

Otis James

An Amateur Fireman



James Otis

An Amateur Fireman

«Public Domain»

Otis J.

An Amateur Fireman / J. Otis — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	11
CHAPTER III.	17
CHAPTER IV.	23
CHAPTER V.	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	32

Otis James

An Amateur Fireman

CHAPTER I.

THE AMATEUR

"I ain't sayin' as how I could run a whole fire, same as some of the chiefs do; but when it comes to drivin' an engine, Dan Roberts, an' doin' it in time to get the first water, or layin' hose, I wouldn't knuckle down to the biggest man in the Department."

"Now see here, Seth Bartlett, what's the sense of talkin' that way? It would be a good deal better, an' I ain't the only one who says it, if you'd stick right to shinin', an' stop playin' fireman, for that's 'bout the biggest part of the work you do."

"Do you s'pose I count on shinin' boots for a livin' all my life?"

"You've got to make a better fist at it than you have done for a year or more, else you'll never get into anythin' else. I tell you what it is, Seth Bartlett, when a man wants to hire a boy, he ain't pickin' out the feller that's failed up two or three times over; but he generally looks for the one what's makin' a go of it, whether it's shinin' or sellin' papers."

"I ain't sayin' but you're right, Dan, an' I s'pose it's a good thing for you to keep right on rememberin'; but it's different with me. I don't count on any one man hirin' me when I strike out for somethin' better'n shinin'."

"Oh, you don't, eh? What little game *have* you got? Goin' to run a bank, or keep a hotel, or do somethin' like that?"

"You think you're funny, but you ain't. I'm goin' into the Fire Department when the right time comes, an' don't you make any mistake about it."

Dan laughed loud and long at this announcement, and Seth gazed at him in grim silence until the explosion of mirth was somewhat subsided, when he said sharply:

"I guess trade must have been pretty good with you to-day, else you wouldn't be feelin' so terrible funny."

"Well, it hasn't. I got stuck on four *Heralds* this mornin', an' five *Expresses* to-night. That comes pretty near cleanin' off all the profits, 'cause it's awful dull nowadays in my business, Seth."

"Then I can't guess why you got so dreadful silly when I said I was goin' into the Department some day."

"It would make anybody laugh, Seth, to hear a feller no bigger'n you talk of such things. You must be a man to get that kind of a job."

"Well, shan't I be in time – and not such a terrible long while either? I'm fourteen now, leastways, that's the way I figger it out, an' if I could get one of them early spring moustaches like Sim Jepson is raisin', folks would think I was a man when I wasn't only eighteen. Don't you reckon all the firemen were boys once?"

"Yes," Dan replied doubtfully, "I s'pose they was," and he added quickly as a sudden thought occurred to him, "but they had to know a good deal about the business before they could get a job."

"Course they did, an' it was a case of learnin'. That's jest what I'm doin' when I tend out on fires. I'm gettin' posted, an' by an' by when I'm old enough you'll see me in the Department, that's all there is about it."

Seth Bartlett and Dan Roberts were old friends, having made each other's acquaintance no less than three months previous, when the former, who had disagreed with Jip Collins on a matter regarding household affairs, was in search of a new roommate.

Seth owned, or believed he did, certain rights in a small shed situate in the rear of Baxter Brothers' carpenter shop, where he made his home.

It was a rude affair, originally built for the purpose of sheltering Mr. Baxter's horse and carriage, but afterward used as a storage place for such odds and ends as accumulate in a carpenter's work-shop.

Seth had made his home in this shed for nearly a year, having been given permission to sleep there by one of the owners on a certain cold, stormy night, and he was not averse to telling his friends how he "worked the snap."

This is his version of what may perhaps be called a business transaction:

"I did start in to live with Jim Wardwell's folks. You see, business was mighty good for a spell, an' I got to feelin' way up toney where nothin' short of a reg'lar room would do me. I paid a dollar a week jest for sleepin' there. Ten big, round plunks for ten weeks, an' then I tumbled to myself! You see, it was too rich for my blood when there come a long spell of bad weather, an' I wasn't takin' in more'n twenty-five cents a day, so I snooped 'round to see if I couldn't find somethin' that would be cheaper. Then I struck this shed, an' I says to myself, says I, 'That's jest my size'; but I knew it wouldn't do to try to bite it out of the carpenter's ear 'less I had a pretty good story to put up. I waited four whole days till it turned 'round so cold that the hair on your head would freeze, an' long towards the middle of the afternoon it began to snow. Then I said to myself that the time had come when I'd got to make the trade. I crawled into the carpenter's shop an' give him a pretty straight story. Told him how bad business was – Well, he could see for himself nobody would want boots shined in that weather. He said if I promised him I wouldn't freeze to death, 'cause he didn't want any dead bootblacks on his hands, I could come in for a spell. An' don't you think I wasn't fixed! All the shavings I wanted for a bed right there on the floor, an' if the boss of the Astor House had got down on his knees beggin' me to come to his hotel to stop, I'd said 'no,' 'cause I couldn't be bothered with the airs they put on down that way. How long can I stay here? I ain't troublin' my head 'bout that. I don't let the man what owns the place see me any oftener than I can help, an' so long's I keep out of sight there ain't much chance of my bein' fired."

Seth's home in which he took so much pride was by no means as uncomfortable as one might suppose. With ample material in the shape of short lengths of boards, he had constructed a tiny apartment in one end with so great care that only such wind as was necessary for perfect ventilation found its way in to him, while his bed of shavings was more rest-inviting and probably more cleanly than was the well-worn mattress on which he had slept at Mrs. Wardwell's home.

Once having taken possession of this abode, Seth set about making an honest penny out of his new possessions by allowing Jip Collins to become his roommate upon the payment of fifteen cents each week, and for several months these two lived in apparent harmony, although Seth afterward said that "Jip tired him" by finding so much fault with the Fire Department.

Then came the time when the lodger insisted upon the use of candles at night, and in smoking cigarettes inside the apartment, both of which luxuries or pleasures had been expressly forbidden by Mr. Baxter when he gave the bootblack permission to occupy the premises.

Jip had not departed in a friendly manner. He believed he had good cause for grievance against Seth, and on the day he left the lodgings threatened with many a needless word to "make it hot" for the would-be fireman.

Then Master Bartlett had taken Dan Roberts as a tenant, and the two had been living as peacefully and comfortably as could be expected, save at such times as they heard of new and more startling threats from Jip, up to this moment when the lodger took it upon himself to criticise his landlord's admiration of a fireman's calling.

Seth Bartlett was not a general favorite among the merchants in the boot-blackening and newspaper business, owing to the general belief that he "put on airs" because of his acquaintance with 'Lish Davis, driver of Ninety-four engine, which was stationed near Mr. Baxter's shed.

When trade was dull, instead of joining his brother merchants in pitching pennies or such other games as they might chance to indulge in, Seth spent his time about the engine-house, on the alert for an opportunity to be of benefit to some of the men, hoping thereby to so far earn their favor that he might be looked upon as a welcome visitor.

During no less than two months had he thus apparently loitered around, bent on one object, and pursuing that steadily, without having been so fortunate as to attract particular attention. Then on a certain day, Elisha Davis, the driver, called upon the small workman for a shine.

Seth's freckled face was radiant with delight as he entered the engine-house for the first time, and his big brown eyes wandered from the glittering machine, above the pole of which hung the shining harness, to the apparently complicated apparatus of brass and walnut over the house-watchman's desk.

'Lish, as his comrades spoke of him, was not in the mood to wait until the boy's curiosity had been satisfied, for at any instant an alarm might summon him to duty, and he impatiently called upon Seth to set about his work, or "clear out."

Never before had the bootblack spent so much time over a single pair of boots; he polished them with his brushes until they shone like mirrors, then hardened the gloss with a piece of flannel, and when it seemed as if his work had been done to perfection, blackened the brilliant surface again with the hope of improving what had apparently been a great success.

"You're not any too quick about the job; but there ain't a lad around here that could have done it better," 'Lish said approvingly, and would have given the boy a nickel, but that the latter drew back quickly.

"I don't want anythin' for the shine; I'd like mighty well to give you one every day."

"Do you go around working for thanks?" the driver asked with no little surprise.

"Of course I take my pay from other folks; but I wouldn't let any fireman put up for a shine."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I'm jest the same as one myself – that is, I'm goin' into the Department when I'm old enough."

"Stuck on the business, eh?"

"That's jest the size of it!" Seth cried enthusiastically. "I tend out on most all the fires in Ninety-four's district, an' sometimes I get a chance to sneak inside the lines."

"You do, eh? Well, I'll have an eye out after this, and if I get my hands on you there won't be any more such sneaking."

"Now, what's the matter with my doin' a little thing like that? It don't hurt anybody, an' I pick up a good many points."

"Some day a falling wall will knock you down, or you'll find yourself under the wheels of an engine, and then your 'points' won't be of any particular advantage."

"I can take care of myself as well as you, an' if I don't knock 'round when there's a fire, how am I ever goin' to learn the business?"

"You don't want to learn what's a dog's life at the best. Steer clear of it, lad, and put your mind on anything else, for a man don't last long at this kind of work; even if he doesn't get killed offhand, it's only a question of time – and in many cases a precious short time – before a fireman is laid on the shelf, worn out. Now, clear away from here if you won't take pay for the shine, and remember that I'll have my eye out after this to see you don't get inside the lines."

Seth obeyed promptly with never a protest, and 'Lish said to the watchman at the desk:

"That's a decent kind of a lad, and if he hangs around here any more there's no reason why we shouldn't throw a job in his way now and then."

"How does that fit in with the lesson you read to him?"

"I didn't try to make it fit. If I can scare him out of the notion he's got in his head, it'll show he ain't suited for this kind of a life; but if he sticks at it, I'll believe it's worth while to give him a lift now and then."

If Seth could have heard this brief conversation he would, most likely, have indulged in the latest jig-step he had learned, and perhaps neglected his work as bootblack until hunger forced him to take up the brushes again; but he was ignorant of 'Lish's good intentions, and went away with a heavy heart, yet having no idea of abandoning his efforts to "learn the business."

He did not cease to spend his spare moments about Ninety-four's house, and after 'Lish Davis had many times threatened the direst punishment if he persisted in such a course, but without effect, the members of the company came to look upon Seth as a boy of pluck, who would one day force his way into the Department.

However, no one of Ninety-four's men had given him an opportunity for doing other than blacking boots, and the boy was entirely ignorant of their friendliness toward him.

Such was the general position of affairs on the night when Dan Roberts believed it his duty to mildly reprove Seth for spending so much time in what seemed to be idleness when he should be looking for customers.

After the master of the shed-home had announced so positively that he would be a fireman in due course of time, Dan, remembering how Jip Collins had lost his footing in the household, decided he had done his whole duty in the matter, and straight-way changed the subject of conversation by saying:

"Sam Barney had mighty bad luck to-day. First off, somebody passed a lead dime on him, an' then he lost as many as fifteen cents at one slap."

"How?" Seth asked with no slight show of interest.

"That's what he can't make out. He had the money in the same pocket where he always carries it, when all of a sudden it was gone."

"Somebody touched him."

"Must be, an' Sam thinks he's got an idea who it is."

"Can't be any of the reg'lar gang, 'cause I don't know a feller what would do a trick like that."

"Sam's keepin' mighty close about it, an' I wouldn't wonder if he found the whole business out before long. He comes near to bein' a reg'lar detective, you know."

"Who? Sam?"

"Sure."

"But what does he know about the detective business?"

"Perhaps he's learnin' it same's you are the fireman's racket."

This reduced Seth to silence, and Dan, fearing that he might have given offence, hastened to say in a most friendly tone:

"Of course if a feller studies over anything of that kind he'll soon come somewhere near knowin' a little about it, an' Sam is posted in more ways than one."

"Then how does it happen he let anybody go through him?"

"That's the funny part of it, an' the folks what did it must have been mighty slick, 'cause, you see – "

Dan was interrupted by the sound of footsteps near at hand, and ever on the alert against possible danger, Seth made his way to the door of the shed as he asked sharply:

"Who's there?"

"It's only me," a familiar voice replied, and he knew that the visitor was none other than the boy of whom he and his lodger had just been speaking.

"Dan was tellin' me you'd lost your money. Didn't come up here reckonin' he or I'd got it, did you?"

"I ain't any sich fool as that; but Jip Collins has been makin' a good deal of cheap talk this afternoon, an' I thought perhaps you'd like to know 'bout it."

"He's allers doin' that, an' I reckon it's more wind than anythin' else."

"I wouldn't wonder if this time he got right down to business, an' you ought'er keep a pretty sharp lookout, Seth. These are too snug quarters for you to lose through a feller like Jip."

"Come inside and set down," Master Bartlett said as his lodger joined him at the door of the shed. "Dan an' me is here alone, an' you won't mind if it's dark, 'cause you see I promised Mr. Baxter straight out an' out that there shouldn't ever be any kind of a light inside. That's one of the things Jip kicked about, you know."

Sam Barney promptly accepted the invitation. Being an old friend of Seth's, he was familiar with the household arrangements, and despite the darkness made his way through the shed to the box-like home in one corner, where, after some difficulty, he found a block of wood that served as chair.

Seth threw himself upon the bed of shavings, and Dan lounged negligently near the entrance.

"I should think it would be kind er lonesome in here nights when it's like this," Sam suggested as he tried in vain to distinguish the form of either of his companions.

"Well, it ain't, 'cause Dan an' me don't spend a great deal of time settin' 'round after we once get in. We should have been asleep before this if he hadn't had considerable to say 'bout my tryin' to be a fireman. He'd jest got through when you came."

"Well, say, Seth, you don't b'lieve you're ever goin' to get on to the Department, jest 'cause you run to every fire Ninety-four goes to, do you?"

"I don't know why I can't be a fireman jest as easy as you can a detective, an' some of the fellers say you're workin' mighty hard to be one."

"Well, s'posen I am?" and Sam spoke sharply.

"I ain't kickin' against it; but was only sayin' that it's jest as easy for me to get what I'm tryin' for, as it is for you."

Sam's opinion on the subject may have differed from that of his host, but he refrained from making any reply, and at once began to speak concerning the purpose of his visit.

"Jip Collins is goin' to work some kind of a racket on you, an' I reckon I can guess pretty nigh what it is. He was makin' a good deal of talk this afternoon, an' it seems as though the time had come when you'd better have your eyes open."

"Jip's allers had a good deal to say since I told him he couldn't sleep here any longer; but it never 'mounted to anythin'."

"But look here, Seth, this time I b'lieve he'll do some mischief. He's been tellin' that he'll give you a chance to show how much of a fireman you are, an' I heard him talkin' 'bout touchin' a match to shavings, so's to smoke you out, till I've made up my mind that he's goin' to set fire to this place."

Seth laughed derisively.

"I ain't 'fraid of a feller like him."

"Then it's all right, an' no harm done in my tellin' you; but if I was in your place I'd keep my eyes open pretty wide. Now, Jip Collins can't scare me a little bit; but yet if I was in a snap like this, an' I knew he'd threatened to set fire, it would kind er stir me up a bit."

"Don't you go to thinkin' I ain't glad 'cause you told me, Sam, for I am, only it don't stand to reason a feller like Jip Collins can do much of anythin'."

"Don't you be so sure of that," Dan Roberts cried. "I've heard somethin' 'bout what Jip's been sayin', though I never b'lieved he had it in his head to burn the place up; but this much is sure: if it could be done without his takin' too many chances, he's jest the kind of a feller what would try it. He claims that, accordin' to the trade, you give him the right to stay in this place jest as long as *you* did, and that it was the same as swindlin' him when I come in."

"He knows better than that. I told him we'd try it a spell, an' see how we got along; the very first night I went all over the business with him, an' said if we couldn't hitch together easy like, why

we didn't want to stay in the same place, an' he was satisfied with it. Now, I don't see how I can do anythin' if he's bent on settin' fire to the shed, more'n lookin' 'round pretty sharp before I go to bed."

"If I owned this place same's you do, I should set up nights, 'cause then's when he'll try his game," Sam said with an air of wisdom. "It ain't likely he'll come 'round here in the daytime; but after the men have gone away from the shop it wouldn't be anyways hard for him to get in an' strike a match to some of these shavin's."

"But accordin' to that you couldn't do very much work, if you set up all night watchin' for Jip Collins. You'd have to sleep in the daytime. I don't see how a feller is goin' to earn his livin' any sich way."

"I didn't say you ought'er do it," Sam replied quickly; "but was only tellin' what I believed in. It ain't likely you'd have to stand watch many nights, 'cause the first time you caught Jip you'd put an end to it by pretty nigh thumpin' the life out er him; then I don't reckon he'd come again."

"Do you s'pose he's countin' on doin' this all alone?"

"No; he's got a couple of fellers from Brooklyn that he's chummin' with jest now, an' most likely they're comin' into the game."

"If they do, an' I should watch for Jip till I caught him, there ain't any great show of my thumpin' him very bad if he's got two others to lend a hand."

"You ain't scared of him, are you?" Sam asked quickly.

"Not much I ain't; but I'll keep clear from that kind of a racket till I know somethin' 'bout it. I can't 'ford to have a row, don't you see, 'cause if any of Ninety-four's men heard I was fightin' my way along, as likely as not they'd shut me off from goin' to the engine-house, an' then ag'in when the time comes for me to get into the Department it would give me a black eye if I had the name of doin' sich things. I don't s'pose that would hurt a detective; but they're mighty careful what kind of fellers they have in the Department, an' I don't count on havin' a bad mark to my name four years from now."

"Well, suit yourself about that, of course. It ain't any of my business, only I thought I'd tell you what Jip's sayin', an' I've got to get along over towards Hoboken."

Then, from the noise he made, his hosts understood that Sam Barney was making his way out of the apartment, and Dan asked in a friendly tone if he had made any new discoveries regarding the theft of his money.

"I'm follerin' up a pretty good clue now," Sam replied in a tone calculated to give the hearer an impression that he could tell more if it was necessary, and then with a cheery "So long," he rapidly made his way across the lumber-yard to the street.

CHAPTER II. 'LISH DAVIS

When their visitor had departed Seth and Dan held a long consultation as to the advisability of following Sam's advice in the matter of standing guard during the hours of darkness.

Dan believed that, owing to his having made a study of the detective business, Sam Barney knew better than they what should be done toward warding off the threatened attack, and, regardless of the labor involved, he proposed that a sentinel be stationed just outside the shed door.

"I'll go on guard until twelve o'clock, and you can sleep all that time; then I'll call you an' take my turn at it," Dan said after they had discussed the matter in all its bearings for ten minutes or more.

"How do you count on keepin' awake?"

"That can easily be done, 'cause I'll walk 'round the yard, an' the nights are just about cold enough to make a feller want to move lively."

"I don't believe Jip Collins would dare do what he threatens."

"He would if he thought the game could be worked without too much risk, an' I tell you, Seth, if both of us turn in an' go to sleep he might carry the whole shed away without our knowin' it."

"All right; I'll 'gree to it, though if he should come 'round we mustn't have too much of a row, 'cause you remember what I told Sam 'bout not wantin' to be taken for a fighter in this neighborhood, else I'll never get into the Department."

"You can be pretty certain I shouldn't tackle him alone, an' if them two fellers from Brooklyn 'mount to anythin', why you an' I together wouldn't have too much of a show."

Then, after repeating that he was to be called at midnight in order to perform his full share of the labor, Seth went into the box-like apartment, and Dan began his work as watchman.

During the first half-hour he paced to and from one end of the yard to the other, scrutinizing carefully every unfamiliar object, until it seemed to him the night was more than half spent.

"I must have been here four hours now, an' Sam Barney left 'bout half-past seven, so I haven't got a great while to tramp 'round," he said to himself, and just at that moment the clock on a neighboring steeple struck the hour of eight.

He was both surprised and discouraged at thus learning that the time was passing so slowly, and it suddenly came into his mind that he was very tired.

It was foolish to keep constantly moving around, because if Jip Collins should come he would see the sentinel and make no effort to carry out his threats until the coast was clear.

Therefore it was that Master Roberts built a seat from pieces of board just inside the shed, and seating himself where he could have a full view of the yard while remaining unseen, he continued his duties in what appeared to him to be a much wiser, and certainly a more comfortable fashion.

Here he was protected from the chill wind, and as was only natural, here also he fell asleep even while saying to himself that nothing should tempt him to close his eyes even for a single moment.

When the near-by clock struck the hour of twelve Dan was still wrapped in slumber.

At three o'clock in the morning his repose was most profound, and just at daylight Seth shook him by the shoulder as he asked with a laugh:

"How long have you been asleep?"

Dan's most intimate friends claimed that he never told a lie, and he was not tempted to do so on this occasion, even though the truth provoked mirth at his expense.

"It couldn't have been a great while after eight o'clock. It didn't seem possible I'd go to sleep here, Seth, an' sure I meant to keep my eyes wide open; but the first thing I knew it was done, an' I haven't woke up since."

"Well, that shows how much need there is to watch for Jip Collins. He's all wind, that feller is, an' likes to go 'round town braggin' what he'll do to us; but you'll find every night will be jest like this. As soon as it's dark he gets where he belongs, an' don't take the chances of bein' out too late. Comin' up here in the night an' tryin' any funny business is too much for a coward like him, an' I tell you we might as well go to sleep as to stand guard."

Nothing could have been more convincing to Dan than this experience. When the amateur detective left them it seemed positive Jip Collins would attempt to work mischief before daybreak, and had he been forced to lie down on the bed of shavings by the side of his landlord, Dan Roberts would have felt decidedly uneasy in mind.

Now, however, since he had kept such poor watch, and it was evident the enemy had not been in that vicinity, he came to look at the matter much as did Seth.

Although no absolute decision was arrived at regarding what should be done in the future as to standing guard, it was understood between these two inmates of the shed-home, that such precaution was unnecessary.

Among his other conveniences for housekeeping Seth had a tin biscuit-box which served him as cupboard, and the two were in the custom of bringing home at night sufficient for their breakfast next morning.

It was necessary Dan should be ready to begin business at a very early hour, and when the sun rose these two merchants were usually making ready for the day's work.

On this particular morning, however, they lingered over the meal, having much spare time at their disposal because of Seth's early awakening, and shortly after daybreak both set out, one to visit the newspaper offices and the other to loiter in the vicinity of the engine-house until the firemen should require his services, for now nearly all the company patronized the lad, whom they were pleased to call "the amateur."

It is but right, however, to state that he was paid for such services. After that first morning when Seth had refused to take money from 'Lish Davis, he was given to understand that when the members of the company wanted boots blacked they were to pay for the labor, otherwise some other of the fraternity would be called upon.

Seth begged for the privilege of "shinin' for the crowd free," declaring that he should not lose any money through such gratuitous labor, for he would be familiarizing himself with the indoor details of a fireman's life.

To this, however, 'Lish Davis made answer:

"See here, my son, you've got your living to earn, and can't afford to give up bread an' butter for the sake of getting on to our work. We'll pay for the shines, or you don't put your nose inside this house, and as for finding out what we do hereabout, why it's nothing but drudgery. Cleaning harnesses, setting the machines to rights, and keeping the place neat as a new pin make up the bulk of the work. So take a nickel for every shine you give, or out you go, never to come back."

From that hour Seth had been paid regularly, and, thanks to such patronage, he was in a great measure independent of other customers, because there was seldom a day when he did not earn at least twenty-five cents from Ninety-four's men.

Thus it can be understood that he was warranted in loitering near the engine-house until his patrons should be ready for his services, and on this particular morning the first man who came out of doors found him seated on his box, leaning against the building, whistling cheerily.

"Feeling pretty good this morning, ain't you, kid?" the fireman asked rather as a greeting than for the purpose of gaining information, and the boy replied in a tone of perplexity:

"I ain't certain about that, Mr. Walters."

"Not sure whether you're feeling good or not?"

"No, an' that's a fact. Has Mr. Davis turned out yet?"

"Well, s'pose he has? Do you want to consult with him?"

"That's 'bout the size of it."

"He's inside with the horses; go right through."

In order that he might not be an unwelcome visitor, Seth had had sufficient good sense never to enter the building without an express invitation or permission, and perhaps because he was thus scrupulous the men were all the more willing to admit him.

"Hello! What's up?" 'Lish Davis asked as the boy appeared thus unannounced.

"If you ain't very busy I'd like to talk with you 'bout somethin' that's botherin' my pardner an' me a good bit since last night."

"Fire away, lad. I reckon I've got time enough to listen to the story, unless it is in more than one chapter."

"It ain't so very long, an' I'll be quick as I can," Seth replied, and then he told, without going too much into detail, of his trouble with Jip Collins, and of the latest threats which the boy had made, according to Sam Barney's statement, concluding by saying:

"Now, I don't believe Jip's got sand enough to do any sich thing as settin' fire to the shed, an' it's sure he didn't try it last night, 'cause he had every chance; but I've been thinkin' 'bout it while I was waitin' for the house to be opened, an' it kind-er come into my mind that perhaps he might make a bluff at it."

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything some of these young villains did," 'Lish Davis said after a brief time of reflection. "The general run of street boys get an idea into their heads, and don't stop to realize what the consequences may be. Let me see, you live in the rear of Baxter's carpenter shop, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's a brick building butts up against the back end of that lot, so your only chance of getting out would be to come through the lumber-yard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it wouldn't amount to very much as a fire; but in case one got started there, you and your partner would stand a good show of getting a dose."

Seth understood the driver to mean that there was danger of being suffocated by the smoke, and he admitted that such might be the case, but added:

"We can't do as Sam Barney says, an' set up every night watchin', else when would we sleep?"

"Why don't you leave this place for two or three days, and find some other quarters?"

"That never'd do, 'cause jest as soon as the fellers knew I'd gone, they'd snoop 'round, an' I'd be thrown out of a home mighty quick."

"You might get Baxter to let you put a lock on the shed; that would keep them out."

"I wouldn't like to do it, 'cause you see I've got an idea the carpenter has forgot all about my sleepin' there, an' perhaps if I was to flash up so fresh askin' for a lock on the bedroom door he'd think it was 'bout time for me to skip."

"Well, look here, Seth, you might as well give me a shine, and while you 're doing that I'll see if I can think of a way out for you. I'm inclined to believe the same as your detective friend does, that it stands you in hand to keep a pretty good watch, and I'll speak to the cop on this beat."

Seth set about his professional duties without delay, and by the time one boot had been polished so perfectly that it reflected surrounding objects almost as well as a mirror, the fireman asked abruptly:

"How old are you, kid?"

"Fourteen, accordin' to the way I figger it."

"Don't you know?"

"Well, you see, old Miss Washburn – she was the woman that claimed to bring me up, though it's precious little she did towards it – wasn't no ways certain herself, but that's what she allowed, so it's good enough for me."

"Haven't got any folks, eh?"

"Well, I did have a mother, you know, till I was a couple of years old, so Miss Washburn says."

"Where's your father?"

"You see, I never had one, leastways not what you would call a real father, 'cause when a man is a reg'lar gin-pig, no decent feller is goin' to own up that he's his relation. The last time I saw him he was goin' down on the Island for ninety days, an' that was as much as three years ago."

"You've still got the fool idea in your mind that you're going to be a fireman?"

"It ain't any fool idea, Mr. Davis, 'cause it's a fact. That's jest what I count on bein'."

"Look here, my son, I've been thinking about you a considerable bit since I found it was no use trying to scare you out of the plan, and in a year's time or so, I reckon, between the captain and Walters and me, we can get you in up to headquarters. Now, don't jump so! I didn't mean we allowed you could go there as a recruit; but the captain was saying the other night that we might work it so's you could get some kind of a berth there – sweeping floors, washing windows, and the like of that, which, if you keep your ears and eyes open, would amount to the same as if you went into actual training. You ain't the lad I've got in my eye if you couldn't soon work your way into one of the classes."

"If I only might!" Seth replied emphatically, with a long indrawing of the breath. "If I only might!"

"I allow we'll work it, lad; but you must grow a good bit 'twixt now and then."

"I'm hopin' to get an early spring moustache before long. Sim Jepson's got one, an' I'm goin' to do the same as he did, 'cause the fellers say he put somethin' on to make the hair grow."

The driver laughed long and loud at this announcement made in the gravest tone, and called upon every idle man in the building to come and hear the "amateur's" latest scheme for getting into the Department.

The boy's face flushed a deep red before 'Lish Davis was willing to cease laughing at or repeating the proposition; but finally he wearied of his sport, and, his boots having long since been polished, said in a serious tone:

"I'll speak to the cop on this beat about your friend Collins, and in the meantime make it your business to hunt him up. Let the little scoundrel know you've told me; that I'm going to post the policeman, and that he'll get a mighty hot reception if he should try any of his firebug business. I reckon some such hint will knock the mischief out of his head, unless he's a born idiot."

Then Mr. Davis walked away, intent on the morning duties, and Seth set about his regular work until all the company had been served, after which he started down-town in accordance with the plan proposed by the driver.

Owing to customers, and they were unusually plentiful on this day, it was not until late in the afternoon that he arrived at City Hall Square, where Jip Collins was most often to be found, and here he met his partner.

Dan was delighted at learning what steps had been taken for their safety, although because of the previous night's experience he had begun to doubt if their enemy would dare carry his threats into effect, and the two at once made search for Master Collins.

He had been seen thereabouts within an hour by more than one of Seth's acquaintances; but now although the two searched until nightfall it was impossible to accomplish their purpose.

It seemed much as if Jip Collins, learning that Seth was in the vicinity, believed it wisest to keep out of sight, and after the night had fully come Dan said impatiently:

"It's no use spendin' so much time on that duffer, 'cause he won't show up again to-night. We've told so many of the fellers what 'Lish Davis said, that Jip will be sure to hear of it before he goes to bed, an' perhaps that will be just as well as if you had met him, 'cause there might have been a row. Let's go up and get a bowl of five-cent soup and a piece of pie. I can stand a ten-cent spread to-night, an' business has been good enough with you."

To this proposition Seth assented, and the two made their way to a certain restaurant on Chatham Street, where, after an unusually profitable day's work, they were in the custom of feasting.

If there was any one thing in which Dan Roberts excelled it was in his ability to eat very fast and for a long while.

He ordered the waiter to bring him the pie and the soup at the same time, and it seemed to Seth as if he had but just begun before his partner was finished.

"I reckon I can take one more bowl of that soup, an' then be through before you are," he said, thoughtfully. "I made pretty near forty cents, an' it's kind'er tough if a feller can't spend fifteen of it, eh?"

"Go ahead if you want the soup, an' are willin' to pay for it. It don't make any difference to me, 'cause I'll stay here till you're filled plum full; but I tell you what it is, Dan, you're gettin' into an awful habit of eatin'."

"Is that what you call a habit?"

"Course it is. If you didn't think about it every minute, you wouldn't be so hungry."

"I'm pretty near starved all the time as it is, an' I don't know how I'd get along with any less," Dan replied apologetically, and then, the soup having been brought, he gave his undivided attention to the pleasing task.

After the feast the boys, having nothing of special importance to do, lounged leisurely towards their home in the shed, and it was nearly nine o'clock before they crept into the box that served as chamber, both feeling tired and sleepy.

Not until they were inside did Seth realize that they had not searched the lumber-yard, and he insisted that they go at once to make certain no enemy was hidden near at hand.

"What's the use of that?" Dan asked petulantly. "You can be sure Jip Collins ain't anywhere 'round here, 'cause some of the fellers have told him what we said long before this, an' he'll give the place a wide berth."

"You ain't sure he knows that I told 'Lish Davis 'bout the threats he was makin'."

"Well, he didn't come last night, an' you was the one that said he wouldn't dare to show his nose 'round."

"I know it; but somehow or other, Dan, it seems as if we ought'er look out a little sharper, 'cause he might be fool enough to try such a game."

"An' if he did after tellin' everybody about it, he'd go up the river ten or fifteen years, sure – I ain't certain but that it would be a life sentence."

"Yes, I know all that, Dan, but Jip ain't the kind of a feller to figger on sich things, an' if he gets a notion right solid in his head, there's no knowin' how big a fool he might make of himself, so let's go out an' have a look 'round."

It was with an ill grace that Dan followed Seth, and even then his share in the search was of but little service owing to the fact that he hurried from one part of the yard to the other without making an effort to ascertain if any one was secreted in the many convenient hiding-places near at hand.

After ten minutes or more had been spent by the two boys, Seth performing his work faithfully and Dan shirking, the partners retired, and it was as if they had but just stretched themselves at full length on the bed of shavings when both were asleep.

If Dan had been acting the part of sentinel just inside the shed door an hour after the two retired, he would have seen in the gloom three dark forms emerge from behind a pile of boards which he had failed to look over carefully, and advance cautiously toward the shed door, halting when they were twenty feet or more away.

Had he been there he would have recognized one of these as Jip Collins, and most probably suspected that the other two were the boys from Brooklyn spoken of by the amateur detective.

He would also have heard the conversation which followed; but he did not because he was asleep, and the lad who was willing to commit a crime in order to compass his revenge found no impediment in the way.

"They're snorin' by this time, that's certain," Jip said to his comrades, "an' even if they wasn't we might talk here for an hour without their hearin', 'cause Seth's room is in the farther end of the shed, and there's a whole pile of lumber between him an' the door. He don't believe in going out much after he's got inside the yard, for fear the carpenter will see him, so we can make up our minds that there's nothin' to stop us."

"Where do you count on starting the fire?"

"Right close by the shed door, of course. I know where to get a lot of shavings."

"But it won't do to set it so near, because the fellers might be burned to death, an' that would be a pretty piece of business, Jip Collins."

"Gettin' scared, eh?"

"You don't want to talk to me 'bout gettin' scared, a feller who'd let another only half his size back him down same's you did last night."

"If you ain't scared, what are you makin' a row 'bout now? We 'greed to put a fire here so's to singe Seth an' Dan a little."

"Yes, I agreed to that much; but I don't count on killing 'em."

"Neither do I."

"But how can you help it if you build the fire right close to the door, when there's no other way for 'em to get out?"

"Don't you s'pose they've got sense enough to wake up before the thing gets too far along?"

"I've heard of folks bein' smothered to death while they was asleep, an' I ain't in this game if that's the way you're goin' to work it."

"Then back out if you're scared, an' I'll do it."

Without paying any further attention to his companions, Jip made his way to the rear of the carpenter's shop, where he knew would be found an ample supply of light wood and shavings, and when he returned, his arms filled with the inflammable material, neither of his friends from Brooklyn could be seen.

CHAPTER III. JIP'S REVENGE

If Jip Collins had not accused the Brooklyn boys of being afraid, it is doubtful if he would have dared to set fire to the shed.

Now it seemed to him as if he must carry out the proposed crime, or set himself down as a coward, and because of being deficient in bravery his one fear was lest such fact should be generally known.

He was on the spot; the materials for kindling a blaze were in his arms, and it appeared at that moment to him as if it was absolutely necessary he should perform what he had so often threatened without really intending to do.

The shavings and light wood were laid at the door of the shed. Jip was careful not to place them in such a manner as would be best calculated to produce the fiercest blaze; but dropped them without heed, as if saying to himself that chance should decide whether the building caught fire or not.

He drew several matches from his pocket, and looked around apprehensively, hearing in every noise the footsteps of an officer coming to drag him to prison.

After thus hesitating several moments he understood beyond peradventure that he was alone – that nothing save his own conscience prevented him from carrying into effect his plan of revenge.

It should be said that at this moment Jip failed to realize what might be the consequences of such an act.

One of the Brooklyn boys had suggested the possibility that those in the shed might be burned to death if the fire was started near the door; but to this Jip had given little heed. He could not believe that two active lads like Seth and Dan would be overpowered by a little smoke, and felt assured the firemen would arrive so soon after the blaze had been kindled that very little damage could ensue.

After this brief time of hesitation he turned toward the pile of wood and shavings once more, with a gesture as if impatient with himself for delaying.

Then he lighted a match, protecting the tiny flame with both hands until it was a sturdy blaze, after which, instead of holding it to the shavings, he threw it away.

For one instant his conscience had triumphed; but it was only for an instant.

He lighted another match, hurriedly this time, as if fearing he might not have the courage to apply it, and when it was fully on fire muttered to himself:

"I'll drop it an' take the chances. If she burns, it's a go, an' if she don't, I've done as much as I've threatened."

He suited the action to the words, and not daring to wait for the result, ran hurriedly into the deserted street.

It was his intention to continue on, halting only when having arrived at his home; but now that the mischief might have been done he was so thoroughly alarmed that it seemed impossible he could leave the vicinity.

Partially concealing himself in a doorway he waited almost breathlessly, hoping fervently the match had been extinguished when it fell, and as the seconds passed, each one seeming a full minute, a great hope came into his heart, for he believed chance had decreed that the fire should not be kindled.

Then a stifled cry of fear burst from his lips, for he had suddenly seen a bright tongue of flame leap up, and he knew the crime had been committed in fact as well as spirit.

At this moment he remembered the words of his friends from Brooklyn as distinctly as if they had but just been spoken, and like a flash came the realization that perhaps he had done that which would result in the loss of human life.

The flames increased until they were reflected on the wall of brick in the rear, and it seemed to Jip as if the shed must already be in a blaze.

"Why don't somebody send in an alarm?" he said, speaking aloud in his anxiety, although there was no one at hand to hear him. "Seth an' Dan will be burned to death if the engines don't get here mighty soon!"

Then came the thought, for he believed the fire was already beyond control, that it would be impossible to rescue the boys – that he was indeed a murderer, for it seemed to him as if an exceedingly long time had elapsed since he first saw the tiny ray of light.

Now his one desire was that an alarm might be sent in, yet no one could be seen or heard in either direction.

Each moment of delay increased the peril, and when he had waited in most painful suspense for ten seconds it was impossible to remain inactive any longer.

Far down the street a red light could be seen, denoting the location of a fire-alarm station, and he ran toward it as he had never run before, so nervous when he would have opened the outer door of the box that for two or three seconds it was impossible to turn the handle.

When he did so the sound of the warning gong, intended to notify the policeman on that beat that the box was being opened, caused him to start back in alarm, for he fancied the officers of justice were already on his trail.

Jip had many times seen a call rung in, and in the merest fraction of time he recovered from his fears as he understood the cause of this sudden noise.

Then he opened the outer door and pulled down the lever once; and from that instant until the first engine appeared, which was Ninety-four, it seemed to him as if an hour had passed, although in fact the company of which Seth considered himself in a certain degree a member, had responded to the call in less than three minutes.

Jip was standing by the signal-box when a rumble and roar in the distance told of the coming of Ninety-four, and he watched as if fascinated the fountain of sparks which went up from the smoke-stack; listened to the sharp clicking of the horses' shoes on the pavement; to the din of the gongs, and the cries of startled pedestrians in the rear – hearing everything, seeing everything, but yet all the while as if in a dream.

Nearer and nearer came the puffing engine drawn by three plunging horses as if it had been no more than a toy, and then, his brain still in a whirl, Jip heard as if from afar off, the question:

"Where's the fire?"

"In Baxter's carpenter shop!"

The engine was some distance beyond him by the time he had answered the question, and from the opposite direction he heard the rush of a second on-coming machine; then here and there the rumble of wheels and hoof-beats of horses driven at their utmost speed, until it seemed as if by that one pull on the lever of the signal-box he had aroused the entire city.

Now Seth and Dan would be saved if they were yet alive.

At that moment there was no hope in Jip's mind that they could still be living.

It was as if he had lighted that match an hour ago, so slowly had the seconds passed, and with the thought of them as dead – burned to death through his act – came wildest terror.

He fancied every fireman on Ninety-four had recognized him as they rode past in such mad haste, and knew him to be the one who had committed the crime.

There was no place in his mind for any thought save that of his own danger, and instantly he started at full speed down the street, never daring to so much as glance behind him, although no man pursued.

When the "joker," which is the name given by firemen to the combination-bell, in Ninety-four's house rang out the number of the call sent in by Jip, and as the horses, released by the mechanical

trip moved by the joker, dashed out of their stalls, 'Lish Davis believed he knew beyond a question to what particular building they were summoned.

Instantly that which Seth had told him came into his mind, and with it the painful thought that perhaps by his own neglect he had contributed to what might be a fatal disaster.

"And I never so much as warned the policeman on this beat!" he said to himself as he leaped to his seat on the engine, snapped into place the belt that would hold him there, and with a quick jerk on the reins released the harness-catch.

Ninety-Four had seldom left the house more quickly, and certainly the horses were never urged to a higher rate of speed than now, when 'Lish Davis charged himself with criminal neglect.

During the minute and a half which intervened before they reached the station from which the alarm had been sent, the driver of Ninety-four conceived an absolute affection for the boy who had so persistently followed up his idea of becoming a fireman, and, prompted by the prickings of his own conscience, perhaps, he muttered to himself:

"The kid shall go into the Department if I can put him there, providing it so be we find – "

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant it was to 'Lish Davis as if he must in a certain degree take upon himself the results of this night's work.

When they dashed past the station he needed not Jip's reply to tell him whence came the glow of light which could now be seen reflected on the taller buildings, and Ninety-four got water a full two minutes before any other engine.

"That little bootblack, Seth Bartlett, sleeps in the shed behind the shop," 'Lish called hoarsely as the men ran swiftly through the lumber-yard, and, hearing the words even above the tooting of whistles, the sounding of gongs from the on-coming engines, and the puffing of steam, Jerry Walters cried:

"I'll look out for him, 'Lish!"

Every man heard the driver's cry, and knew that the amateur fireman was in danger.

They also knew where he slept, having been given by the boy himself a description of his home, and with the first crash of Jerry's axe as he burst in the door of the shed, the men set up a shout which sounded like music in 'Lish's ears.

It was Jip Collins who had started the fire, and he also was the means of saving the lives of Seth and Dan after the mischief had been wrought, for the firemen gained the box-like apartment not one moment too soon.

All unconscious of the danger which threatened, the boys had slept on until the noisome vapor overcame without awakening them, and when Jerry carried the two out into the street through the piles of lumber which were already beginning to blaze, he said to Joe Black as the latter advanced to help him take the apparently lifeless bodies to one of the patrol-wagons drawn up near at hand:

"I'm afraid the amateur has got more of a dose than he can well stand."

Ten minutes later, when Seth woke to consciousness, Dan was lying by his side in the bottom of the wagon, and 'Lish Davis bent over him.

"It must be that Jip Collins did what he threatened," he said, speaking with difficulty because of the parched, burning sensation in his throat.

"Ay, lad, that's what he did, and this town won't be big enough to hold him after daylight tomorrow morning."

"But why are you here, Mr. Davis? What about the team?"

"Ben Dunton is on hand, and I'm off duty for the time being till I can make sure whether you're alive or not."

Seth knew that Ben Dunton was 'Lish's "relief," therefore the driver was not neglecting his duty by thus staying with him.

"Is it a bad fire?" he asked.

"The shop and about half the lumber-yard will go. It's nothing to speak of, lad, save for the fact of its having been kindled that murder might be done."

"I don't believe Jip Collins really meant to kill us. He most likely thought we would get out before it was very bad. Is Dan all right?"

"There's nothing much the matter with me," Master Roberts replied in what he intended should be a cheery tone. "I've been awake quite a spell, an' thought you'd never open your eyes."

"Sure you're all right?" 'Lish asked, shaking Seth gently as if doubting whether the boy was fully conscious.

"Of course I am, an' now we're inside the lines there's a good chance for me to look 'round after points. I'm going into the yard to see what Ninety-four's men are doin'."

"I reckon you'll lay where you are for a spell," 'Lish said with a grim smile, speaking half to himself, and in such a low tone that neither of the boys heard the words.

Seth attempted to rise; but had no more than gotten up on one elbow when a most violent nausea assailed him, and he fell back on the rubber blankets which had served as pillow, feeling much as he looked – desperately ill.

"Don't feel like wiggling 'round to any great extent, eh?" 'Lish asked, understanding full well the boy's sensations, and so relieved at knowing his life had been saved that the temporary sickness seemed as nothing.

"I don't see what makes me feel so bad," and Seth did his best to speak in a careless tone.

"If it so be you ever get into the Department, lad, this ain't the first dose you'll take, nor the heaviest. It's the smoke which came nigh to strangling you, and there ain't a man that answers to Ninety-four's roll-call who can't tell exactly how you feel."

"I've got to brace up pretty soon, or Dan an' me will have to walk 'round the streets the balance of the night, now our housekeepin' is broken up."

"Don't worry about that, lad. I reckon the captain will give you a shelter till daylight, and after that we'll see what can be done."

Then 'Lish, understanding that he could render no assistance, left the two boys to join his comrades, who were fighting the fire as gallantly in the lumber-yard as they would have done at a palatial residence.

"So Jip Collins had sand enough to try an' burn us out, didn't he?" Dan said interrogatively. "I'll run across that duffer one of these days, and when I get through with him he won't set anybody else's shed on fire!"

"The police will most likely get hold of him, 'cause Mr. Davis knows all about what he threatened, an' even if Sam Barney didn't let out the whole story, the driver will."

Having said this Seth relapsed into silence, for his bodily condition was such that it seemed a severe exertion to so much as speak.

The fire was subdued, but not extinguished, when the patrol-wagon was driven away with Ben Dunton on the front seat, and Dan asked in a tone of awe:

"Do you s'pose they're goin' to carry us up to the engine-house?"

"It seemed as though that was what Mr. Davis meant; but yet I'm afraid we're bound for the hospital."

"Well, say, you don't catch me inside of one! I ain't goin' to flock in with a lot of dyin' folks jest 'cause I've got a little smoke down my throat," and Dan, who was not suffering as much as his partner, attempted to scramble to his feet, whereat Ben Dunton shouted gruffly:

"Lay still there, you two kids, or I'll come down and know the reason why!"

"We ain't goin' to no hospital!" Dan cried angrily.

"Who asked you to? You don't allow we're running an ambulance for such kids as you, eh?"

"Where are we goin'?"

"Lay still and you'll find out."

Seth had learned enough regarding a fireman's life to know that the first engine at the scene of a conflagration must be the last to leave, therefore wherever Ben Dunton might be taking them, there was little chance of seeing 'Lish Davis until the following morning.

To the great delight of both the boys the patrol-wagon was drawn up in front of Ninety-four's house, and Dunton asked:

"Can you lads get out alone, or shall I lend a hand?"

"Are we goin' to stay here all night?" Dan asked suspiciously.

"Of course you are. It's the captain's orders, and you're to have 'Lish Davis's bed."

This was sufficient to cause a decided change in Seth's condition.

The fact that he was to sleep in the engine-house as if he had been a member of the Department was so great an honor that for the time being his illness was banished.

The boys alighted from the vehicle without assistance and followed Ben Dunton into the building, where a report was made to the house-watchman regarding the guests, who were then conducted to the floor above.

"There's where you're to sleep," the fireman said, pointing to the driver's bed. "And you want to get in some precious big licks, for it ain't often 'Lish Davis puts himself out in this fashion for anybody, especially when he's likely to be on duty six or eight hours. No skylarking, now, but get between the sheets as quick as you know how."

No second bidding was necessary, and five minutes later the two boys were enjoying a greater degree of comfort than they had ever fancied would be possible, Seth refusing to join in the conversation which his partner would have started, in order to give himself wholly up to building air-castles, all based on the Fire Department with himself rising from the grade of recruit to that of battalion-chief.

Slumber closed their eyelids in due time, however, and they journeyed so far into the recesses of Dreamland that neither heard the home-coming of Ninety-four, nor the bustle consequent upon cleaning up and making ready for duty once more.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Seth awakened, and for the first time since having been told he was to sleep in 'Lish's bed, he realized how much inconvenience and possible discomfort he might have caused the driver.

"Say, Dan, we did a mighty mean thing to sleep here, an' perhaps Mr. Davis had to set up all night. Hustle your clothes on as quick as you know how, so's we can get down-stairs an' tell him we're ashamed of it."

Neither of the boys was feeling any the worse for the painful experience of the previous night, and in a remarkably short space of time they were ready to descend, but not by the stairs.

For the first time in his life Seth enjoyed the pleasure of sliding down the pole to the floor below, and this method of descending served to strengthen certain portions of the air-castles he had built just before falling asleep.

The driver was found grooming one of the horses, and greeted the boys before either could speak, by saying cheerily:

"Well, how are you getting along after your dose of last night?"

"First-rate, sir. We're as well as ever; but feelin' mighty mean to think we used your bed an' kept you up all night."

"You didn't do anything of the kind, lad. We got back about four o'clock, and I found plenty of spare beds for the short nap I wanted. I reckon you lost everything you owned, eh?"

"Yes, sir; but that wasn't very much. My box, brushes, and what we had brought home for breakfast."

"How will you get another outfit?"

"I guess I've got money enough for a second-hand box and brushes; but if I haven't some of the fellers will lend me what's needed, an' I'm goin' now to pick up the things, so's to get back in time to do the shinin' here."

"There are brushes and blacking belonging to the house, and you can use them this morning, which will give you a little extra towards buying a new outfit. Haven't been to breakfast yet, have you?"

"That don't count, even if we haven't, 'cause we can get something later," and Seth, knowing where to find the tools of his trade, set about his customary morning's work, while Dan lounged here and there, feeling that he was a very fortunate lad in thus being a guest of Ninety-four's men.

Half an hour later, in company with Dan, Seth, richer by thirty cents, set out in search of a second-hand box and brushes.

Save in the way of questioning him concerning the boy who was believed to have started the fire in the lumber-yard, none of the men treated the bootblack other than in their customary manner, and Seth departed with the fear in his mind that they were glad to be rid of him.

No sooner had he gone, however, than 'Lish Davis addressed three or four of his comrades who were near at hand, saying emphatically:

"Look here, that boy Seth is bent on getting into the Department, and I tell you when a lad sticks to one thing as he's stuck to that for the last year, some one ought to lend him a hand."

"You ain't thinking of getting him taken on here, are you, 'Lish?" Walters asked with a laugh.

"I've got a plan in my head, and allow that the rest of you can help me through with it. If all hands of us turn to we can get the boy a job at headquarters, and he ain't the lad I've taken him to be if he don't put himself in the way of being received as a recruit when he's grown stouter and a little older. Now, such a lift as that won't be much for us, and it may be the making of him."

"Do you allow it's a good idea, 'Lish Davis, to help a boy into the Department when he might learn a trade which wouldn't be that of risking his life two or three times every day?"

"Would you turn tinker, or tailor, or candlestick-maker, Jerry Walters, in order to avoid risking your life two or three times a day?"

"It's different with me, 'Lish. I've been here so long I couldn't give it up."

"And it would be almost as hard for that lad to give up his idea. I tried to frighten it out of him when he first came around here; but he didn't scare worth a cent, and I tell you again that he'll make a cracking good man for some company one of these days."

"If there's anything I can do to help the thing along, you may count me in," Walters replied, and the other members of the company who heard the remark pledged themselves to the same thing.

"We'll let him hoe his own row till everything is ready, 'cause it may do harm if he gets to thinking somebody is trying to give him a lift."

"What's to be done with the kid who started the fire?"

"I repeated to the captain all the "amateur" told me, so I reckon he'll be attended to. Is Ben Dunton in the house?"

"Upstairs asleep."

"Then I'm going out for a bit. I want to see the battalion-chief."

"Going to strike for Seth while the iron's hot, eh?"

"That's what I'm thinking of, Jerry," and while Seth Bartlett was making ready to continue his business of blacking boots, 'Lish Davis began in his behalf the efforts which he believed would result favorably, so far as the boy's ambition was concerned.

CHAPTER IV. SAM THE DETECTIVE

The sidewalk merchants in the vicinity of the post-office were well informed of Seth Bartlett's loss by the time he arrived in that section of the city.

Those who had not heard the story from Dan Roberts read an account of the destruction of Baxter Brothers' carpenter-shop in the morning papers during the early part of the day before the business rush began, and thus it was Seth found himself the centre of a sympathizing crowd of acquaintances as soon as he crossed City Hall Park.

Master Barney had but just returned from a journey supposed to have been taken in search of the boy who had robbed him, and he immediately cast aside his own business troubles in order to "work the case against Jip Collins," as he expressed it.

Sam was among the throng gathered to meet the homeless bootblack, and when others would have asked for further particulars regarding the conflagration, even though Dan had given all the information in his possession, the amateur detective checked the curious ones by saying sharply:

"This ain't any time to talk foolishness, 'cause if I'm goin' to take up this case I must get right down to it before Jip has a chance to run very far."

"What do you mean by takin' up the case?" Seth asked in surprise, and Dan Roberts replied quickly:

"Sam says he's willin' to go after Jip Collins, an' will stick at it till he catches him."

"That's what I've 'greed to, an' I'm in dead earnest, Seth. Of course you can't afford to pay a reg'lar detective a whole lot of money jest to find Jip for you; but I can do the work as well, an' you needn't put out a cent more'n I'm called on to spend for expenses."

"What do *you* want of Jip?" Seth asked in surprise.

"To have him 'rested for settin' fire to your shed, of course."

"I don't want anythin' of the kind. I reckon he's sorry enough for what he did without my tryin' to make more trouble for him."

"Do you mean to say you're willin' he should burn the shed an' come pretty nigh killin' you?"

"Course I ain't willin'; but now it's been done there's no need for me to try to put him in jail, 'cause it won't do any good, an' I'd feel bad to think any feller I knew was up to Sing Sing doin' time."

It was evident that but few of the sidewalk merchants agreed with Seth in the view he took of the matter.

The majority of them believed Jip should be pursued until captured, and then punished to the full extent of the law.

Some were inclined to the opinion that Sam Barney might possibly succeed in running down the culprit, but these credulous ones were the most intimate friends of the amateur detective, and by far the larger number of the throng thought a formal complaint should be lodged with the officers of the law against the boy who had so nearly caused the death of Seth and Dan.

Sam Barney was literally astounded at the forgiving spirit which the would-be fireman displayed, and this first burst of astonishment soon gave way to something like anger.

He said in what was intended to be a fine tone of irony:

"Well, you're too good, Seth Bartlett, that's what's the matter with you! Here's Dan been tellin' that you were jest about the same as dead when Ninety-four's men got in there. The snugest house in town burned, an' you thrown out of a home! After all that you've got the nerve to say there's no reason why we should catch Jip Collins! I ain't certain as you've got anythin' to do with it. S'posen the cops find out what was done – an' most likely Ninety-four's driver that you claim is a chum of yours will tell 'em – how are you goin' to help it if they try to find him?"

"I can't, an' that's a fact; but I haven't got to start the thing myself."

"What would you do if you should meet him right here this very minute?"

"I'm 'fraid I'd thump him."

"'Fraid!" Sam repeated sarcastically. "Why, you ought'er pound his head off, an' then have him jugged."

"You see, it's jest like this, fellers," Seth said in an apologetic tone as he looked around at his friends and acquaintances, understanding full well that they disapproved of his leniency. "It's jest like this: If a feller gets to fightin' on the street he's likely to be pulled in for it, an' then perhaps he has to go down to the Island for ten days or so. Now you all know I'm tryin' to work into the Department, an' what kind of show would I stand if there was a record like that against me? Fellers who get up a name for fightin' don't 'mount to very much, 'cordin' to what I've seen, an' that's why I said I was 'fraid I might thump Jip. You see, what's done now will stand against me when I'm old enough to be a fireman, an' I've got to look out mighty careful for that. Now, so far's puttin' Jip in jail goes, I don't want anythin' to do with it."

"I can't see how that's goin' to give you a bad name," some one of the throng cried.

"I reckon it couldn't; but it might stand against Jip when he grows up, an' if I should let Sam take the case I'd be hurtin' Jip more'n he did me, so it wouldn't be fair."

"But you don't allow folks can go 'round settin' fire to houses an' tryin' to burn other people up without havin' to pay for it?"

"Course I don't, an' Jip ought'er get it hot for what he's done; but I won't be the one to send him up the river."

"If that's the way Seth feels 'bout it we haven't got any right to kick," Dan suggested, and Sam Barney cried sharply:

"I say we have! Jest 'cause Seth is gettin' so awful good on account of wantin' to go into the Department, there's no reason why we should let Jip Collins sneak away after what's been done, an' I'll take up the case on my own hook rather than see him wiggle out of it."

"Have you got the feller yet what stole your money?" Dan asked in a meaning tone, whereat the remainder of the company set up a loud shout of derision, much to the amateur detective's discomfort.

"If I haven't that's no sign I can't. I reckon I know enough 'bout the business to handle two cases at the same time, if I want to, an' you'll see if I don't pull Jip Collins over the coals before I'm a week older."

Then Sam stalked away with the bearing of one who feels that he has been injured, and the remainder of the party discussed the events of the previous night without further reference to the arrest of the evil-doer.

When the subject had been exhausted Seth made inquiries concerning any bootblack's outfit which might be for sale, and half an hour later he was once more the owner of a box and brushes.

"The fire has cost me seventy cents, besides the breakfast we lost when the place was burned," he said to Dan, and the latter replied mournfully:

"I'd have been willin' to give a good deal more'n that right out of my own pocket, poor as trade has been, than to lose the snuggest lodgin'-place in this town. We'll never find anythin' that will come up with that shed."

"Cryin' won't help out on it. What we've got to do is to hunt up another shanty where we can bunk in without givin' up too much money, for after havin' to buy a new outfit I can't afford to fool away good dollars payin' for a bed at a reg'lar lodgin'-house."

"You'll never get anythin' that will come up to the shanty Jip Collins set on fire," Dan replied sadly, and as the realization of their loss came to him with redoubled force now that the time had arrived when they must search for new lodgings, he gave way to anger against the boy who had wrought them so much mischief, as if believing this would mend matters.

Seth waited patiently until his partner had indulged in such outburst several moments, after which he said sagely:

"Now, look here, Dan, scoldin' won't fix things the least little bit, an' there's no sense in keepin' on tellin' 'bout how big a villain Jip Collins is. What we've got to do is to hustle, an' in the long run we'll find that will pay better'n ravin'. Do you know of any place where we can stop for a night or two till I've had time to look 'round more?"

"If I did I'd taken it long ago, instead of payin' you fifteen cents a week for half of your quarters."

"Well, we've got to find one; that's all there is to it. Now, s'posen, instead of tryin' to do any more business to-day, we mosey right along about it."

"Where you goin'?"

"I don't exactly know. We'll kind-er loaf 'round; that's the way I found the carpenter-shop, an' if it turns out we don't see a place, why, it'll be a case of puttin' up the stuff for one night's lodgin's."

"I ain't sure as I've got money enough left to pay for a reg'lar bed."

"I reckon I can squeeze out what'll pay the bills if you're broke. Now, come on."

Unconsciously Seth led the way toward Ninety-four's house, not really being aware he was proceeding in that direction, and after walking several blocks in silence Dan asked almost sharply:

"Are you countin' on their lettin' us hang 'round the engine-house?"

"Course not. The firemen can't do anythin' like that, you know. We was mighty lucky to get a bed there last night, an' wouldn't had it except that we'd been burned out."

"Then what are you goin' up this way for?"

"There's jest as much chance 'round here as anywhere, an' of course I'd sooner live near Ninety-four, 'cause I do a good deal of shinin' for the men. Then ag'in, I don't want to lose run of 'em, for perhaps some day 'Lish Davis'll give me a lift into the Department."

"There's no use lookin' here, 'cause we'd know if there was any place that would suit us."

"I ain't so sure of that. You see, we wasn't lookin' for one, an' now if we go along with our eyes open there's no tellin' but what we may run – "

Seth ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant the clanging of gongs could be heard far up the street, and Dan exclaimed:

"That sounds like Ninety-four."

"Course it is. I'd know her if she was in the middle of a hundred, an' all of 'em comin' straight for me."

There was no longer a thought in the mind of either of the boys regarding the necessity of finding a home that night.

Under no ordinary circumstances would Seth have allowed himself to be prevented from getting possible "points," and although Dan did not share in the aspirations of his friend, he was equally excited by the prospect of "going to a fire."

The two waited breathlessly an instant, expecting Ninety-four would continue straight on toward them, when from the opposite direction came the clatter of wheels and the booming notes of the gongs telling of the coming of a second engine, and they knew that at some point midway the two engines would be turned at right angles with their present course.

"Come this way! It looks to me as though Ninety-four was slackenin' up!" Master Bartlett cried as he darted forward, and Dan readily followed the advice, for while he did not approve of his friend's devotion to the Fire Department, he understood full well that Seth was thoroughly conversant with all such matters as might be learned by an outsider.

"There she goes, an' I wouldn't wonder if the alarm came from some of them big storage warehouses, for Ninety-four is headin' straight toward them."

The first engine had swung sharply around to the left, and the driver of the second was urging his horses forward at yet greater speed, in the hope, perhaps, of getting first water, when the two boys

dashed up the street at their best pace, for to Seth at least there was but one engine and one point of attraction at any conflagration, however extensive.

While it is probable he could have "picked up as many points" from other companies, it did not so appear to him, and in his mind it was only from the crew of Ninety-four he could gather such information as was most desired.

Before they neared the station from which the alarm had been sent the throng on the sidewalks, added to from nearly every house, had so increased that it was only by taking to the street regardless of the danger to be apprehended from hose-carts, hook-and-ladder trucks, patrol-wagons, or water-towers, that the boys could make any satisfactory headway, and because of their being thus hampered in their movements Ninety-four's men had already begun their work when Seth and Dan arrived at a point outside the fire lines where they could see the machine.

Here a single policeman kept the crowd in check, and Seth whispered excitedly to his partner:

"Now's our time! If we're anyways smart we'll get in before that copper can catch us. Wait till somebody tries to pass, an' then scoot. Don't stop if he yells, 'cause he won't dare leave here to chase us."

"I thought 'Lish Davis said he'd have his eye out so's you couldn't get into the fire lines?"

"That's what he said."

"Ain't you 'fraid he'll be mad if he finds you in there?"

"He knows I've got to do this thing, else I'll never get posted on the business; but of course if we should sneak in an' he told us to march straight out ag'in, I'd feel as though I ought'er go. We won't stand very near Ninety-four, an' then there'll be less chance of his knowin' we're around."

The opportunity which Seth desired came a few seconds later.

Two gentlemen who were curious to see the workings of the Fire Department nearer at hand than was possible while they remained outside the lines, approached the officer on duty with the idea that it was only necessary to bluster or threaten a little in order to pass him without difficulty, and while they were alternately entreating and threatening Seth gave the signal.

Stooping until their heads were beneath the rope, the two boys darted up the street, which was covered with a veritable network of hose, and before the officer was fully aware of their intentions they were lost to his view amid the panting, quivering monsters of steel and iron whose mission is to save, rather than destroy.

"There's 'Lish Davis on the engine!" Dan said, speaking indistinctly because of his breath, which came thick and fast. "It looks to me as if he has seen us."

"We'll keep over this way a bit where there's no danger of his comin'. Watch our men try to get up that stairway! Ain't they the dandies!"

The fire was, as Seth had first surmised, in a storage warehouse, and it appeared from the outside as if the entire second floor of the building was in a blaze.

The men had battered in the doors only to be met by a mass of flames which seemed to roll in huge columns down the staircase to the new outlet which had thus been made, and just as the boys arrived the brave fellows were momentarily beaten back by the scorching element until they stood on the first landing in plain sight of Seth and Dan.

Jerry Walters and Joe Black were at the nozzle, with Ben Dunton close in the rear, and at the moment Seth called his partner's attention to the scene the captain of Ninety-four shouted encouragingly:

"Now, hit it up, boys! Get in there! Get in! Get in!"

Then it was the flames retreated momentarily, and those who were doing such gallant battle advanced step by step up the stairs seemingly into the very midst of the fiery cloud, until they were entirely hidden by the downpour of black smoke which came from the open doorway in volume sufficient to drive back even those on the sidewalk.

While this desperate fight was in progress other men had raised a ladder and were prying open one of the iron shutters on the second floor in order to use more hose, and, yet trembling with apprehension for the safety of those friends who had last been seen in the very midst of the fiery element, Seth involuntarily glanced toward the remainder of the company on the outside, while Dan looked back to make certain 'Lish Davis was not preparing to drive them from their place of vantage.

That which he saw reassured him so far as any immediate danger of such kind was to be feared, for the driver of Ninety-four was unhitching his horses, knowing from the general appearance of the blazing building that the company had a long task before them.

At that instant a crashing, rending noise as of an explosion sounded high above the din, and one of the iron shutters which the men had been trying to force open was hurled from its fastenings and thrown outward into the street, falling within half a dozen feet of where Davis was busy with his horses.

Following it was a mighty rush of flame as if the interior was a seething mass of fire; loud shouts of command rang out, and then came even above all the din the clatter of a horse's iron-shod hoofs as he dashed madly away in affright. Involuntarily Seth had followed with his eyes the flight of the shutter, and, unconscious of even having made a movement, he sprang toward Ninety-four as if in the time of danger that was his post of duty.

He saw the heavy mass of metal as it struck the pavement, and instantly afterward was aware of what very few gave heed to because of the fact that all eyes were fixed upon the building, from whence might naturally be expected another explosion.

The nigh horse of the team, one that had been in service only a few weeks, leaped forward in frantic terror, and by some strange mishap was dragging his driver behind him.

At the moment Seth had no thought of possible danger to himself. His mind was upon 'Lish Davis's peril to the exclusion of everything else, and almost involuntarily he sprang toward the maddened animal, Dan close at his heels.

It was by accident rather than good judgment that he succeeded in gaining a hold of the bridle just above the bit, swinging himself outward by aid of his elbow to avoid being struck by the beast's forefeet.

His weight was not sufficient to bring the frightened animal to a standstill instantly; but he succeeded in checking his speed so far that the engineer of Ninety-four had time to come to his assistance, and between the two the runaway was stopped.

A buckle on Davis's coat had caught in one of the rings of the harness, and this it was which held him prisoner after having been thrown from his feet by the animal's sudden plunge.

"Are you hurt?" Seth asked anxiously, still retaining his hold of the bridle, and the driver replied grimly as he scrambled to his feet:

"A man is bound to get a few knocks after such a course of treatment; but I reckon that all the harm which has been done is a little skin broken here and there. Do you know, lad, it's a mighty dangerous thing to jump for a horse in that fashion?"

"I caught him all right, sir."

"Yes, that I know, else I wouldn't be standing on my feet this minute; but suppose you had missed your hold? He would have had you under his feet in a jiffy."

"But he didn't, so I can't see as that counts very much; but all the same, I was willin' to take the chances."

'Lish Davis, having assured himself that he had spoken correctly so far as personal injuries were concerned, took charge of the horse; the engineer went back to his post, and Seth, fearing lest he should be driven outside the line, was making his way toward the building once more with Dan by his side when the driver shouted:

"Come back here, you young rattle-brain! How did you get inside the lines?"

"Crept under the rope when the copper wasn't lookin'. It ain't any very hard job to do that."

"Don't you know you're liable to be arrested for doing anything of that sort?"

"Well, we had to take the chances, you see, 'cause it wouldn't do to miss a fire like this," Seth replied, half apologetically, and Dan cried in his shrill tone:

"It's mighty lucky for you, Mr. Davis, that he did sneak inside this once."

"I ain't likely to forget that, you rapsallion; but it has got nothing to do with you lads being where you don't belong, and that's right about here."

"Please don't send us away!" Seth cried imploringly. "We'll keep out of sight so the chief won't see us, an' nobody will know where we are."

"I'll take precious good care you can't get into more mischief. Come over here, both of you, an' stick right by Ninety-four till I give the word to leave. Don't you dare to so much as move till the engine does, an' if there's any more mishaps, steer clear of them instead of doing your level best to run into trouble. Are you hearing what I'm saying?"

"Yes, sir," Seth replied meekly, and then the boys obeyed readily, for Mr. Davis had stationed them in the very place above all others where they could see everything which occurred, and Dan said in a tone of satisfaction:

"It was a mighty good thing, your stoppin' that horse. You never had a better chance to see a fire than this is, an' we'd better hold on to it precious close."

"That's a fact; but I ain't gettin' so many points as I might if we walked 'round."

"You'd better be satisfied with what's a soft snap, even if you don't get points," Master Roberts replied grimly, and then he gave himself up to the pleasure of watching the battle between the firemen and the elements, for a third alarm had been rung in, and the number of men at work round about was more than either he or Seth had ever seen engaged at any one time before.

The hours passed to these two small but decidedly interested spectators as if they were composed of no more than one quarter the usual number of minutes, and when night came the conflagration was subdued but not extinguished.

Ninety-four had gotten first water, and, consequently, would be the last to leave the scene.

Here and there the companies dismissed from this particular duty were taking up their hose, or already driving away in order to be ready for the next alarm.

The throng of spectators just outside the lines had diminished in number until no more than an hundred remained, and 'Lish Davis came up with the appearance of one who has already done his full duty.

"Hello, Amateur! Still here, eh?"

"You told us to stay, sir."

"I didn't allow that you'd hold on to go out with us. We're like to be here till well towards morning, an' if you lads have got the price of a bed about your clothes you'd better be leaving. If you haven't, I'll ante up something to hire one."

"We've got the money, sir," Seth replied; "but seein' 's we belong to Ninety-four jest now, why can't we stay till she pulls out?"

"Please yourself, Amateur, please yourself," was the grim reply, and as the driver turned away he muttered, "If that bloomin' little duffer don't get into the Department it won't be 'Lish Davis's fault, an' that goes for a fact."

CHAPTER V. TARDY REPENTANCE

Seth was as happy and proud as a boy well could be.

Never before had he dared to remain very long near any particular engine lest some of the firemen should take it upon themselves to send him outside the lines, consequently all his "points" had been gathered as he moved from place to place.

Now, however, he was in a certain sense attached to Ninety-four, and each member of the company had some kindly word with which to greet him, for it had become known to all that if the amateur did not actually save 'Lish Davis's life, he had assisted in preventing that gentleman from receiving severe injury.

Dan was enjoying the advantages thus arising from his partner's popularity, which was quite sufficient for him, since, not aspiring to become a fireman, he thought only of the present moment, and the privilege of remaining by the engine as if he were really a member of the Department was some thing of which he could boast in the future among his comrades.

It is true there was little of interest to be seen after the fire was apparently extinguished, when the men had nothing more to do than remain on the lookout for any smoldering embers which might be fanned into a blaze; but Seth's interest was almost as great as when the flames were fiercest.

Shortly after sunset hot coffee and sandwiches were served to the weary firemen, and Master Bartlett believed he had taken a long stride toward the goal he had set himself, when the captain shouted:

"Come here, you two kids, and get your rations. While doing duty with Ninety-four you're entitled to all that's going."

Dan ran forward eagerly, intent only on getting his share of the food, for he was very hungry; but Seth walked slowly in order to prolong the pleasure of obeying the captain's command, and could almost fancy he was wearing the city's uniform.

He stood by 'Lish Davis's side when the lunch was passed around, and that gentleman said grimly as Seth blew on the steaming coffee to cool it:

"You mustn't do that if you ever count on being a fireman, Amateur."

"Why not?" and Seth looked up in surprise.

"Because you must get used to hot things. Supposing you could drink that while it was boiling? Don't you reckon you'd stand the heat from a blaze better and longer than them who need to have it mighty nigh cold?"

This seemed reasonable to Seth, and without stopping to further consider the matter he instantly raised the cup to his lips, drinking the hot liquid until the pain was so great as to bring tears to his eyes.

Then he lowered the cup slowly, striving manfully to repress any sign of suffering, and the driver gazed at him admiringly.

"That kid has got sand, eh?" Davis said half interrogatively as he turned toward Jerry Walters, and the latter replied:

"He showed it when he jumped for the horse. I believe if you should tell him to roll over on the embers in that 'ere cellar, he'd do it."

"I guess you're right, Jerry. Here, Amateur, don't try to drink any more of that coffee till it cools a bit! I was only stuffing you when I said you'd stand a better show of being a fireman if you could scald your throat without feeling it."

This evidence of solicitude for his welfare was sufficient reward for all Seth had suffered, and he glanced at Dan as if to make certain that young gentleman was fully aware of the great honor which was being bestowed upon his partner.

Dan had no eyes except for the rapidly decreasing store of sandwiches, and no thought save as to how he might get his full share without appearing absolutely greedy, therefore all this by-play had passed while he remained in ignorance of it.

Once his hunger was appeased Dan curled himself up on a bale of half-burned merchandise near at hand, and immediately fell asleep.

For him this association with Ninety-four's men was nothing of more importance than the gaining of a meal and so much of a night's lodging as might be possible; but to Seth it was as if the gates guarding the approach to his desires had been left ajar, permitting him to obtain a glimpse of that goal he so ardently longed to reach, and he patrolled the ruins of the building as if upon his shoulders rested all the responsibility of making certain the fire had been wholly extinguished.

Not until fully an hour after midnight was the welcome word given for Ninety-four to pull out, and Seth awakened his partner lest he should be in the way of the tired men.

"Get a move on you!" he shouted in Dan's ear as he shook him roughly. "There's nothin' more to be done here, an' we don't want to act like as if we was hangin' 'round, when the machine goes into her quarters."

"Why don't you kind er loaf here till they have hitched up, an' perhaps we'll get another chance to stay in the engine-house?" Dan asked sleepily.

"Because I'd be ashamed to do anythin' like that. Get up so's we can be off before they pull out."

Jerry Walters had overheard this brief conversation, although neither of the boys was aware of the fact, and he asked as the two were making their way out through and over the debris into the darkness:

"Where are you kids going?"

"I reckon it's time we was home," Seth replied, giving his partner a warning shake lest he should say that which would seem to indicate that they were sadly in need of a bed.

"What do you call home now the carpenter-shop has gone up in smoke?"

"We haven't hired any house yet; but we've got our eye on one up in Fifth Avenoo, an' if the price ain't more'n we've got in our pockets, I reckon we'll take it."

"Where are you counting on sleeping to-night?"

"Most anywhere; it don't go hard with Dan an' me to find a place," Seth replied with an assumption of carelessness, and again shaking his partner to remind him that there must be no approach to begging.

"Look here, Amateur, I don't reckon you know where you're going to sleep!"

"We'll turn in somewhere; that part of it will be all right. So long!"

"Hold on here, you kid!" and Jerry Walters spoke in a tone which sounded unusually stern. "Have you been with Ninety-four's crew at this 'ere fire, or not?"

"I reckon we have," Seth replied, with a laugh.

"Then we'll take care you have a roof over your heads for the balance of this night. Wait till 'Lish Davis shows up, and see what he has to say about letting the kid who pulled him out of a big hole go off to bunk in the streets. Come back, I say, till the driver gets here."

"We ain't begging for a bed, Mr. Walters," Seth said decidedly, as he obeyed the command, "an' if we turn anybody out as we did last night – "

"If you *was* begging a bed I reckon you wouldn't get it from me; but since you're so mighty independent I'm just contrary enough to see that you have one. I reckon it won't strain the rules very hard if you sleep on the straw, an' that's about the best you'll get up at the house to-night, unless another alarm is sent in."

At this moment 'Lish Davis returned with the horses, and Jerry Walters held a short, whispered conversation with him, at the conclusion of which the latter said gruffly:

"Amateur, go on with your partner up to the house – there's no need of your riding – an' wait there till I come. We ain't going to have any sulking jest because we've taken it into our heads to see that you get some sleep 'twixt now and morning."

"We ain't sulkin', Mr. Davis," Seth made haste to say, "an' we'll go wherever you say; but I don't want you to think we can't find a lodgin'-place."

"Get on with you!" the driver roared as if in a fury of passion, and when the boys obeyed he said in a low tone to Jerry Walters:

"The Amateur has got a good bit of spirit in him, and that's what I like to see. He shall come into the Department, eh?"

"I'd like to see him there, for sure, and hope you'll be able to work it."

"I don't know as a fireman's life counts much to the city; but if it does something ought'er be done for the Amateur, 'cause if it hadn't been for him there'd be one driver short in the Department by this time."

Dan was in high glee at the prospect of spending another night in the engine-house, and said in a tone of satisfaction as the two made their way rapidly up the street:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.