel Ross," said his wife. "Don't impoverish him by your foolish generosity."

Colonel Ross shrugged his shoulders.

"Philip will have all the money that will be good for him," he said.

"Very well; as you please. Only get him off as soon as you can. It is mortifying to me to have such a looking old man here claiming relationship to me."

"He is your uncle, Lucinda, and you must mention the plan to him."

"Very well."

It was a task which Mrs. Ross did not shrink from, for she had no fear of hurting the feelings of Uncle Obed, or, rather, she did not care whether he chose to feel hurt or not.

Uncle Obed was called down to supper, and took his seat at the handsome tea table, with its silver service. Colonel Ross, to his credit be it said, received his wife's uncle much more cordially than his own niece had done, and caused Uncle Obed's face to beam with pleasure.

"Railly, Lucinda," said Uncle Obed, as he looked over the table, "you have a very comfortable home, I declare."

"Yes, we try to have things comfortable around us," answered Mrs. Ross, coldly.

"Years ago, when you and your mother lived out in Illinoy, I didn't think you'd come to live in a house like this."

"Yes, people live in an outlandish way out there," said Mrs. Ross.

"But they have happy homes. When Mary lived, I enjoyed life, though the old farmhouse seemed rough and plain, compared with your handsome home. I'm glad to see my sister's child living so well, with all the comforts that money can buy."

The old man's tone was hearty, and there was a smile of genuine pleasure on his rugged face. He was forced to admit that his niece was not as cordial as he hoped, but, then, "Lucinda was always reserved and quiet-like," he said to himself, and so excused her.

It must be said for Colonel Ross that he knew comparatively little about his wife's early life, and didn't dream of the large obligations she was under to Uncle Obed. He was a rich man, and the consciousness of wealth led him to assume airs of importance, but he was not as cold or heartless as his wife, and would have insisted on his wife's treating her uncle better had he known the past. Even as it was, he was much more gracious and affable than Mrs. Ross to the old man, whom he had never seen before.

As for Philip, he was a second edition of his mother, and never addressed a word to Uncle Obed. When the latter spoke to him, he answered in monosyllables.

"Nancy, you may leave the room. I'll call you if I want you."

This was what Mrs. Ross said to the servant, fearing that Uncle Obed might refer to her early poverty, and that the girl might talk about it in the neighborhood.

Though Colonel Ross made conversation easy for him, Uncle Obed could not help feeling the coldness of his niece.

"Lucindy might treat me better," he thought, "after what I did for her in her early days. But I see how it is; she's ashamed of them, and I won't say anything to make her feel bad. I see I must look elsewhere for a home. Lucindy don't want me here, and I shouldn't feel at home myself. I wish Philip was more like that Harry Gilbert, who showed me the way here."

Supper was over, and Philip took up his hat to go out.

"Philip," said his father, "you forget that your uncle is here. You should stay to keep him company."

"I've got an engagement," said Philip, alarmed at the suggestion.

"Can't you put it off?"

"Let the boy keep his engagement," said Uncle Obed. "I like to see young people particular about keeping their appointments."

"Your uncle may like to walk out with you, and see something of the village."

Philip looked dismayed at the prospect of being seen in the company of the rather shabby old man, who claimed to be his great-uncle.

"No, no," said Uncle Obed. "I can find the way round by myself. A man that's used to the Western prairies doesn't get lost easily."

Philip breathed a sigh of relief. For the first time he began to think that Uncle Obed had some sensible ideas.

Uncle Obed took his hat and cane, and walked out slowly, making his way along the principal street.

"I wish I could see that boy Harry Gilbert," he thought to himself – for a new plan had occurred to him. "Why, bless me, there he is now," he said, as our hero turned the next corner.

"Good-evening, sir," said Harry, cheerfully.

"Good-evening, Harry. You're just the one I was wanting to see. I've got something to say to you."

What Uncle Obed had to say was of importance, but must be deferred to the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE OBED MAKES A PROPOSAL

Harry waited to hear what the old man had to say.

"How do you and my grandnephew hitch horses?" asked Uncle Obed.

"You mean how do we get along together?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"Well, we are not bosom friends. Philip thinks I am a poor, working boy, and looks down on me accordingly."

"It don't do you a mite of harm to work. I had to work when I was a boy, and I've done my share of work since I got to be a man."

"I like to work," said Harry. "I only wish I had the chance."

"So there is no love lost between you and Philip?"

"No; he doesn't suit me any better than I suit him. He's got too high notions for me."

"He's like his mother," said Uncle Obed. "I reckon she and Philip ain't very glad to see me. It's different with the colonel. He's a nice man, but he seems to be under his wife's thumb."

Harry did not reply. It was only what he expected, from what he knew of Mrs. Ross and her son.

"I hope it won't be unpleasant for you," said he, in a tone of sympathy.

"It's a kind of disappointment," the old man admitted. "I was hoping Lucindy would be like her mother, and I could have a home with my own folks the rest of my life."

"Poor man," thought Harry. "He's old and destitute, and it must be a trial for him to find himself so coldly received."

"I wish," he said, impulsively, "we were richer."

"Why?" asked Uncle Obed.

"Because we'd offer you a home. But, unfortunately," continued Harry, with a sigh, "we don't know how we are to pay our own expenses."

The old man looked gratified.

"I wish you were my nephew, instead of Philip," he said. "You've got a good mother, I take it."

"She's one of the best mothers in the world," said Harry, earnestly.

"I might have known it. Such boys as you always have good mothers. Supposing I was able to pay my share of the expenses, do you think your mother would give me a home?"

"I am sure she would," said Harry, who could not help feeling interest in the homely, but good-hearted, old man. "But I thought –" here he hesitated.

"You thought I was destitute, didn't you?" asked Uncle Obed, with a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm thankful to Providence that I'm not. I've got enough to pay my way for the few years that remain to me. My niece might treat me different if she knew it, but I'd rather she'd think I was in need."

"Shall I speak to my mother about your coming?" asked Harry.

"Yes; but I won't come just yet. I want to see how Lucindy'll act. She wants to get rid of me, and she'll be saying something soon. Like a snout, she'll offer to pay my fare back to Illinois," and the shrewd old man, who had hit the truth, laughed.

"Very well, sir, I'll speak to mother. We've got a nice room that we've kept for a spare chamber, where I'm sure you'd be comfortable."

"I don't much care now what Lucindy says or does," said the old man, cheerfully. "If Philip won't have me for a great-uncle, I'll have to adopt you in his place, and I guess I'll make a good exchange."

"Thank you, sir. I shall try to treat you as a nephew ought."

Good-evening."

"That's a good boy," said Uncle Obed to himself. "I wish he was my nephew. Somehow, that stuck-up Philip, with his high-and-mighty airs, doesn't seem at all kin to me."

Harry went home in excellent spirits. It would be of advantage to them to have a boarder, as it would give them a steady, even if small, income.

"I wonder what he'll be able to pay?" he said to himself. "If he pays as much as I used to get – four dollars a week – it'll make us all right, for I'm sure of earning as much as two dollars a week, even if I don't get a place."

His mother brightened up, too, when Harry told her of the prospect that opened up of making up for his lost wages. It was a timely help, and both mother and son regarded it as such.

CHAPTER IX

NOTICE TO QUIT

"Strike while the iron's hot!" This was the motto of Mrs. Ross, especially in a matter of this kind. She was firmly resolved to get rid of Uncle Obed as soon as she could.

She had always claimed to be of high family, and to have been brought up in the same style in which she was now living, and here was a witness who could disprove all she had said.

No one knew better than Uncle Obed that she had been very poor in her early days, for it was he who, out of his small means, had contributed to support her mother and herself. Any day he might refer to those years of poverty; and Mrs. Ross felt that she should expire of mortification if her servants should hear of them. Farewell, then, to her aristocratic claims, for she knew well enough that they would be ready enough to spread the report, which would soon reach the ears of all her acquaintances. By way of precaution she took an opportunity of presenting her version of the story to Nancy, who waited on the table.

"Mr. Wilkins is rather a strange old man, Nancy," she said, affably, as

Nancy was clearing off the breakfast table the next morning.

"Is he really your uncle, mum?" asked Nancy.

Mrs. Ross wished she could deny it, but felt that she would be found out in falsehood.

"Yes, Nancy, I confess that he is. There is a black sheep in every family, and poor Uncle Obed was the black sheep in ours."

"You don't say so, mum! He seems harmless enough."

"Oh, yes. There's no harm in him; but he's so rustic. Poor grandpa tried to polish him by sending him to expensive schools, but it was no use. He took no interest in books, and wouldn't go to college" – Uncle Obed would have opened his eyes if he had heard this – "and so grandpa bought him a farm, and set him up in business as a farmer. He was rather shiftless, and preferred the company of his farm laborers to going into the fashionable society the rest of the family moved in; and so all his life he has been nothing but a rough, unrefined farmer."

"What a pity, mum."

"Yes, it is a pity, but I suppose it was in him. Of course, it is very mortifying to me to have him come here – so different as he is from the rest of us. I am sure you can understand that, Nancy."

"Oh, yes, mum."

"He won't feel at home among us, and I think I shall ask Colonel Ross to pay his fare back to Illinois, and give him a pension, if he really needs it. I dare say he has lost his farm, and is destitute, for he never knew how to take care of money."

"That would be very kind of you and the colonel, mum," said Nancy, who didn't believe half her mistress was saying, but thought it might be for her interest to pretend she did.

"By the way, Nancy, I think I shall not need any more the mantilla you like so well. You can have it, if you like."

"Oh, thank you, mum," exclaimed Nancy, in surprise.

For she had never before received a present from her mistress, who was well known to be mean and penurious.

The mantilla was a handsome one, and she thanked Mrs. Ross effusively.

"There, I've managed her," thought Mrs. Ross, "though at the expense of the valuable mantilla. I grudge it to her, but it is best to guard her against any of Uncle Obed's stories, at any cost. I must get rid of him as soon as I can."

Colonel Ross wished his wife to postpone speaking for a week, but this she was unwilling to promise. She agreed to let her uncle stay a week, but insisted on giving him notice to quit sooner.

On the morning of the third day she found her opportunity. Breakfast was over, and she left alone with the old man.

"Mr. Wilkins," she said, "I want to have a talk with you."

"Certainly, Lucindy, you can talk just as much as you please. But what makes you call me Mr. Wilkins? When you were a little girl, and came over with a message from your mother, it was always Uncle Obed."

"It is so long since I have seen you that I hardly feel like speaking so familiarly," said Mrs. Ross.

"You'll feel better acquainted after a while, Lucindy."

"That shows he expects to stay a long time," thought Mrs. Ross.

"Don't you think you made a mistake in leaving Illinois?" asked Mrs.

Ross, point-blank.

"Well, perhaps I did," admitted Uncle Obed.

"Of course you did. You are too old to come to a new place where you don't know anybody. Now, out there you knew –"

"Pretty nigh everybody."

"Exactly."

"But out there I hadn't any relations left. After my poor Mary died I felt lonesome."

"Still, as you hadn't seen us for so many years, we are almost the same as strangers."

"I can't forget, Lucindy, how you and your poor mother struggled along, and how I tried to help –"

"We won't recall those old times," said Mrs. Ross, impatiently. "I was going to say you wouldn't be happy here. We don't as you were accustomed to do; and, in fact, it would be inconvenient for us to have a new inmate. My health is delicate, and –"

"You look pretty rugged, Lucindy."

"Appearances are deceitful," said Mrs. Ross, nodding her head solemnly.

"I am very nervous and all excitement is bad for me."

"I hope I haven't excited you, Lucindy," said Uncle Obed. "I thought I was pretty quiet. As to the work, you've got two girls to help in the kitchen."

"Yes; but there's a certain amount of care that falls upon me which you can't understand."

"I hope you won't alter your living for me, Lucindy. I'm one of your own folks, and I don't mind a picked-up dinner now and then."

"The ridiculous old man," thought Mrs. Ross, impatiently. "As if I'd alter my style of living for a destitute old man that looks as if he'd just escaped from an almshouse."

"We always live the same, company or no company," she said, coldly.

"If we don't change for fashionable visitors from New York and Philadelphia, it is hardly likely would for you."

"I'm glad I don't give you any trouble."

"But," continued Mrs. Ross, "it is worrying to my nerves to have company."

"Then I shouldn't think you'd invite those fashionable people from New York and Philadelphia," said Obed, slyly.

"Plague take him!" thought Mrs. Ross; "won't he take a hint? I shall have to speak more plainly. Indeed," said she, "I was surprised you should come in upon us without writing, or inquiring whether it would be convenient for us to receive you."

"I begin to understand," said Uncle Obed. "I ain't welcome here."

"Well, you can stay a few days, if you desire it," said Mrs. Ross, "but you will be much happier in your old home than here."

"I ought to be the best judge of that, Lucindy," said the old man, with dignity.

"Perhaps not. People can't always judge best for themselves."

"Perhaps not; but I am going to try the experience of staying here awhile."

"I have already told you that it will not be convenient for you to stay here. Colonel Ross will pay your fare back to Illinois, and that, I am sure, is quite as much as he ought to do."

"Lucindy," said Uncle Obed, "you seem to have forgotten the years I freely helped you and your poor mother. However, if you don't care to remember them, I won't refer to them."

Mrs. Ross had the grace to be ashamed, but was not moved in her resolution to get rid of her uncle.

"Of course," she said, "I don't forget the past. We will help pay your board in some town at a distance."

"Why at a distance?"

"Because, if you were here, people might think it strange you didn't stay with us, and my health won't admit that."

"I'm much obliged for your offer, Lucindy, but I prefer to make my own arrangements. I am going to stay here."

"Then we shall not assist you," said Mrs. Ross, angrily.

"I don't wish you to. I can manage to pay my board, and I have already selected a boarding place."

"Where do you expect to board?" asked Mrs. Ross, curiously.

"I'll tell you when it's settled."

The next day Uncle Obed informed his niece that he was to board with Mrs. Gilbert. This was unwelcome news, because it would be a help to a family she disliked; but Uncle Obed was proof against any insinuation she was able to bring against Harry and his mother, and the day after he transferred himself to the clean and airy chamber in Mrs. Gilbert's cottage.

"This will just suit me," said the old man, looking about him with a pleased expression. "I like this room much better than the one my niece gave me."

"Our house won't compare with hers, Mr. Wilkins," said the widow.

"It ain't so fine, but she put me in a little seven-by-nine chamber, and I was always used to plenty of room."

"I am afraid our living will be too plain for you," suggested Mrs. Gilbert, apprehensively.

"Do I look as if I was used to high living?" asked Uncle Obed. "No; whatever's good enough for you and Harry is good enough for me. And now it's best to agree about terms, so that we may know just how we stand."

This was rather embarrassing to the widow. Uncle Obed certainly did not look as if he could pay much, yet it would not do to charge too little. She would not be able to provide her table.

"Would four dollars suit you?" she asked, in a hesitating way.

"No, it wouldn't," said the old man.

"I don't see how I can afford to ask less," faltered Mrs. Gilbert.

"That isn't the point," he said. "You don't ask enough. I will pay you six dollars a week – the first week in advance."

"I should never think of asking so much," said Mrs. Gilbert, amazed.

"Are you sure –"

"That I can afford to pay so much?" asked Uncle Obed, who understood her thought. "Yes; I have a little something, though you might not think it from my clothes. When my trunk comes – I left it at a hotel in New York – I will dress a little better; but I wanted to try an experiment with my niece, Mrs. Ross. Here's the money for the first week."

And, drawing out a large wallet, he took therefrom two bills – a five and a one.

"It will make me feel very easy," said Mrs. Gilbert, gratefully, "even if Harry doesn't get any regular work, though I hope he will."

"I should like to warn you of one thing," said Uncle Obed. "Don't let people know how much board I pay. If Mrs. Ross chooses to think I am very poor, let her. She won't pester me with hypocritical attentions, which I shouldn't value."

Harry was delighted at his mother's good fortune in obtaining so valuable a boarder. Six dollars a week would go a long way in their little household.

It gave him fresh courage in his efforts to obtain a place, for he knew that, even if it was deferred, his mother would not suffer from the delay.

CHAPTER X

PHILIP MEETS HIS MATCH

Though it would have been possible for the Gilberts to get along now without help from Harry's earnings, his desire to obtain employment was quite as great as before.

As he had no place in view, he continued to go to the berry field everyday, supplying his mother with what she needed, and disposing of the rest to Mr. Mead.

The field in which he had at first picked being nearly exhausted, he bent his steps in another direction, where he learned that there was still a good supply. The field belonged to a Mr. Hammond, a substantial farmer, who had no objections to the berries being picked, but required parties to obtain his permission.

As Mr. Hammond was understood to be very well to do, Mrs. Ross and her son condescended to associate with him and his family on equal terms.

On the particular morning when Harry sought the field, Philip was crossing the pasture on his way to a river, where he kept a rowboat, when he espied two children, Tommy and Rose Perkins, picking berries.

They were children of eight and ten, and it occurred to Philip that he had a fine chance to bully them, in the name of Mr. Hammond.

Striding up to them, with an air of authority, he said:

"Look here, you children, what business have you in this field?"

"It isn't yours, is it?" asked Tommy, independently.

"It belongs to my friend, Mr. Hammond," said Philip. "He don't allow all the loafers in town here."

"Tommy and I are not loafers," said Rose.

"All the same, you are trespassing on Mr. Hammond's pasture. Come, clear out."

"Mr. Hammond gave us leave to come here, and I don't see what business it is of yours," said Tommy.

"I don't believe he gave you permission at all, and I'll let you know what business it is of mine, you little rascal," said Philip, in a bullying tone.

Luckily for Tommy and Rose, there was a friend near at hand, who was not disposed to see them abused. Harry Gilbert had reached the bars between the berry pasture and the next field in time to hear Philip's attempt to bully the young brother and sister.

"Just like Philip," he thought, with a feeling of disgust. "He is always trying to bully those younger than himself, especially if they are poor."

Tommy and Rose were the children of a widow, no better off than Mrs.

Gilbert, and Harry felt a greater sympathy for them on that account.

Meanwhile, Philip, not aware that there was help at hand, continued his persecutions.

"Well, are you going to clear out?" he demanded, in a threatening tone.

"No," said Tommy. "Mr. Hammond said we might pick berries here, and you have no right to touch us."

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