

LITTLE JOE

JAMES OTIS

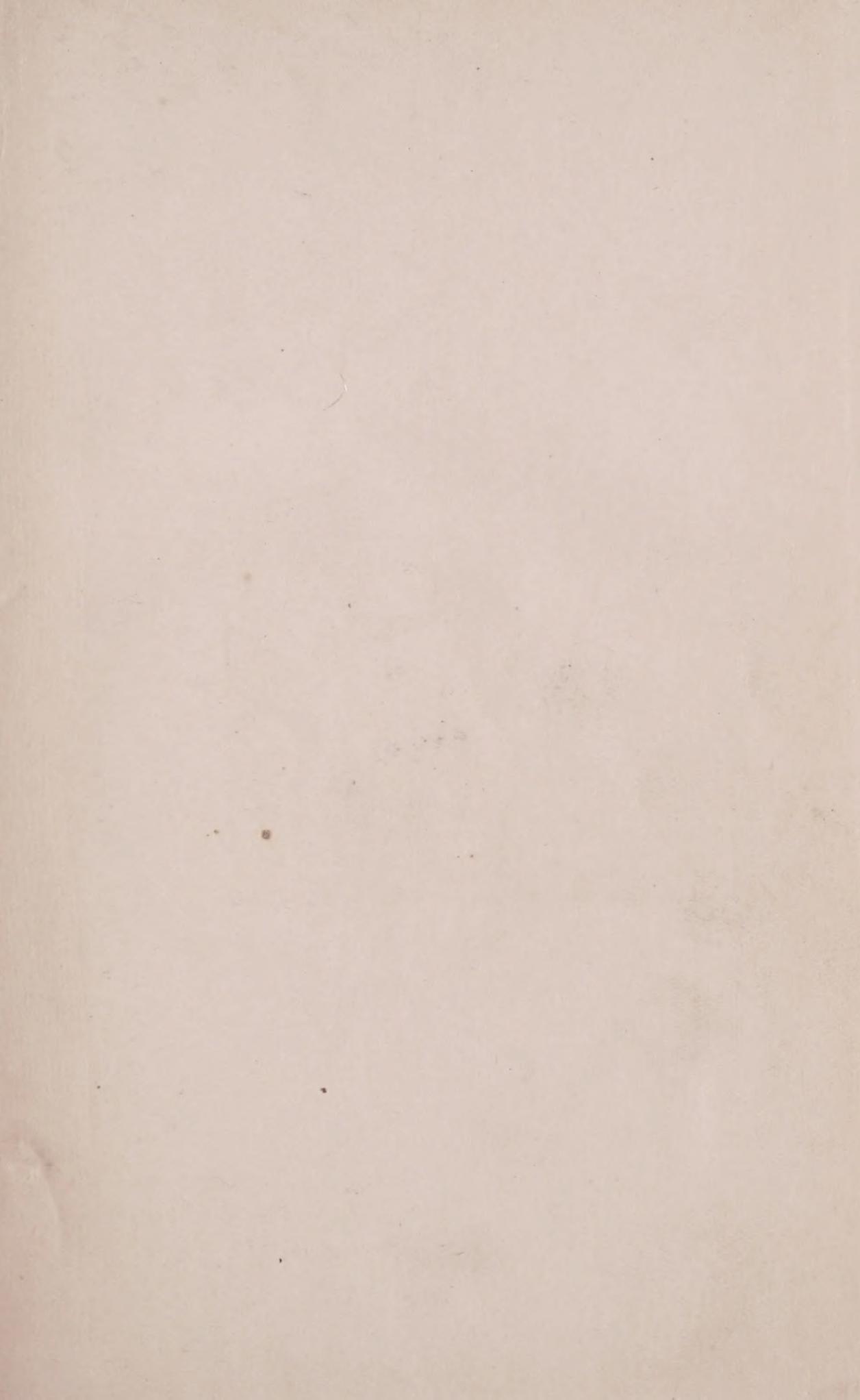


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JOE IN CAPTIVITY.

LITTLE JOE

BY

JAMES OTIS

Author of
Ten Weeks with a Circus
Toby Tyler
Mr. Stubbs' Brother
and others

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Kaler

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D LOTHROP COMPANY
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LITTLE JOE

CHAPTER I.

A HOMELESS GUARDIAN.

“SAY, be you a doctor?”

It was a small, oddly-dressed boy who asked this question of a burly, red-faced veterinary surgeon on Twenty-fifth Street near Third Avenue; and probably the visitor would have been turned away with a very gruff answer but for the look of anxiety in the brown eyes, which seemed unnaturally large because of his thin face.

“If you should go round the corner an’ ask some of the swells who have big door-plates, I reckon they’d tell you that a vet. didn’t know anything about doctorin’,” the man replied, as he gazed first at the boy’s

face and then at a suspicious-looking lump under the curiously patched coat which hid from view every portion of the visitor save his head, hands and feet.

“S’posen a feller should get his legs broke, couldn’t you fix ’em up agin?” the boy asked, as he tried in vain to still that which caused the front of his coat to move in a most singular manner.

“If a horse that was worth the trouble should get his leg broke I could set it, but what do you mean by asking these questions, and what have you got there? Speak up quick, for I can’t spend much time fooling with a customer like you.”

“It’s a dog what got run over by a ’xpress wagon,” the boy replied, as he unbuttoned the ancient and ill-fitting garment, exposing to view a small brown terrier, who yelped with pain when he was thus forced to change his position.

“Both legs broken, eh?” the surgeon said, after a hasty glance. “The best thing you

can do is to tie a stone to his neck and throw him overboard.”

“I don’t want to do that, ’cause, you see, he acted jest like he knew I’d look out for him when the boys were going to stone him to death, an’ as I picked him up he stopped whinin’ right away.”

“That was because he knew you; it would be a poor kind of a dog who wouldn’t recognize his master.”

“But I never saw him before. He was lyin’ in the street with the fellers throwin’ things at him when I came along,” and the boy patted the suffering animal’s head as if to say he would continue to protect him.

“Where do you live?” the surgeon asked almost sharply, as he examined more critically the condition of his dumb patient.

“I—well, you see—that is, I’m stoppin’ down near the ferry that goes over to Hunter’s Point.”

“Oh! you sleep around wherever you can get the chance, eh?”

“Yes, sir; that’s about the way of it,” the boy replied meekly. “I’ve fixed up a pretty fair stand where I sell papers mornin’s an’ nights. If business keeps on same’s it is now, an’ the other fellers what owe me have good luck, I’ll soon get money enough to buy a reg’lar place down near Grand Street.”

“What are you going to do with this dog if I set the broken bones?”

“I’ll keep him ’round there somewhere. P’rhaps they’ll give me a box over to the grocery store, an’ he couldn’t want anything better’n that. Say, how much will you charge?”

“My fee would be five dollars for such a job as that from anybody else; but seein’s how you ain’t likely to be overburdened with cash, I’ll do it for a dollar.”

By this time the surgeon was making ready the splints and bandages, and did not see the troubled look which came over the boy’s face; but he turned quickly as his visitor said in a stammering, hesitating way:

“Wouldn’t — I mean, can — say, if I’ll give you ten cents down, an’ bring five every day till it’s all paid, won’t you mend him?”

“I thought you said business was so good you were thinking of buying a regular stand?”

“Yes; but Tom Brady’s sister’s sick, an’ I lent him eighty cents this morning, so I’m pretty near broke now, but I’ll pay you right up square every day.”

“Do you think you can afford to throw away so much money on a dog that isn’t worth a cent more than his hide would bring?”

“I don’t s’pose he is a very nice one, else his master wouldn’t a’ left him when he got run over; but he looks like a poor, lonesome little feller, same’s I am, an’ we’d feel kinder nice bein’ good to each other.”

Once more the red-faced man looked down sharply at the boy, and then he began his surgical work, as he asked in a gruff voice:

“What’s your name?”

“Joe Morgan. The fellers call me Little Joe 'cause I ain't got much size yet, an' I guess a good many of 'em don't know I own any other name. I'll bring you the money every day till the dollar's paid.”

“Haven't you got any relatives?”

“I ain't had none since Jack Greely's mother died. Say, here's the ten cents,” and Joe laid the money where the surgeon could not fail to see it.

“Haven't you a mother of your own?” the man asked without paying any attention to the coin, and the boy pushed it further across the desk as he replied:

“Not one. Jack's father said I must a' had somebody what belonged to me; but I don't know anything about it. Are you goin' to do the job on trust?”

“Can't you see that I'm working at it now? I shall expect you to come here with the cash every morning.”

“I won't skip one if I can help it. How long will it be before he can walk?”

“In a couple of months he’ll be all right. Don’t give him any meat; keep him in a cool place, and feed him mostly on bread and milk. Where did you get that coat?”

“I traded two horseshoes I found, with the junk-man on Thirtieth Street. It’s pretty big, but it’ll come in handy when the weather gets colder.”

During this conversation the dog remained perfectly quiet, as if he knew exactly what was being done, and whenever Joe caressed him he would lick his hands in token of gratitude.

“Perhaps he ain’t worth very much,” the boy said, as he stood on tiptoe to kiss the cripple’s nose, “but it’ll be nice to have somebody to love a feller in the night when it’s cold an’ lonesome.”

“I should think you’d have plenty of company,” the surgeon said as he looked around again very quickly, and spoke even more gruffly than before. “It seems to me sometimes as if there were more boys than paving

stones in the street, and I can't make out why you lack for chums."

"Neither can I," Joe said mournfully as he pressed the dog's nose to his cheek. "They think I'm a sissy an' a sneak, but I ain't, an' the most of 'em don't like me very well."

"The fellow to whom you lent the money don't call you such names, does he?"

"Oh, no; there's five or six that are friends of mine, but they mostly all have mothers, 'cept Si Hodgdon, an' he's got a sister, so when it comes night I don't have anybody to go with. I'll be all right if this dog gets well, an' his owner don't come for him."

"If that happens send the man to me, and I'll charge so much for this job that it won't be worth while to claim him. I reckon he's all right now, and you had better take him away. What's his name?"

"I'll call him Doctor, I guess," Joe replied, as he pushed the ten-cent piece yet nearer the surgeon, "an' then both of us will be

sure to remember how good you was to trust us for the rest of the money.”

There was no further opportunity for the boy to give words to his gratitude. At that moment the surgeon was summoned to more valuable four-footed patients, and Joe left the office after having once more hidden Doctor under his ample coat.

It was impossible to run without causing the cripple pain; but Joe walked at the best possible speed toward the ferry, for it was nearly time for Slip Johnson, who brought him the evening papers.

Slip — no one seemed to know why such a nickname should have been given to a boy who was christened Walter — was also in the news business. He sold papers in the vicinity of the ferry, but did not confine himself to any particular locality. Three months previous he had taken as much pleasure in teasing the small, delicate-looking boy who was trying to establish a newsstand in the corner of a lumber-yard, as any

of his companions; but he lost all zest for such sport one evening when he fell from the pier and no one save Joe had the courage to make an attempt at saving him. When it was seen that Slip was partially unconscious — his head having struck the string-piece — Joe leaped in without hesitation while the remainder of the party were in a state of helpless bewilderment, and by dragging the drowning boy to the foundation piles, succeeded in keeping his head above the surface until the others could pull him out.

After that, Slip did all he could to show that his enmity had been swallowed up by friendship, and, among other kindly acts, brought regularly from down-town the stock in trade for the lumber-yard stand.

Master Johnson had not yet arrived when Joe reached his place of business, and there was evidently sufficient time in which to provide Doctor with a bed before the evening work could be commenced.

“I’m goin’ to let you have my coat for awhile, old fellow,” he said, as he laid the dog tenderly under a sheltering board, and proceeded to make a bed by pushing the dilapidated garment in a small recess formed by the timbers, and entirely hidden from view of those on the street, where he usually spent the night.

After placing the dog on this, and being as he thought, fully rewarded for the attention when the cripple licked his hands, he went to the grocery store for a penny’s worth of milk. The proprietor not only gave him a tomato can in which Doctor’s food might be kept, but was so generous as to let him make his choice of a kennel from among a quantity of empty boxes.

Joe was yet feeding the patient when Slip arrived with the evening’s stock of papers, and, as a matter of course, was introduced to Doctor, who looked so helpless as he lay on a bed of paper in a box, with both hindlegs swathed in bandages,

that the visitor's sympathy was immediately aroused.

"He don't look like sich a awful swell dog," Slip said, after a critical examination of the patient, "but he'll make a good pardner fer yer when he gets well. I'll come down an' see him agin after business is over, an' I'll ask mother to give me some bread, so's he can have plenty to eat."

There was really no time for any further conversation. The afternoon papers were already in demand, and during the next two hours the lumber-yard newsdealer was so busy that he could pay little or no attention to his crippled partner.

It was just as the last copy had been sold, and Joe was making ready to go across the street for supper, that Si Hodgdon stalked in front of the board-pile, standing there silent and motionless, as if he had come simply for the purpose of being admired.

There could be no question but that he was dressed in his very best, and Joe looked

at him in open-mouthed astonishment before it was possible to speak.

Si wore a remarkably short coat, which was so tight across the shoulders that he could hardly raise his arms, and a collar so tall that it seemed positive it would cut his chin if he attempted to look at his feet. The remainder of his wardrobe, however, was decidedly shabby, and that he was aware of the fact could be seen as he held his hat in such a manner as to hide the largest hole in his trousers.

“Well, you *are* fine!” Joe exclaimed. “What’s the matter? Goin’ to take a trip for your health, an’ come to say good-by?”

“I am goin’ away, an’ that’s a fact. I’ve struck a chance on one of them big steamers that run to Cuba, an’ I’ve got to be on board to-night, sure. Can’t you see to Alice for me, an’ get Granny Tousey to take care of her? I’ll pay a dollar a week for her board, an’ here’s fifty cents down.”

Si laid the coin on the stand in front of

Joe, and turned away as if his business was ended, when his friend asked, as a shade of perplexity came over his face:

“Why don’t you let her stay where she is?”

“Uncle Dick an’ his wife fight so much that I don’t dare to,” Si said, moving off as if every second of time was precious just then. “They’ve both gone away now, an’ she’s all alone in the house exceptin’ you’ll come after her. I’ve got a chance to earn twenty dollars a month, an’ I’ll lose it if I ain’t on board before seven o’clock. You see to her till I get back, an’ I’ll square things.”

Si turned, as he ceased speaking, and darted up the street at full speed, giving no heed to Joe’s cries, even if he heard them, for it was half-past six, and it would be necessary to exert himself to the utmost in order to keep the appointment upon which he believed so much depended.

Joe picked up the coin and started in pursuit; but by the time he arrived at the

corner Si was lost to view amid the throng of pedestrians, and he halted, while the look of perplexity on his face deepened into one of positive distress.

“Why couldn’t he a’ waited till I told him I didn’t have fifty more cents to pay the first week’s board? He knows Granny Tousey won’t let her come without she gets the money right up sharp.”

Then he walked slowly back towards the lumber-pile as if convinced that he could do nothing; but a single thought of the tiny little girl was sufficient to make him retrace his steps very rapidly.

“Si’s gone off thinkin’ I could fix things,” he said with a sigh, “an’ it won’t do to leave her there alone even if I don’t know how to settle it. With Doctor an’ Alice both to take care of I’ll have my hands full.”

Ten minutes later he was at the house where Si and his dwarfed sister had found the poorest apology for a home, and there found Alice awaiting his coming.

She was a tiny girl, hardly more than half as tall as Joe, although she was but two years younger; yet the life of deprivation she had led caused her to look much older, and there was something so winning, and at the same time so sad in her face, as she sat patiently on her small bundle of clothing in the cheerless room, that Joe had not the courage to tell her how difficult it would be for him to do as Si proposed.

“Where’s all the furniture gone,” he asked, as he looked around in surprise.

“Uncle Dick sold it when he went on the last spree,” she said, taking up her small bundle, as if to show that she was ready to go with him.

“Haven’t you had anything to sleep on since?”

“There was a piece of carpet in here last night; but now this room has been let to the woman who keeps the fruit stand, and somebody took it away this morning.”

“Well,” Joe said with a sigh, “things

can't be much worse wherever we find a chance for you to stay, an' we'll go off now, 'cause it's pretty near dark."

And the two children, one confiding most implicitly in the other, went out into the streets where the evening shadows were lengthening into night, to search for that which is most difficult to find in this selfish world — a home.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK.

ALICE did not appear to think that her brother was heedless regarding her welfare in going away without making other provision for her comfort than that comprised in his hurried appeal to Joe.

Si had cared for his dwarfed sister from the time they were orphaned, nearly two years previous, and it was his eagerness to take advantage of what seemed like a wonderful opportunity for earning money, that caused him to appear as if he felt but little affection for the tiny girl who had no relative save him. He knew that Joe was always ready to assist others, for never had a boy applied to him in vain for aid even though he oftentimes suffered because of his generosity, and the idea that his friend

might not have any money just at that particular moment never once entered Si's mind.

"Are we going down to Granny Tousey's?" Alice asked, when Joe had walked very slowly for several moments without speaking.

"I s'pose it might be tried," he said, hesitatingly; "but I haven't got a whole dollar, an' I'm afraid she won't let you come there if we don't pay for a week's board at the start."

"Didn't Si have enough money?" And now Alice began to look alarmed, for she knew by sad experience of the slight value attached to promises in such a bargain as it was proposed to make with Granny Tousey.

"He only gave me fifty cents, an' didn't stay for me to tell him that I hadn't any 'cept what is to pay for the mornin' papers. But I'll spend that if we can't do any better," he added quickly, as he saw the trouble in her face.

“You mustn’t.” And he felt the little hand close more tightly over his slender fingers. “The stand couldn’t be kept open to-morrow if the money was used to-night.”

“Some of the boys might pay what they owe me,” he said, trying very hard to speak cheerfully. “Anyway, we’ll see what Granny has to say ’bout it before we begin to feel bad.”

Then, as a means of diverting her mind from sad thoughts, he spoke of Si’s brilliant prospects, pictured his arrival fairly laden down with money, and described such a home as her brother could give her in the future. After this subject was exhausted he told of Doctor’s accident and adoption, and by the time all these particulars had been related they were at the door of Mrs. Tousey’s not very inviting-looking dwelling.

The old lady was at home; but not in a pleasant mood as they learned immediately after stating the reason for their visit.

“The best of children are a sight of

trouble, an' I'd about made up my mind not to take any more," she said, in an ill-natured tone; "but if you're ready to pay me two weeks' board in advance I might be persuaded."

Joe began in a timid, hesitating way to explain that they could only give one quarter of the amount that evening; but, before he had time even to promise that the remainder should be paid as soon as it was earned, she interrupted him by asking angrily:

"What did you come around here for bothering me when you haven't got so much money as would buy one dinner? I've lost enough already takin' paupers to board, an' I'll have no more of it."

"Come away," Alice whispered; "I'd go anywhere rather than stay here."

Perhaps even Joe was afraid that the now thoroughly angry Mrs. Tousey might inflict some punishment upon them for their temerity in disturbing her; and, after vainly

trying to check the flow of reproachful words by an apology, he hurried away with Alice clinging tightly to his hand, stopping not in what was a veritable flight until they were at the lumber-yard news-stand.

“What’s the matter now?” a voice cried from amid the shadows of the boards, and the question was accompanied by a low whistle of astonishment as Slip Johnson stepped out from Doctor’s hiding-place in front of the fugitives. “What er ye goin’ to do with her?”

In the fewest possible words Joe explained how it was that his homeless family had been thus suddenly increased, and concluded by asking:

“Do you know of any place where she can stay to-night? I’ll hunt ’round to-morrow, but it’s so late now that I can’t tell what to do with her.”

Slip thought it necessary to first explain why he had invaded the privacy of his friend’s home, by saying that he had come

to bring the cripple some bread, and then he rubbed his nose vigorously as a first and necessary step toward solving the problem.

“ P'rhaps mother might let her stay one night,” he said, after spending some moments in deep reflection. “ S'pose we take her up there an' see ? ”

“ Can't I sleep here,” Alice asked, timidly. “ I'd rather than have anybody scold us because we haven't got money enough to pay the board.”

“ Mother won't fly out same's Granny Tousey did,” Slip said, confidently, and Joe added in a decided tone :

“ You couldn't sleep in a pile of boards same as if you was a feller; of course not. We'll try it up to Slippey's house, an' I'm most sure his mother will let you stay.”

Alice could make no further objections to the plan, although she would have much preferred to sit on the curbstone all night rather than take the chances of another refusal, and the party set off after Joe satis-

fied himself that Doctor was not in need of any immediate attention.

The dog had already learned to recognize the boy who was so kind to him, and the violent wagging of his tail showed plainly that he was grateful, or, at least, his new master interpreted it in that way.

On arriving at Slippey's home it was some moments before Joe could make known the reason for his visit, owing to Mrs. Johnson's surprise at seeing such a tiny girl, and the many questions she asked; but when the good woman did finally understand the condition of affairs, all trouble was at an end for the time being.

"The child shall stay with me until you can find her a home," she said so heartily that there could be no question but that Alice would be made welcome. "If I hadn't so many of my own she might board here; but we are terribly crowded now, and it will be better for her to go where she can have more comforts."

Joe tried to induce her to take at least half the money Si had given him; but she positively refused to accept anything, and he left the house feeling quite happy, for he was certain he could readily find Alice a home as soon as he had money enough to pay one week's board in advance.

Slip walked with him to the lumber-yard, and after a brief call upon the invalid, took his leave of both for the night with the promise to "look in" before going downtown in the morning.

Joe had had no supper, and it was now too late to get any. Going hungry to bed was not such an unusual occurrence as to cause him much inconvenience, however, and when he laid down on the hard boards with his hand on the dog's head he consoled himself with the thought that, owing to this deprivation, he could afford to buy a fifteen-cent breakfast at a restaurant next morning.

"We are pretty lucky fellers, Doctor," he whispered, "'cause we've got a good place to

stay in till cold weather, an' we won't have to live alone. It was awful lonesome here some nights, and I used to get kinder frightened; but we'll be company for each — ”

The sound of voices near the lumber pile caused him to cease speaking, and cover the dog's nose with his hand while he listened to a conversation, the first words of which alarmed him greatly.

“He's been 'round here long enough spoilin' our trade, an' I'm goin' to serve him out so bad that he'll be glad to leave.”

There could be no mistaking that voice. Joe knew Bill Dunham was the speaker, and that he was the one referred to, for Bill had threatened many times to drive him away from the particular streets in which he and his friends claimed to have the especial rights to sell papers.

The listener also knew that among the newsboys of the city there existed at least a tacit understanding regarding certain rights which accrued to those who first started

business in the different localities, and he had been regarded as an interloper more than a year ago when he opened the stand. Both Slip Johnson and Si Hodgdon were recognized as having a right to sell papers in the vicinity of the ferry, and after they learned to have a sincere affection for the little fellow, who was always so ready to help others, they insisted that he should be allowed to remain at the lumber-yard. Bill Dunham and a few of his particular friends, however, openly threatened to drive "Sneaky Joe" away, and there could be no question but they had decided on carrying their threats into execution at this time when Si was no longer where he could lend any aid.

"Will we go right in an' snake him out?" Joe heard one of the party ask, and Bill replied:

"He might tumble the boards over on us. We'll get a lot of rocks, an' I guess it won't be long before he'll show up, for I can put every one right into his den."

Joe was thoroughly alarmed now, for if his enemies should send a volley of stones into the lumber-pile, Doctor might be hit, in which case he would undoubtedly make his presence known by yelping, and that would seal his fate, for Bill thoroughly enjoyed torturing an animal.

“If I stay here they’ll find out about the poor little fellow, an’ be sure to kill him,” Joe said to himself. “They won’t come in when I’m outside, an’ if I let them pound me Doctor don’t stand so much chance of gettin’ hurt.”

It was not a pleasant thing to go among a party of boys who had come for the sole purpose of giving him a severe flogging, but Joe never hesitated after deciding that the dog was in danger, and before his enemies had gathered the materials with which to make the attack he was on the sidewalk, running rapidly toward Second Avenue.

With loud shouts of triumph Bill led his friends in the pursuit, and the chase was

speedily ended, for Joe was not strong enough to make much of a race.

“You can’t sneak off like that,” Bill said, as he caught him by the throat, pulling him roughly to the ground, and in another instant the entire party had gathered around the half-stunned boy.

“Take what money he’s got before you pound him,” some one suggested, and those who were nearest the prisoner complied at once.

Joe realized that he was being robbed, and knew he could do nothing to prevent it; but when, after searching all his pockets, the half-dollar Si had left for Alice was found, he struggled more desperately than ever.

“That ain’t mine,” he cried, trying unsuccessfully to take it from Bill. “It belongs to Si’s sister Alice, an’ if she don’t have it to-morrow she can’t pay for her board.”

“If Si Hodgdon was sich a fool as to let

you keep his money, he oughter lose it," Bill said scornfully, as he put the coin in his pocket, and then, seizing Joe by the hands, held him firmly, despite his struggles. "We're going to pound you now for snoopin' 'round where you don't belong, an' if you ever show your head near this ferry agin we'll jest about kill you. Go on, fellers, I'll hold him so's he can't git away."

Joe believed the flogging would surely be administered, and he shut his lips hard that no cry of pain should escape, while as a slight means of enabling him to bear the punishment silently he kept his mind fixed on the fact that as yet none of the party knew of Doctor's whereabouts.

"Go on, give it to him hot!" Bill cried; but before the order could be obeyed some one shouted as he started down the street at full speed:

"Look out! There comes the cop!" and in another instant all save the ringleaders were doing their best to beat a rapid retreat.

Bill waited only long enough to assure himself that a policeman was really coming toward him. Then he cried as he suddenly let go his hold of Joe's hands and struck him a stinging blow full in the face, which caused the boy to fall backward :

“ We'll see you agin to-morrer, an' then we'll serve you out.”

Joe's head struck the curbstone with a force sufficient to have stunned a strong man, and the policeman, who by this time was but a few yards away, started in pursuit of Bill before paying any attention to his victim.

There were others near at hand to render assistance, however, for directly behind the officer came two men and a boy, the latter carrying a violin, and as both pursued and pursuer disappeared around the corner they raised Joe's head from the pavement.

“ Here's just the boy you want, Marco,” one of the men said in Italian. “ If he can't play now, it won't take long to show him

how, and by only letting him out with Giuseppe he'll not dare to talk on the street."

"Can we get him away before the officer comes back?" the second man asked in the same language, and his companion had not replied when the policeman returned. He had seen the uselessness of trying to catch a party of boys when it was so dark that they could readily hide, and gave up the chase very shortly after it was begun.

"Is the young one hurt much?" he asked, and the man called Marco replied in broken English as the other lifted Joe in his arms:

"His head is cut. It is my son whom we were hunting for, and we will carry him home."

"It's all right, then, if he belongs to you," the officer said, well pleased at being thus relieved of what might have been an unpleasant duty, and the two men walked rapidly away, one carrying the still unconscious Joe, while the other kept a firm hold of the boy with the violin.

And when morning came the crippled dog waited in vain for the little fellow who had saved his life; the surgeon did not receive the second instalment of his fee, as he had believed he would, nor was Si's tiny sister able to find him who had promised to fill her brother's place.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ITALIAN QUARTER.

WHEN Joe awoke to consciousness he was sensible only of a pain in his head so severe that for some moments he lay with closed eyes, pressing his hand to his temples in the effort to check the throbbing of his veins which seemed on the point of bursting.

Then a most distressing nausea assailed him; at the same time he became aware of a peculiar and disagreeable odor, and a low cry of fear burst from his lips as he looked around in the vain effort to learn where he was.

So strange and terrifying was the scene that several moments elapsed before he remembered the event which preceded his loss of consciousness. He was lying on a pile of rags in one corner of a long, low

room, on the walls of which hung a variety of musical instruments, while on the floor were at least a dozen boys, some stretched at full length on the bare boards, and others resting their weary limbs on the same unsavory kind of a bed occupied by him. These sleeping companions ranged in age from a swarthy little fellow not more than seven years old to a stripling of sixteen, and the same disparity was observable in their costumes, none of which were better than Joe's garments, while some were decidedly more ragged.

At the opposite end of the apartment was an old man and a lad eighteen or nineteen years of age, seated at a three-legged table in earnest discussion; but as they spoke in the Italian language, the bewildered boy could gather no idea of where he was from the conversation.

Fear prevented him from asking any questions, and with a throbbing head and the pain of terror in his heart he lay motionless

upon the rags, trying to understand where he was, or how he had been thus suddenly transported from the lumber-yard.

After some moments the events of the evening were recalled. He remembered running out from the board-pile to prevent his enemies from learning of Doctor's whereabouts, the robbery, and the cruel blow struck by Bill Dunham; but after that all was a blank. Then he thought of the crippled dog who looked to him for protection, of Alice for whom he had promised to find a temporary home, and of the surgeon who would be expecting him to make the second payment in the morning on account of services rendered.

That he would be prevented from returning within a reasonable time to the lumber-yard never once entered his mind, although he fancied he might be called upon to pay something for the wretched shelter afforded during the time of his unconsciousness. He was afraid his story of the robbery would

not be believed, and that an effort to detain him until a certain amount was paid might be made.

During nearly a quarter of an hour he remained silent and motionless, trying to decide whether he should walk boldly out of the place, or first ascertain if there would be any claim for services; but after a long scrutiny of the men's faces, he concluded to adopt the former course, and return the next day with Slip Johnson and settle matters.

“They may try to make me stay till mornin' if I tell 'em I'm goin',” he said to himself, “an' there's no knowin' what would happen to Doctor if I should be away so long.”

With this thought in his mind he rose cautiously to his feet, and crept softly toward the nearest of the two doors which led from the room; but, however careful he was to guard against making a noise, the latch clicked in the lock sharply as he tried to turn the knob.

In vain he pulled with all his strength; the door was locked, and the two at the table, warned by the noise, were watching his movements without attempting to prevent him from making the effort to escape. Emboldened by their evident indifference, he went toward the second door, which was directly opposite where they were sitting; but before he could grasp the knob the tall boy leaped from his seat, caught him by the collar, and dragged him back to the table that the light of the candle might fall upon his face.

“What’s your name?” he asked, with an accent so strong that the captive had some difficulty in understanding him.

“The fellows call me Little Joe. Say, I’ve got to go back to the lumber-yard right away, ’cause somebody’s waitin’ for me. Bill Dunham and his crowd stole all my money; but if you’ll ho’d on till mornin’ I’ll scrape up enough to pay part of what I owe you for takin’ care of me when I was hurt.”

“Where is your father?”

“I haven’t got any, nor a mother neither; but I musn’t stay any longer. I’ll come here again jest as soon as I get some money to pay you with.”

As he spoke Joe turned toward the door once more; but before he could move a single pace in the desired direction the old man pulled him back roughly, and taking from the table a short, stout-handled whip with a thick leather lash, struck him twice across the back with a force that caused the poor boy to shriek with pain.

“You will stay with us,” he said sternly, shaking Joe violently, as if by so doing the words would be better understood. “If you try to run away I will use this on your bare back till you cannot stand. Now lie down, and do not dare to speak before morning.”

This command was immediately followed by a vicious thrust which sent Joe reeling toward the corner he had just left, causing him to fall headlong over the rags, where

for some seconds he lay without motion, as if senseless.

The noise awakened several of the boys, among whom was the one who had been present when the Italian represented to the policeman that Joe was his son, and they arose sleepily to a sitting posture; but on seeing what had caused the disturbance laid down again, as if such incidents were of too frequent occurrence to create any surprise.

Joe was mentally stunned. He could hardly bring himself to believe that these men deliberately proposed to keep him prisoner, and yet he had painful evidence of the fact. He remembered having heard Si Hodgdon say that there was a class of Italians who made virtual slaves of boys, forcing them to beg, or play on musical instruments in the streets; but he had never fancied such could be the case in a city like New York, until at this very moment.

“I won’t stay! I *can’t* stay!” he moaned, as he buried his face deeper in the pile of

raggs. "Who will look after Alice an' Doctor if I'm not there in the mornin'? An' when I don't pay the man for mendin' the poor little dog's legs, he'll think I'm a fraud."

"Stop your whining and go to sleep, or I shall give you another taste of the whip!" the padrone shouted, and poor Joe did his best to repress the big sobs which shook his slender frame violently.

The grief and despair in his heart was so great that punishment could not reduce him to absolute silence. It was beyond his power to obey the harshly-spoken command, and the threat would most likely have been carried into effect if, from among the occupants of the room, one had not dared to sympathize with the new-comer.

The master of the establishment had hardly finished speaking, when Joe felt the light pressure of a hand on his shoulder, and, looking up for an instant, he saw a small Italian boy, not more than eight years

old, who whispered in a trifle better English than that spoken by the man:

“Make no noise, for old Marco will use the whip. It is bad to be here; but do not let it be worse.”

“What right has he to keep me?” Joe asked passionately, but in the same low tone as that used by the boy. “I’ve got to go home! I’ve got to go.”

“No one but the master can leave here in the night, and you could not get out if they should let you try, for the doors are locked. When you are forced to fiddle on the street all day you will be glad of a chance to lie here.”

“What are they goin’ to do with me? Why do they want to keep me?” Joe asked in a voice choked with sobs.

“Old Marco will show you how to play on the fiddle.”

“I won’t learn! I can’t even play on a jewsharp, and I won’t touch a fiddle!”

“Then the master will beat you. The

whip was used on me when I tried to run away, and it cut like a knife. You must do as he tells you, and some time, a good many days from now, we may both get a chance to go. Don't say no when he says yes, for it will make you pain," and the boy flung his arm around Joe's neck in kindly sympathy.

If it had not been for thoughts of Alice and Doctor, and the shame he felt at thus being forced to break his promise to the surgeon, Joe might have borne up under his troubles more bravely, for he could have consoled himself in a measure with the idea that he would eventually succeed in escaping. It was the suffering which his absence, even if only for a few days, would probably cause that made him almost frantic, and rendered impossible the slightest effort at resignation. As he tried to imagine what steps his friends would take toward finding him, a ray of hope sprang up in his heart. If he was sent out with the other boys next

morning he might possibly see Slippey, and thus succeed in getting away from his captors; but his anticipations were speedily crushed after asking the lad by his side:

“Will I have to go with the rest to-morrow?”

“No; not for many days, and perhaps you will be taken to some other city. If old Marco treats you as he did me when I was brought from Chicago by my uncle, he will keep you shut up here till you can play on the fiddle, and when you are allowed on the street, after praying to see the bright sun, Guiseppe will be by your side. He is as bad as the master.”

“Go to sleep, Tonio, and hold your peace, or to-morrow you will work without your breakfast,” old Marco shouted, and the boy obeyed silently, after whispering in Joe’s ear:

“Do not tempt him to use the whip, and in the morning do whatever he commands.”

Then he crept away to the pile of rags which served him as a bed, and Joe was

left alone with his gloomy thoughts and almost overpowering sorrow.

When the little captive had been ordered to go to sleep he thought it would never be possible to obey while he remained in that terrible place; but the violence of his grief was so great that in less than an hour kindly slumber had closed his eyes, and until morning he remained blissfully unconscious of his wretchedness.

It was Tonio who awakened him when the distribution of bread crusts and pieces of cold meat was begun, and he said in a half-apologetic tone:

“If you do not get a share now you will go without until evening, and old Marco rouses the boys with a whip instead of words.”

Joe sprang to his feet as if bewildered at finding himself in such a place; but the events of the previous night came to his mind in a very few seconds, and he crouched upon the rags again as if the appearance of

the food which the Italian was taking from a basket, giving a greater or less amount to each lad, according to his record for industry or indolence, was to him disgusting.

The old man threw two broken biscuits and a small piece of cold beef down by Joe's side, and then passed on, indifferent whether they were accepted or not; but little Tonio, seeing that the boy paid no attention to this allowance, said as he slipped the food into the captive's pocket:

"Keep it, for you will be hungry by and by. I must leave you now; but you shall see me again to-night."

"Are you going out-doors?" Joe whispered eagerly, catching the boy by the hand and speaking very close to his ear.

"Yes, and we shall get a beating if we do not bring Marco the money he thinks ought to be earned."

"If you go near the Thirty-fourth-street ferry and see a newsboy, won't you ask him to tell Slip Johnson where I am?"

“I would like to, but Guiseppe will beat me if I speak English to any one on the street,” Tonio said, as he shook his head sadly.

“But you might get a chance when he isn't looking,” Joe urged, and the boy replied earnestly:

“If I do I will take the risk of a beating, and repeat your words.”

There was no time for him to say anything more; old Marco was issuing harsh commands in the Italian language to “his children,” as he called them, and Tonio was obliged to depart with the others. Joe watched him as he took a violin and bow from the wall before following a tall, forbidding-looking boy who carried a harp, and when he left the room he threw himself on the pile of rags once more, without attempting to check the grief which burst forth in passionate weeping.

But even the poor consolation which tears sometimes afford was denied him, for no

sooner had the boys gone out than old Marco came up with a much-battered violin and bow in his hand, and made known to Joe that his close attention was required, by kicking him on the arm.

“You will learn to play this,” he said with even a broader accent than he had used when speaking to the policeman. “When you can fiddle you may go out with the others; but if you do not try, I have this,” and he held up the whip with a threatening gesture.

Just for an instant Joe was tempted to resist; but Tonio’s advice came into his mind, and reflecting that he could hope to effect nothing while held a close prisoner he made a brave effort to repress his tears as he followed old Marco’s instructions to the best of his ability.

During the entire day, save at brief intervals when the padrone left the room from motives of business or pleasure, Joe was forced to practice with the bow, and by

noon his arms ached so badly that it seemed almost impossible to raise them. He kept on, however, without complaint of weariness, for he had come to understand that the first step toward making an escape was to gain such knowledge of music as would cause him to be sent out with the others.

He was also sustained by the hope, which grew stronger as the day advanced, that Tonio would succeed in sending word to his friends, and he waited with a feverish impatience for the return of the boys, which, perhaps, did not pass unnoticed by old Marco.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PUNISHMENT.

NOT until nearly sunset did the old padrone allow Joe to take any lengthy rest, and then he signified that work was done for the day by giving him quite a generous allowance of cold meat and bread. In the morning the unhappy boy had thought it would be impossible to eat the food, even though his own peculiar manner of living was not calculated to make him fastidious; but before night came his hunger asserted itself so strongly that even the dry crusts tasted palatable, and this second portion of food was not despised as the first had been.

The boys had left the house in parties of two and three, and they returned in the same order, each group presenting themselves before the table at which the master

was seated, to give him the fruits of their labor, as represented either by money or food, and waiting there until he passed judgment upon them. Some were praised, for the padrone decided as to their industry or indolence by the amount brought, and were given what was considered by them as an appetizing meal. Others were scolded, not a few whipped, and two sent supperless to bed.

Among these last was Tonio. His companion, Guiseppe, gave old Marco an unfavorable account of his work, and the result was that he would have nothing to eat until the following morning, a punishment which was considered more severe than if he had received half a dozen blows with the whip.

Joe had waited for this boy, whom he looked upon as a friend, in anxious expectancy, and when he entered the room tried to form, from the expression on his face, some idea as to whether he had succeeded in

sending any word to Slip Johnson. In this attempt he was unsuccessful, for Guiseppe brought Tonio forward like a criminal who might make an attempt to escape, and not until old Marco passed sentence upon him was it possible to see his face.

Then there was no necessity of asking any questions, for he shook his head dejectedly when he caught Joe's inquiring gaze, and the poor boy who had built so many hopes on this one chance, was again plunged into the lowest depths of despair.

"I tried, but Guiseppe kept too sharp a watch," he said when he was at liberty to approach Joe who was sitting on the rags in the corner giving full vent to his grief. "The day I was first brought here I did my best to run away, and now old Marco never lets me go out save with those who are well content to stay in his service. We were not near your ferry, but I spoke to two newsboys, and because of that I am to have no supper."

These words aroused Joe from his sorrow more quickly than anything else could have done, and he cried, as he pulled from his pocket the food which as yet he had not tasted —

“Take this. You’ve walked around all day, an’ must be hungry, while I’ve been stayin’ here; besides, I’m feelin’ too bad to want anything to eat.”

“Put it away,” Tonio cried quickly and with every appearance of fear. “If old Marco should see that we would both be flogged — you for giving, and I for taking it.”

“Haven’t I got the right to do as I please with this stuff if I don’t want anything to eat?” Joe asked, still holding the food in his hand.

“You may throw it on the floor, but not give a crumb to one who has been punished,” Tonio said, as he motioned for Joe to put out of sight what were to him tempting morsels, and when they had been hidden

in one of the many pockets of the enormous coat, he added, "After the others are asleep pass me what you do not want."

"That'll be all," was the decided reply. "There is such a big lump in my throat that I ain't hungry, an' so long as you got into trouble through tryin' to help me, it isn't more than fair you should have the whole."

A quick, warning look from Tonio caused Joe to cease speaking suddenly, and turning his head slightly he saw the mocking face of Guiseppe from behind a harp which, with its covering of green baize, stood a few feet to the left of where the boys were sitting.

On being discovered, the spy, for that was in fact the position he held in the household, came toward Joe with what he intended should be a gesture of the utmost friendliness, as he said :

"When Tonio tells you he is hungry, pay no attention, for he has not obeyed the good Marco who gives him this home, and it

would be only right if he had no food for two days.”

“Old Marco is a villian!” Joe cried, unable to keep his temper in check any longer, and he continued despite Tonio’s frantic gestures for him to be silent. “The time will come when he’ll wish he hadn’t given a home to so many boys, for he can’t keep me shut up here all the time, and after I do get out I’ll tell every policeman in the city about this place.”

Guissepe made no reply, but his dark face was lighted up with a smile of satisfaction which made it look positively hideous as he glided swiftly across the room to where the old man was counting the cash receipts of the day, and sorting out the different varieties of food by putting each kind into a separate basket.

“Oh, dear!” Tonio wailed in a tone of deepest distress. “Why did you say such things?”

“It’s the truth,” Joe replied stoutly, “an’

when I get away from here I'll do just what I threatened."

"But you should not have spoken of it before Guiseppe; he is only happy when he sees the whip in use. Now they will watch more closely than ever, and you will be sent away when the padrone's friends need boys in other cities. I, too, will suffer for the words, and there is no hope of my being able to give your message to those who know you."

"I had rather they would kill me right off quick than keep me shut up here," Joe said; but despite the brave words his lips trembled ominously and his sun-browned face grew pale.

"They will whip, not kill us," Tonio said faintly, and even as he spoke Guiseppe came swiftly toward them.

"The master will speak with you," he said, as he seized both the boys by their coat-collars with a movement so rapid that it could not have been guarded against

even if they were meditating resistance, and dragged them roughly across the room with as much zest as if he was about to participate in some rare sport.

“So!” the padrone exclaimed with a peculiar intonation which sounded to Joe like the snarl of an animal rather than a human voice. “Old Marco is a villain about whom the police must be warned, is he? Take the supper from him, if there is any left in his pockets, Guiseppe, and he shall know whether it is better to go hungry than be fed.”

Tonio watched eagerly as the crusts of bread, on which he had hoped to feast, were taken from Joe, seeming to be more sad over the loss of the food than regarding the prospective punishment, and after that had been done the padrone dealt each culprit a series of heavy blows with the stout whip which called forth shrieks and cries of pain despite their efforts to remain silent.

A few of the other boys gathered around

to enjoy the scene; but the majority of the wretched inmates crouched in the corner like cowed animals who can be terrified by the swish of the lash as it cuts through the air.

When the padrone finished his brutal work he laid the whip on the table as if to have it close at hand in case it should suddenly be needed, and then, resuming his work of counting the money, gave an order to Guiseppe in Italian which caused Tonio to fall on his knees, crying and begging even more vehemently than when the leathern thongs were cutting into his flesh.

No attention was paid to these entreaties. The old man did not raise his head, which was again bent over the pile of small coins; but repeated the command impatiently, and Guiseppe in turn called for one of the boys to assist him in what was evidently a most pleasing task.

There was no lack of volunteers from among those who had been interested spec-

tators of the flogging, and before Joe was fully aware of the fact he was being pushed through the door which a third opened, toward a staircase leading to the basement.

Tonio ceased his outcries the instant he felt Guiseppe's grasp upon his neck, and the two whose only crime was a desire for freedom, were half-forced, half-carried down a short flight of stairs to a small, damp, brick apartment which had originally been built as a coal-hole. After being thrust into this noisome place, Guiseppe, gratifying his brutal nature by kicking them most industriously all the while, the door was shut and bolted, leaving them cowering in the darkness as they clung closely one to the other for mutual protection.

In pain as he was, both mentally and physically, Joe gave no heed to either his companion or the surroundings for some time after they were left alone. The sense of a grievous injury inflicted was uppermost in his mind until the thought of the suffer-

ing to which others might be subjected because of his absence, came once more, and his troubles were greater than could be borne in silence.

“Can’t we get away from this dreadful place?” he cried. “Have we got to stay here an’ let them treat us as they choose?”

“Those who try to run away from old Marco are always brought back, and I cannot tell you how terribly they are beaten,” Tonio said gloomily. “It would not be so bad if only the whip was used; but they have been made to stay in this place without anything to eat until you would weep to see them.”

“How long do you suppose they will keep us here?”

“No one ever comes out in less than one day and a night, and Marco does not bring food to those who are being punished.”

“See here, Tonio,” Joe said abruptly, after a long pause, “if it hadn’t been for me you wouldn’t a’ got served like this. I don’t

s'pose I can say anything that'll make you feel better, but I'm awful sorry. I never mean to get folks into trouble, an' yet it seems as though I always did. If I could a' taken all the beatin' it wouldn't been so bad."

"You did not know," Tonio replied soothingly. "If you had staid longer here I'm sure the words would not have been spoken. It isn't as bad as if I was alone, and we shan't get so very hungry if we don't have to work."

Joe had not been reduced to the same state of subjection as Tonio, therefore he could see nothing cheering in this unwarranted punishment. He refused to look forward to their release from close confinement as something to be greatly desired, but thought only of escaping from the padrone's power.

"What street is this house on?" he asked, after a pause, as if he had not heard his companion's attempt at encouragement.

“It is on Crosby Street, at the corner of a court where the Italians live.”

“I wonder if there isn’t a window that we could crawl through?”

“There is a little one with iron bars across it; but there are heavy boards to shut out the light,” Tonio replied in a tone which showed that he believed any effort to escape would be in vain.

“If we’ve got to stay here all night, it won’t do much harm to look at it,” and again the sense of injury was uppermost in his mind. “I won’t give over tryin’ to get out of this place so long as I can move.”

“The master will use the whip harder than before if he knows we have even thought of running away,” Tonio cried in alarm.

“Then he’s got to flog me till I can’t stand, for I shan’t give in,” Joe said resolutely, as he groped his way around in search of the window. “I’d rather die a hundred times than stay here an’ work for that crowd up-stairs.”

Tonio was silent; he failed to understand how any one could even appear indifferent to the punishment old Marco would inflict. He was eager to escape, but not willing to make the attempt unless absolutely certain he should succeed, and perhaps Joe might have been quite as timid if he had known the padrone better.

It was not a difficult task to find the boards which covered the window, for the apartment was so small that in a short time the searcher could pass his hands over every inch of the walls.

“I believe we might pull these off,” Joe said in a low tone of suppressed excitement. “They are loose now, an’ if you’ll help me I’m almost sure it can be done.”

“And what then?” Tonio asked listlessly. “The iron bars will still be there; we cannot pull them out.”

“We can look into the street, and perhaps see somebody who will help us get away,” Joe cried impatiently. “Come, Tonio,

we'll never be free if we don't run some risks, an' I'll keep on tryin' if he stands right over me with the whip."

"We shall see no one except old Marco's friends, who will tell him what we are doing," Tonio replied; but at the same time he did as his companion had requested.

The nails which held the screen in place were driven into the mortar between the bricks, and it was only necessary that the boys should work them to and fro several moments before they could be pulled out.

As the boards yielded to their efforts and the prison was illumined by the rays of the street lamps, Tonio pointed moodily to the heavy bars which yet remained between them and the open air, but Joe uttered a low cry of joy as he pressed his face close to the grating.

"If we could *only* be on the sidewalk for one little minute!" he cried excitedly. "It wouldn't take long to show them villians our heels, an' then how happy we'd feel!"

“We are here, and the sidewalk is there,” was the reply in a bitter tone, as Tonio threw himself upon the brick floor, leaving his companion on the watch for some one to whom an appeal for help might be made.

CHAPTER V.

PROMISED AID.

OLD Marco's prisoners could not gain any very extensive view from the grated window, for it was on a level with the sidewalk, and the buildings opposite were hardly more than a dozen feet away. By standing close against the wall, it was barely possible to get a glimpse of Crosby Street; but to attract the attention of any one outside the court would be an extremely difficult matter.

Tonio, who had been well aware of this unpleasant fact before the boards were removed, did not indulge in what was to Joe the luxury of looking through the bars. He remained stretched at full length on the damp floor of bricks, thinking bitterly of the price they would be called upon to pay for having dared to do even this much

toward bettering their condition, and the minutes had formed themselves into an hour before either of the unhappy captives spoke. Then Joe said with a sigh, as he turned from the narrow aperture :

“ There’s no chance of our seein’ any of the fellers before mornin’, even if they come ’round here to sell papers reg’lar. We’ll put the boards back so’s when Guiseppe goes out he won’t know what’s been done, an’ after all hands have left the house we can take ’em down again.”

Tonio was on his feet in an instant, eager to efface, so far as possible, the traces of their work, and after several attempts, the screen was in place, the nails having been pushed firmly into the holes in the mortar until, from the outside, it would have been difficult to perceive that the boys had ever had the audacity to breath the tainted air of the court.

When this was done Joe’s companion so far recovered from his fears as to be able

to engage in conversation, and the unhappy lads discussed the possibilities of escape, which were very few, according to Tonio's ideas.

"They'll send us both away," he said, when Joe suggested there was yet a chance that he might have an opportunity to speak with some of the newsboys. "After this old Marco will believe I might try to help you, and I don't think he'll allow me to go out even with Guiseppe. Then when we are in some strange city under a master as cruel as the one we have now, there can be no hope."

"We haven't been sent away yet," Joe replied, speaking cheerfully, although his heart was filled with despair, "an' we won't give in while there's ever so little a chance."

A deep sigh was the only reply Tonio made, and for a long time neither spoke. To describe their situation in plain words made it appear more desperate than the reality, and Joe said at length:

"We might as well sleep as much as we

can; but our eyes must be open the first thing in the morning so we can tell the very minute the boys go out to work.”

“The rags up-stairs are softer than these bricks, and we shall not need any one to awaken us.”

In this Tonio was correct. Although the air from the street appeared warm, the boys' teeth were chattering after they had lain on the bricks half an hour, and the chilling dampness was so penetrating that it became necessary to move around briskly in order to prevent actual suffering.

Their condition might have been improved by removing the screen, for the heat from the street, even though it was night, would have increased the temperature sensibly; but this Joe himself was not willing to do lest they sleep too late, and some early riser in the court should report the fact to old Marco. All his hopes were centered on being able to attract the attention of a boy who would carry the news of their

imprisonment to Slip Johnson, and to make this possible it was necessary the master remain in ignorance of what had been done.

It was a long, wretched night which the prisoners passed before the welcome sound of wagon-wheels from the street told that the city was awakening to another day of joy or sorrow, labor or indolence. Slumber had not visited their eyelids during all the weary time, and at the first noise betokening the morning's approach they were on the alert for any movement on the part of old Marco's unhappy family.

Impatient and anxious as they were, it seemed as if hours elapsed before the tramp of feet overhead told that the padrone's little slaves were preparing to set out for another day of work from which they could reap no benefit, save such as might be represented by absence of punishment and a handful of dry crusts.

Then the sound of closing doors gave

proof that the boys had left the house, and Joe stood by the screen of boards eager to begin the watch from which he hoped for such happy results.

“Do not take them away yet,” Tonio said imploringly. “Old Marco himself may go out; the rag-pickers will be passing, and it is much too early to see your friends.”

Joe was well aware that his companion's advice was good, and he controlled his impatience until positive it must be nearly noon, when he said:

“It's no use to wait any longer, for they're more likely to come 'round here sellin' papers in the mornin' than any other time,” and with one vigorous wrench he pulled the screen away.

It was not necessary for him to gaze into the street many moments before being convinced that it was yet early in the day, and while fearing the window had been uncovered too soon, he was not willing to rectify what might possibly be a mistake lest the

one opportunity he so ardently longed for would be lost.

Tonio listened at the door for any sounds betokening a visit from the padrone, while Joe remained with his face close against the bars, and their relative positions were comparatively unchanged when the sudden appearance of many people on the street told that it was noon. The employés from the factories and shops in the vicinity were going to dinner, and their merry words and laughter rang like notes of mockery in the watcher's ears; he could not understand why others should be happy while he was in such sore distress.

Twice he called softly, hoping to attract attention; but the noise from the street and the hum of conversation completely drowned his voice, although it seemed to Tonio that it was sufficiently loud to be heard by old Marco.

“I must do more than whisper,” Joe said, as his companion cautioned him against

making such an outcry. "Unless I shout they won't know we are here."

"If the master hears before those on the street do, you will not be able even to whisper," Tonio replied with an ominous shake of the head, the pallor of his face telling eloquently of his fears.

Another hour went by, during which neither of the prisoners spoke, and the same throng of workingmen and women re-passed to take up again their briefly interrupted tasks; but, although they were less noisy, Joe made no effort to attract attention. He had begun to despair, and fear of the old padrone was making rapid inroads upon his courage.

It was when hope had very nearly deserted him that he uttered a low, sudden cry of joy which brought Tonio to his side, and in another instant he was making a sharp, hissing noise, as he called from time to time:

"Dick! Dick! Come into the court!"

Tonio waited by the window only long enough to see two boys on the sidewalk who were deeply engrossed in a game of marbles hardly more than half a dozen yards away, and then he darted to his place at the door once more, trembling so violently with excitement and apprehension that his services as a listener must have been sadly impaired.

It was fully five minutes before Joe succeeded in making himself heard by Dick White, a boy whom he had once met with Tom Brady, and then it seemed almost an endless time before this chance acquaintance could ascertain from what quarter the summons had come.

By pushing his arm between the iron bars Joe finally persuaded Master White to venture into the court, and then he asked in a voice so choked with emotion that it sounded strange and indistinct:

“Do you know Slip Johnson?”

“Slip Johnson?” Dick repeated, with such

deliberation that Joe was nearly frantic with fear lest the old padrone should discover the state of affairs and interrupt him just when escape seemed possible.

“Yes, yes; Tom Brady’s pardner.”

“I know Tom,” was the slowly-spoken reply. “But say, who be you?”

“I’m a feller what sells papers up near the Thirty-fourth-street ferry — Little Joe, the boys call me. A lot of Italian organ-grinders have locked me in here, an’ I can’t get out. Will you tell Tom to tell Slip where I am, an’ ask him to come down here with a big p’liceman?”

“How did they catch you?” Dick asked, his curiosity exceeding his sympathy.

“Bill Dunham’s crowd was poundin’ me, an’ somehow this old man lugged me off when I didn’t know anything. I don’t dare to talk very long for fear he’ll come; but if you’ll find Tom an’ Slip before dark, I’ll agree to pay you half a dollar the next day after I get away from here.”

“You don’t happen to have the money now, I s’pose?”

“I haven’t got a cent; but if you’re ’fraid to trust me, Slip will give it to you. Tell him he must bring a p’liceman, else they might keep him, too. This is an awful place, an’ the man beats all the boys with a big whip.”

“What are you down in that coal-hole for?” Dick asked, determined to gain the full particulars before exerting himself to search for Tom Brady.

“’Cause I said I’d run away; but don’t, *please* don’t stop here any longer, or the old man will be sure to see you. Go right off now, an’ tell Slip I’ll die if he don’t get me out to-night.”

“I don’t believe they’d dare to kill you,” Dick said, with what to Joe was exasperating deliberation. “If there’s any danger of that I’ll walk right into the house, an’ tell ’em they’ll all be ’rested for murder.”

“Somebody will come if he don’t go soon,”

Tonio cried with a groan, and Joe added imploringly :

“ Please start now, Dick. I’ll tell you everything when I get out, an’ if you stay much longer it’ll be all up with us. You shall have as much money as I can earn in a week if you only tell Tom about me before dark.”

“ I can do that easy enough,” was the confident reply; “ but what I want to know is — ”

“ Old Marco is coming down the stairs ! ” Tonio cried in a frantic whisper, as he darted toward the window and seized the screen. “ Get this up quickly, or we shall be discovered ! ”

“ Run, Dick, please run ! Some one is coming now ! ” Joe said in a pitiful tone of entreaty, and then he aided his companion in replacing the boards, his hands trembling so violently that if old Marco had been on his way to visit the prisoners, he would have entered the apartment several moments

before they succeeded in concealing the efforts made toward escape.

Then followed a time of greatest anxiety as the boys waited, expecting a visit from the padrone; but nothing was heard to denote that the cellar had any occupant save themselves, and Joe said, with a long-drawn breath of relief:

“You made a mistake; if any one had come down-stairs the door would have been opened before this. I wish now I’d said more to Dick so’s to be sure he’d hurry.”

“Do you think he’ll go?” Tonio asked in a whisper.

“Of course he will. Anybody would do that much when fellers are in such trouble as us. Slip will be sure to come with a p’liceman, an’ you shall go with me. We’ll make old Marco let out every one what don’t want to stay.”

“I’m afraid — afraid,” Tonio repeated, as he crouched once more by the door.

“What of?” If they keep us here till

the others come home we're all right," and Joe spoke incautiously loud, so firm was his belief that they would soon be free. "I wonder if Dick has gone."

"Don't take the boards down!" Tonio cried as Joe went toward the window. "It can do no good, and if the boy should begin to talk again somebody might hear him."

"I'll only pull one end out so's to peep through. You've been here so long, Tonio, that you're frightened at nothing."

It was necessary for him to wrench the screen several inches from the masonry before he could gain a view of that portion of the street overlooked by the narrow aperture, and he cried in a joyful tone as he peered through:

"He has gone! There isn't anybody in sight, an' it won't be long —"

The noise of a key in the lock caused him to cease speaking very suddenly, and he made every effort to replace the boards before the visitor could enter; but in vain.

A broad ray of light from beneath one end of the screen illumined the room when the door was swung open quickly, and Guiseppe stood in front of the boys with a look of mingled triumph and anger on his face.

Tonio had already crept into the corner where he cowered in abject fear, but Joe was at the window, pushing on the nails as if it was yet important that the aperture should be closed.

“So!” and Guiseppe was evidently copying after old Marco in his style of speech. “You thought to be wiser than the master, and have dared to speak with those outside.”

“I dared to try an’ get out of this place, if that’s what you mean,” Joe said, with a show of defiance, “an’ I will keep tryin’ till you kill me.”

“We shall see what the master thinks,” was the reply, in a menacing tone, as the lad, taking a piece of stout cord from his pocket, tied the prisoners’ hands behind

them, neither making the slightest show of resistance, for both knew only too well how useless would be such a course.

“Now, march,” he cried, pushing the helpless boys forward, and, silent with fear, they ascended the stairs, closely followed by one whose greatest delight was to witness the suffering of others.

CHAPTER VI.

TOO LATE.

DURING the few seconds which elapsed from the time of leaving the cellar until they stood in the padrone's presence, Joe made an attempt to cheer his companion in misery by whispering words of hope; but Guiseppe sternly ordered him to "hold his tongue," and Tonio looked so distressed lest he should provoke their cruel master still further, that he walked on in silence, trying hard to prevent the fear in his heart from being seen on his face.

Old Marco was seated at the three-legged table when the boys were led into the room, and that he was not yet aware of what had happened in the basement could be told from the astonishment he exhibited at seeing the culprits brought before him. His

quick, impatient question in Italian was answered in the same language by Guiseppe, who occupied several moments giving, as Joe naturally supposed, an account of the discovery he had made.

While his assistant was talking the padrone looked angrily at the two boys; but before the story was concluded he glanced nervously around as if the knowledge that Joe had succeeded in sending word to his friends caused him considerable alarm.

If the prisoners had simply made a vain attempt they would undoubtedly have been severely flogged; but since a message had actually been sent to some portion of the city, old Marco had no time to spend in such a manner. He knew what would be the result if a descent was made upon his establishment by the officers, and that very undesirable visit might be paid at any moment, therefore it was necessary, according to his belief, to prepare immediately for their reception.

He gave a brief command to Guiseppe, and that young gentleman seized Tonio by the collar, marching him out of the room so quickly that there was no opportunity for him to speak, even had he been so disposed.

To Joe it seemed almost as if his companion had been led away for execution, and he felt more alarmed at this singular proceeding than if the whip had been called into immediate use.

While his assistant was absent old Marco was so busily engaged throwing the piles of rags which had served as beds, into one enormous heap, and evidently trying to change the general appearance of the apartment, that he paid no attention to Joe, who stood near the table directly opposite the door.

Just for an instant he believed it might be possible to slip out of the room before the padrone could prevent him; but on trying to raise his hands, which were still tied behind his back, he understood at once that

his hopes were vain. The door might as well be locked as latched, so far as his ability to open it was concerned.

When Guiseppe returned, after an absence of about five minutes, he was alone. Instead of waiting for further orders he seized Joe by the throat in such a manner that the boy could hardly breath, much less speak, and while he was thus helpless pushed him roughly into the hall. Then the Italian walked swiftly on, without relaxing his hold, through the hall into the street, and from there to the extreme end of the court where was a dilapidated-looking house in front of which a party of rag-pickers were at work over the piles of rubbish collected during the morning.

Two or three of the women stared curiously at the half-strangled boy as if to impress his face upon their memory in case it should be desirable to recognize him at some future time; but the men hardly looked up from their work, and this indifference

showed Joe how useless would be any appeal for help even if it was possible for him to speak.

Guiseppe had the same idea of the value of time as old Marco. He hurried his captive through the house, up two flights of stairs to a back room, and thrust him into a dark closet, the door of which he both locked and bolted.

Joe was in a state of semi-unconsciousness for some moments after being left alone. The Italian had kept such a firm hold upon his throat that he could hardly breathe, and the relief experienced when this was relaxed, prevented him from understanding immediately what this sudden change of prisons meant.

The true condition of affairs came to his mind in a short time, however, and he kicked at the door and screamed until all his strength was exhausted. He knew now that old Marco was making his house ready for a visit from the police, and even if Dick

should deliver the message to Tom or Slip, their efforts to release him would be in vain, since after the padrone showed that the charges against him were false, nothing more could be done.)

His hands had not been unbound; but this comparatively trifling source of discomfort was not heeded amid the overwhelming grief caused by the thought that the steps taken to insure his escape, which he had believed so certain of success, would result only in rendering his condition more hopeless. He was plunged into an apathy of despair which prevented him from heeding the passage of time, and when the door was opened again to admit Guiseppe, he had no idea whether he had been in this second prison one hour or six.

The poor boy's first thought was that the Italian had come to flog him, yet he showed no additional signs of fear. The pain in his heart was so great that bodily suffering would have been light by comparison.

But the whip was not to be used this time. The padrone's assistant had a small bundle of clothing in his arms, and his task was to so far change the little captive's personal appearance that he would not be recognized by his friends.

The boy's hands were untied, and his huge coat taken from him to be replaced by a short velveteen jacket. His shoes were exchanged for well-worn boots, a broad-brimmed, ragged felt hat was placed upon his head, and the costume was complete.

After this had been done Guiseppe took the precaution of tying Joe's hands behind him once more, and then the work of rendering it impossible for him to make any outcry was begun.

With a quick gesture which showed that he had had long experience, Guiseppe thrust a roll of cloth between the boy's teeth, and over it he tied a gaudily-colored handkerchief in such a manner that the gag and lower portion of his face was concealed.

After the felt hat had been pulled down to cover the forehead it would have required quite a critical examination at very short range to identify this apparent street-musician who was suffering from the toothache, as Little Joe, the newsboy.

“You are to go out with me,” the Italian said, after the transformation had been affected in what he considered a satisfactory manner. “The master thinks your health will be better in the country. If, when we get into the street, you walk close by my side, all will be well; but if you try to run away, or raise your hand to try to take off that pretty handkerchief, I will beat you worse than Marco ever thought of doing. Now, come along.”

Of course Joe could make no reply while the gag was in his mouth, and he obeyed the instructions given for the very good reason that he was literally dragged down the stairs.

On arriving at the lower floor Guiseppe

slung over his shoulder an organ which was found near the door, and, repeating the threat, untied the cord from Joe's wrists, grasping him firmly by the right hand as he started out through the court toward the street.

Although he was in the open air the little fellow was nearly as helpless as while confined in the coal-hole. His master held him in such a manner that it was impossible to break loose, and there was no opportunity to carry out his rapidly conceived plan of pulling the gag from his mouth when they were near an officer, for Guiseppe took good care to cross the street whenever he saw one approaching.

In this manner they continued up Crosby Street to Bleecker, and on turning the corner Joe saw Tom and Slip, one each side of a policeman, coming toward him hardly more than half a block away.

Guiseppe was on the point of going in the direction of Broadway, when all oppor-

tunity of attracting attention would be lost, and Joe determined on one supreme effort regardless of the result. Swinging half around that the organ might not shut him out from view, with a quick movement he pulled the handkerchief from his mouth. Before it was possible to remove the gag the Italian caught him by the throat, taking good care to act as if he was in sport lest some of the pedestrians should interfere, and, throwing him against the building, held him as in a grasp of iron while he quickly replaced the handkerchief.

It was done so adroitly that any one close at hand would hardly have been able to detect the gag during the few seconds it was exposed to view, and all the while Guiseppe chattered in the Italian language and laughed as if he and his companion were having the jolliest kind of a lark.

Poor Little Joe! He could see his friends when they turned down Crosby Street quickly as if impatient to effect his release, and he

knew that but for the man who was choking him so cruelly he would soon have been free, while even now, with those who were searching for him not more than twenty yards away, he was unable to make the least outcry.

“Dare to try that game again and I will kill you!” Guiseppe said, with the smile still on his lips, as the rescuing party were concealed from view by the buildings, and he released his hold of the boy’s throat to seize him by the hand once more. “Come on quickly, if you wish to live.”

Perhaps the poor fellow had no desire to live such a life as would be his if he remained in the custody of this brutal master; but he obeyed meekly because bewildered by grief. Like one dazed he walked by Guiseppe’s side toward the North river, each step taking him further from his friends, and every minute increasing his despair. All idea of trying to make an escape had fled, and he permitted him-

self to be led on as if it was by his own desire.

Straight across the city to the Hoboken ferry the two went, one taking no heed of his steps, and the other looking well satisfied because of his success in evading the officers. On the boat Guiseppe and his prisoner stood near the after rail, the former with his arm thrown around Joe's neck in apparently an affectionate manner, but really to prevent him from making any signs of distress, and when the opposite shore was reached they went on to the slip far in the rear of the other passengers.

If Joe thought the journey was ended he soon learned of his mistake, for the Italian continued on through the city, and not until they were in the sparsley-settled portion of the suburbs did he release his hold or speak. Then he said jeeringly:

“Do you think now that it is better to obey, or will you try once more to run away from your dear friend, Guiseppe?”

Joe made no reply; he had learned his own weakness as compared with the Italian's strength and cunning.

"I will tie you as I would a monkey, though there should be a leather collar around your neck," Guiseppe continued, as he took the cord from his pocket and fastened it tightly on Joe's wrist. "Now, you can walk ahead, but not behind, and if you do not come to my side when we meet any one, I shall pull the rope very hard."

Joe plodded wearily along after this change in the manner of marching had been made. It was some slight relief to be free from the vice-like hand, even though the rope did cut into the flesh. The afternoon was rapidly drawing to a close; already were the long shadows of the trees thrown across the dusty road, and yet Guiseppe gave no sign of calling a halt.

On and on until the twilight distorted fences and bushes into fantastic figures, and the twinkling lights gleaming like tiny stars

from the windows of the cottages, mocked the poor little captive with promises of rest and rescue if he could but succeed in making his condition known to those who had lighted them. The darkness increased until the mantle of night shut out the last vestiges of day, and then Joe fancied they had left the highway for some less frequented road. The rope was drawn tightly now, and his captor was forced at times to drag him along, for fatigue made his limbs heavy, and caused him to stumble even when the path was free from obstacles.

That Guiseppe was well acquainted with this portion of the country was shown as he turned abruptly into the fields, making his way through bushes and over fences, driving Joe before him, for a distance of forty or fifty yards when he halted under a dilapidated roof or shed such as farmers sometimes build over haystacks.

“We will sleep here to-night,” he said, “and although you deserve to keep your

teeth on that mouthful of rags, I am going to take them out. To-morrow, if you have decided to obey, you will find that walking around the country is more pleasant than staying in the hot city."

When the gag had been removed Guiseppe tied Joe's hands together once more, fastening the end of the rope to his own arm. Then the weary boy was allowed to lie upon the damp ground as best he could; but his troubles were at an end, during a few hours at least, for exhaustion summoned slumber so quickly that he was on the borders of dreamland before the Italian had made his preparations for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

ACCUSTOMED as Joe had been to sleeping in the lumber-yard and looking upon a dry board as something to be considered a luxury in the way of a bed, this camp, which consisted only of a roof, perfumed with the odor of flowers and having close at hand a frog orchestra to furnish lullaby music, was all that could have been desired as a means of inducing slumber. But in addition to these natural advantages, the weariness of body was stronger than the grief in his heart, and he did not open his eyes until the birds had well begun their morning hymn of praise.

Guiseppe was yet asleep; but Joe was not in a condition to take any advantage of his keeper's unconsciousness, for the rope

around his wrists prevented him from leaving his undesirable companion.

The pure, odorous air, the repose which had refreshed him wonderfully, and the knowledge that he was no longer confined in old Marco's dwelling with scenes of suffering everywhere around, served to make him more cheerful than at any time since finding himself a prisoner in the Italian quarter. The fact that Slippey understood the reason of his absence lessened his troubles decidedly, for he believed both Alice and Doctor would be taken care of by his friends, and the situation no longer seemed so utterly hopeless.

Surely there would be some opportunity to escape if they remained in the country any length of time, he reasoned, as he listened to the birds, and he resolved to appear very submissive when Guiseppe awakened; but be on the alert for the first chance to give him the slip.

Joe was not permitted to enjoy the luxury

of being thus comparatively alone many moments; the feathered musicians soon aroused old Marco's assistant, and the beauties of nature had not sufficient charm to cause him to remain in the fields any longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Come, get up; it's time to see how much money we can make," he said, as he gave a vicious twitch to the rope, and Joe replied cheerfully:

"I've only been waitin' for you."

Guiseppe stared at him a moment, surprised by this decided change in his manner, and then he said, as if angry because the boy's wretchedness had disappeared:

"So! You are beginning to think it is best to obey, eh?"

"If I've got to go 'round with a hand-organ that's all there is to it," and Joe scrambled to his feet as best he could while his hands were tied.

Guiseppe arose more slowly, slung the instrument over his shoulder, and appeared

to be considering some weighty question. As a matter of fact he was making up his mind whether the prisoner deserved any breakfast, and perhaps for the only time in his life he was inclined to be reasonably kind toward one in his power.

“Eat this,” he said, taking a stale biscuit from his pocket. “If you have found out that the best way is to do as the master commands, it won’t be long before you can go back to the other boys.”

This was exactly what Joe did not want to do, for once in the city with so many to watch him, there would be but few chances to escape. He was careful not to let his companion know why he was so cheerful, however, and took the dry bread with such an air of thankfulness that Guiseppe believed he had already been reduced to a state of submission.

“I shall take the rope off now,” he said, suiting the action to the words; “but remember that if you once try to get away, I

will strike with this till every bone in your body is broken.”

He shook the heavy stick which was used as a rest for the organ; but Joe apparently gave no heed to the threatening gesture. He was decidedly hungry, and, until a better opportunity should present itself, had no idea of trying to escape; therefore he walked on meekly by the Italian's side out through the fields into the main road, when the work of the day was at once begun.

A house in front of which several children were playing stood at the corner of the highway, and here Guiseppe stopped. He gave Joe a tin cup as he began turning the crank of the organ, and said in a low tone:

“When you go for money I shall watch every motion. Should the people speak, shake your head as if you do not understand, for if I see your lips move once this stick will fall on your back twice.”

Joe nodded his head carelessly, and when, after a few moments, the musician motioned

for him to go toward the gate, he walked forward obediently, but mentally resolving that he would give no heed to the threats when there was a favorable opportunity to appeal for help.

At first the woman who came to the door of the cottage paid no attention to the outstretched cup; but after looking at his thin, pale face which appeared even more pinched and wan than it really was because of the big, brown eyes, she disappeared for an instant to return with three pennies and a large slice of sweet, fresh bread thickly covered with meat.

Joe was on the point of thanking her for the gift; but fortunately he remembered what the result would be in case Guiseppe, who had come nearer the gate, should see his lips move, and he lifted the ragged hat in token of gratitude.

A low, sharp command from the Italian caused him to retreat toward the organ; but he ate the bread greedily lest it should

be taken from him, and a scowl on Guiseeppe's face told that save for this precaution he might have lost the palatable food.

This first visit was repeated several times before noon. Joe was looked upon as deserving of sympathy at many places where otherwise they would have been turned away empty-handed, and Guiseeppe soon learned that old Marco had gotten a prize when he carried away this boy whose face was so well calculated to excite pity.

Knowing that the Italian would not dare to prevent him from eating while others were near, Joe took for his share of the food given him, as much as he desired, and the remainder was delivered up to Guiseeppe, who placed it carefully in his pocket evidently with the intention of carrying at least a portion back to New York.

This wandering around from house to house was not at all unpleasant to the boy who did not remember ever having been in the country before; but the shame of

begging for such a purpose distressed him exceedingly. He knew that those who gave him alms did so believing it to be a charity, when in reality the miserly Marco was the one benefited, and had so much not depended on making Guiseppe believe the life not actually distasteful, there were many times when he would have protested against receiving the money.

At noon even the Italian was tired, for they had tramped many miles despite the frequent halts, and a shady nook in a grove by the side of the Passaic river looked most rest-inviting.

“We will stop here awhile,” Guiseppe said, as he slipped the strap of the organ from his shoulder, and threw himself upon the velvety moss, after motioning Joe to sit directly in front of him. “We have done good work, and can afford to wait until it grows cooler. What do you think now? Should not Marco’s boys be happy when they have so little work?”

"It ain't very bad," Joe said evasively, as he laid at full length on the grass, wondering if he would be able to find his way back in case he succeeded in effecting his escape.

"And if we return you would be willing to learn how to use the fiddle so that you might go out like this every day?"

"I'd do most anything rather than stay shut up in the house," and Joe spoke with an emphasis now because he was telling the truth.

"Then we shall see the boys again to-morrow night," Guiseppe said, as if believing he was imparting what would be welcome information.

"To-morrow!" Joe exclaimed, starting up in surprise. "Are you going back so soon?"

"Why not? Isn't it better to sleep on a soft bed in the house than on the ground?"

"It's nice out here, that's all," and Joe laid down again as the old feeling of despair entered into his heart. He had come to

believe that they would remain in the country until he could so far succeed in gaining Guiseppe's confidence that he might see a chance to run away; but return to the city meant death to all these hopes.

“If you do as Marco commands, it will not be long before you can go out every day, and have a home which is warm in the winter, with plenty to eat.”

Then Guiseppe painted in glowing colors the happy life which it was possible to lead under the old padrone's guardianship, until the soft summer breeze, the droning of insects and rippling of waters caused his eyes to close in slumber.

Joe had paid no attention to the alluring descriptions the Italian was giving him, for he knew by experience how false they were, and, being thus inattentive, was not aware his cruel master was asleep until the noise of heavy breathing arrested his attention.

Then rising quickly but cautiously on his elbow, he looked steadily at his enemy until

becoming satisfied that he was really in the land of dreams, and not shamming, as he at first half suspected.

On either hand the yellow road stretched away in the distance until it was lost to view amid the trees; but no dwelling could be seen. If one had been near he would have attempted an escape immediately, in the hope of gaining it and appealing to the occupants for protection before Guiseppe could overtake him; but the chance of winning in a long race seemed very slight.

“I s’pose I’d better try it,” he said hesitatingly to himself, as he glanced around quickly in the vain hope that some traveller might be near. “If I wait till to-morrow it will be too late, an’ he may not leave me untied when he lays down again.”

Another look at the sleeping man’s face decided the question. He resolved to make the attempt on the slight hope of getting so far away before Guiseppe awakened that a chase would be useless; but he knew that

the race could not be a long one unless he gained a decided advantage at the start.

With his eyes fixed on the Italian he arose slowly and softly to his feet. Then removing the velveteen jacket and the stout boots that there might be the least possible impediment to his movements, he stole out toward the road, picking his way carefully among the dead leaves and decaying twigs without arousing the sleeper.

There was no time now for hesitation; his heart was thumping so loudly that it seemed to him the noise could be heard many yards away, and he set off down the road, stealing along on tiptoe until the halting-place was left several rods behind, when he bounded forward at full speed.

Just at that moment a big fly, which had been hovering over Guiseppe's face, settled down on the sharp nose with a vicious bite which caused the sleeper to open his eyes very quickly, and the first thing he saw was the velveteen jacket.

Joe had hardly gotten what he would have called a good start had he been engaged in a friendly race, when he heard the Italian call angrily :

“Come back, or I’ll flog you to death !”

For a single second he slackened his speed, knowing that Guiseppe could soon overtake him, his limbs almost deprived of strength at the thought of the punishment which would be his whether he returned voluntarily or was captured ; but he renewed his efforts as he muttered between his tightly-closed teeth :

“I shan’t get it much worse anyway, an’ somebody *may* come along.”

Bowing his head that he might see the road more plainly, and thus avoid any obstacles, he darted on, fear lending speed to his feet, while the sound of heavy steps in the rear told that the race had begun in earnest. On and on he went giving no heed save to that which lay before him, and praying, oh, so earnestly, that some traveller might

appear, until the panting of his pursuer could be heard close behind.

Turning ever so slightly he saw Guiseppe within a dozen yards, and rapidly closing up the distance. To proceed meant capture in a few moments at the longest, and, hardly conscious of having done so, he turned sharply to the left toward the river.

Straight on he continued, despairing now that any one would come to his assistance, and with the Italian's heavy breathing sounding close in his ears. Nearer and nearer he approached the bank, which at this point was ten or twelve feet above the surface of the water, and with Guiseppe diminishing the distance very rapidly.

As he gained the edge of the shore, the pursuer's hand was already stretched out to seize him. To stop now for the merest fraction of time was to be again made a captive, and he plunged into the water without hesitation, Guiseppe shouting in baffled rage as he was forced to make strenuous

exertions to prevent himself from falling into the stream.

Joe was not considered an expert swimmer by his friends. He was in the habit of diving off the pier adjoining the ferry-dock in company with Slip and Tom whenever the police were not near enough to prevent such prohibited amusement; but he had never been able to equal his companions either in speed or endurance.

In a profuse perspiration as he was the first chill nearly deprived him of breath; but knowing full well what the result would be if the attempt was a failure, he mentally braced himself for the struggle, and swam under water as long as possible before coming to the surface.

Guiseppe was on the bank in a towering rage, and at the first appearance of the fugitive fired a volley of rocks with, perhaps, murderous intention. Anger rendered his aim very uncertain, however, and Joe dove again after inflating his lungs, coming up the

second time so far from the shore that he was in little danger of being hit by the missiles which the infuriated Italian continued to throw.

“He can’t swim, that’s certain,” the fugitive said to himself, trying to take advantage of Tom Brady’s teachings by striking out with long steady strokes. “If I can last as far as the other shore he’ll have a hard run to catch me.”

The river seemed very broad; he did not feel buoyant as when in the salt water, and the icy cold was benumbing his limbs; but there was no thought of returning.

“I’d rather drown than go back,” he said to himself as he tried to shake off the faintness which was creeping over him; but as the minutes passed his stroke became more feeble, and it was just when all hope of escape had fled that he felt the bed of the stream beneath his feet.

He had only sufficient strength to wade ashore before he fell unconscious on the

sand, and Guiseppe ran swiftly down the road toward the bridge, regardless of his organ, as if he believed it would be possible to cross the river and reach the fugitive ere he recovered.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN HOSPITABLE SHELTER.

IT was necessary to travel nearly a mile from the scene of the noonday halt to the bridge which crossed the river, and then as far again to where Joe lay on the shore like one dead. Yet Guiseppe set out at full speed, leaving his organ behind him, as if it was of so much less value than the capture of the boy, that he could well afford to run the risk of losing it.

Fortunately for Joe's hope of escape he quickly recovered consciousness. The Italian could hardly have reached the bridge when he raised himself up and looked around for some signs of the enemy; but saw none, greatly to his surprise.

"I wonder if I've been layin' here so long that he's give it up as a bad job, an' gone

home?" he asked himself, as he gazed intently at the opposite bank, and just as it seemed certain that such must be the case, he saw the organ. The instrument was so far away that at first it was difficult to distinguish it clearly, and while he sat on the sand looking across the river, the noise of footsteps on the shore below, not more than an hundred yards away, caused him to turn his head.

For an instant it seemed as if the sight of Guiseppe as he came at full speed had deprived Joe of his senses. During several seconds he gazed in helpless terror at the Italian; but after that brief time of fear and hesitation he was ready to continue the flight.

This side of the river, like the other, was covered for some distance with a reasonably heavy growth of timber, and he obeyed the first impulse by plunging into the grove where the underbrush was thickest.

The exertion of swimming, as well as the

chill caused by the water, had unfitted him for anything like a long race, and of this fact he became painfully aware after running two or three dozen yards. His knees bent under him, and a mist swam before his eyes until it seemed as if trees and bushes were engaged in the most dizzy dance, and when he could no longer make his way through them he crawled on his hands and knees among a tangled mass of shrubbery, heedless of the fact that the hiding-place thus selected at random was in a marsh, or that he was nearly covered with mud and water.

It seemed as if a long time passed before he again had possession of his faculties sufficiently to be fully aware of all that was taking place; but it could not have been very many moments, for the first he heard was the noise made by Guiseppe as he forced his way among the bushes. If it had been possible Joe would have leaped to his feet and continued the flight, thus probably insuring his own capture; but he was unable

to do any more than lift his head to listen, and in a few moments the sounds died away in the distance.

Even then Joe did not dare make any move for the purpose of bettering his condition; he would have been perfectly willing to lie there in the mud all night if by so doing his escape could be insured. It seemed singular to him that he should feel sick and distressed when he had been so wonderfully successful. His head ached as if it were bursting, and the nausea was so great as to make him very faint, trying as he did to repress the retching which might betray his whereabouts.

Joe could not have told whether an hour or only ten minutes had passed when he heard a noise on the shore, and by turning his head slightly he was able to see through the foliage the form of his pursuer. Guiseppe had come out of the thicket and was retracing his steps, having evidently given up the chase. It needed but one

glance at his face to see that the Italian was in a towering rage ; he gesticulated furiously, and gave free vent in his native tongue to what the listener believed were threats ; but made no further effort to hunt for the runaway.

The fear which the sight of this overgrown boy caused Joe was greater even than his illness, for he heeded neither the pain nor the nausea until he saw Guiseppe on the opposite bank once more. Then he crept out from the mud, and hiding in the bushes nearer the river, watched until his enemy started down the road with his organ on his back.

It was yet possible that he had simply gone back for the instrument and intended to renew the search ; but Joe could do no more than crouch a trifle further in the thicket, for his distress of body, half forgotten in the excitement, had now increased.

He shivered with the cold ; but did not dare to remove his wet clothing lest the

Italian should come upon him unawares, and wretched in body although decidedly relieved in mind, he lay hidden among the bushes until the afternoon came to an end.

During this time he had heard nothing save the shouts of teamsters from the road as they encouraged the tired horses. It was possible now for him to walk, and, with the exception of being cold, he felt none the worse because of the exposure; but concluding it was not yet safe to venture out, he resolved to remain where he was until morning.

The night seemed long, but it passed more quickly than when he and Tonio had been locked in the coal-cellar, and with the first gray light of day he was ready to begin the task of finding his way back to New York. He needed exercise, for having neither coat nor boots the morning air felt like a wintry blast, and he started through the woods on a line with the river, walk-

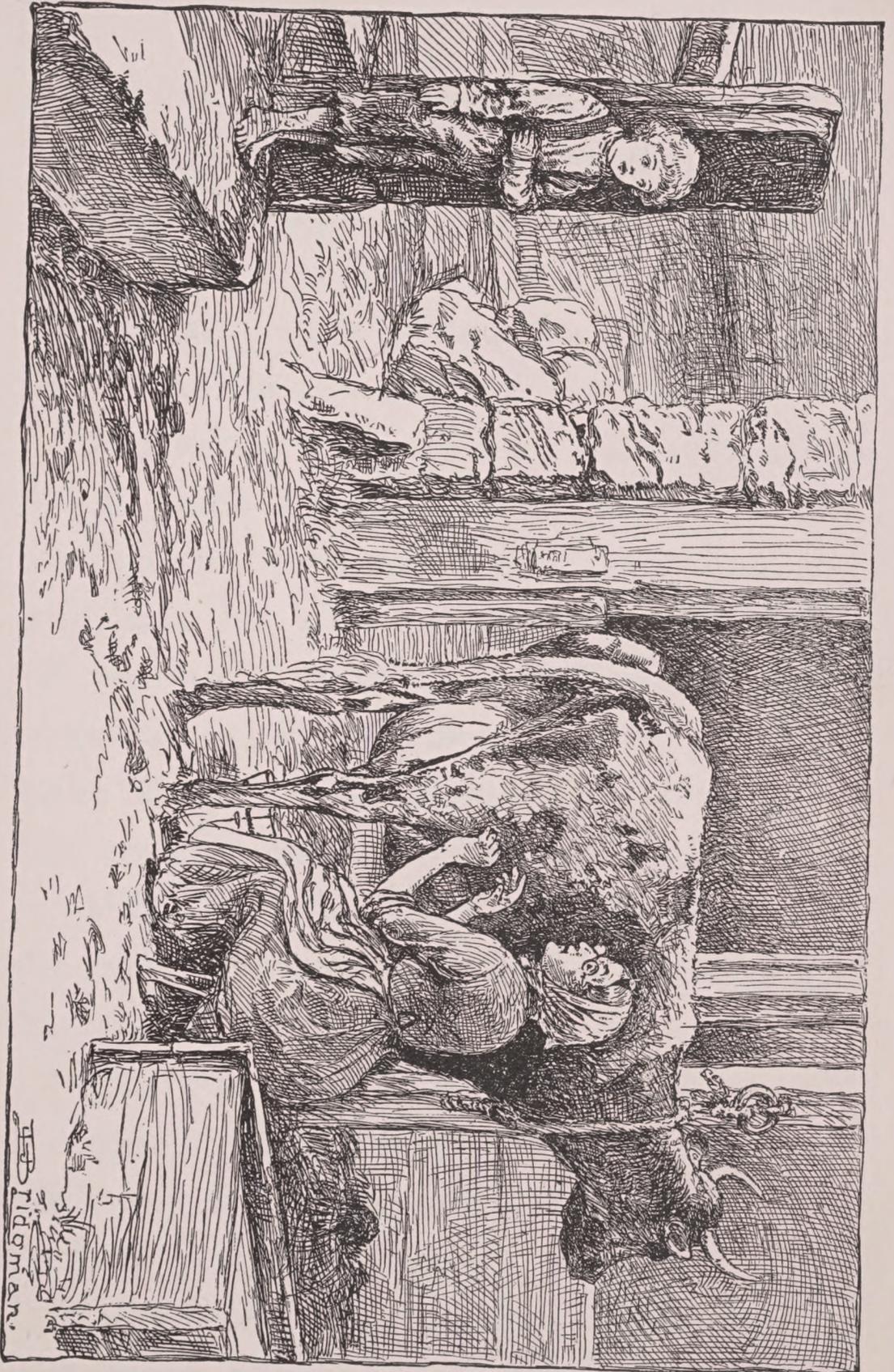
ing as rapidly as his stiffened limbs would permit.

Joe's progress was naturally slow, for it is neither a pleasant nor a painless task to go through the underbrush barefooted, and he did not dare venture on the road lest Guiseppe should be lying in wait to catch him.

The thicket came to an end near the bridge, and it was necessary to make a long detour across the fields; but before proceeding more than half a mile he understood that some change of plan must be made. The stubble cut his feet, and he was sadly in need of food.

"It would take me a month to get home this way," he said to himself, crouching behind a fence near a dwelling at which he had been very hospitably received on the previous day. "I'm goin' right up to that house an' tell 'em about my runnin' away. They wouldn't be likely to help Guiseppe, an' they can't any more'n make me clear out."

JOE FINDS A REFUGE.



Keeping a sharp watch of the road lest the Italian should be near, Joe crept up to the farm yard, and the farmer's wife shrieked aloud in fear as she saw his pale face suddenly appear from behind the corner of the barn while she was milking.

"Please don't be mad," he said piteously, as he came toward the woman, his feet bleeding, his face drawn with deep lines of pain, and his clothing covered with mud. "I run away from that Italian you saw yesterday—he stole me, an' was goin' to make me fiddle for money—an' I'm 'fraid he's 'round somewhere now huntin' for me."

"Who are you?" the woman asked, as she ceased her work and took him kindly by the hand.

"I ain't anybody but Little Joe. You see I couldn't walk through the fields 'cause it made my feet sore, an' I thought p'rhaps you'd help me."

"Of course I will, you poor child; and if that organ-grinder ever comes around here

he'll wish he was somewhere else besides in Jersey. I'm going to put you in bed until breakfast is ready, and then my husband will decide what is best for you to do."

She had led him into the house while speaking, and was ascending the stairs when Joe said timidly:

"I'm so dirty that I wouldn't be fit to get into the poorest kind of a bed. The floor is good enough if you want me to lay down, or I might go out to the barn."

"You shall get into the best tick of feathers I've got, for you don't look able to sit up, let alone trying to walk."

Joe was so completely bewildered by this kind reception that he could make no further protest, and a few moments later he was in a bed such as he had never seen before.

"You shall stay here till you're rested," the good woman said, as she turned to leave the room, "and then we'll see how you can get to New York."

“It feels so soft an’ smells so nice that I could lie here all day,” the little fellow replied in a grateful tone, and when the farmer’s wife was ready to resume her interrupted milking she was obliged to wipe her eyes several times, such a suspicious quantity of moisture had gathered in them.

The sun had but just shown his face in the eastern sky when Joe made the appeal for aid, and he rode high in the heavens when the boy was awakened by a sound of footsteps on the stairs.

“Was you comin’ after me?” he asked in a loud tone, and as the woman entered the room he said, much as if making an apology, “I’m ’fraid I’ve been here too long. Somehow I couldn’t help goin’ to sleep, an’ now I know why fellers what have nice homes like to stay in bed so late.”

“If you choose, there’s nothing to prevent you from remaining there until to-morrow morning; but I think it would be better to come down-stairs for dinner.”

“You’re awful good to me, Mrs.—Mrs.—” and Joe hesitated.

“Webster, my name is Webster,” the good lady said with a smile, as she smoothed Joe’s hair back from his brow; “but don’t talk about my being good. I should be hard-hearted if I couldn’t do this much for a little sick boy like you.”

“Oh, I ain’t sick!” and Joe raised his head quickly to show how active he was; but a sharp pain in his chest caused him to lie down again very suddenly. “Stayin’ out in the woods all night didn’t make me feel very good. I’ll be all right as soon’s I get up.”

“There is water in the next room, and after you have taken a bath come downstairs where I’ve got a nice piece of roast chicken for your dinner.”

“By gracious! but you are heapin’ the good things up for me!” Joe exclaimed, as Mrs. Webster left the room, and then he moved around very quickly that his hostess

might not be kept waiting any longer than was absolutely necessary.

After partaking of what seemed to be a veritable feast, he told his simple story in reply to Mrs. Webster's questions, and concluded by saying:

"Of course I've got to get back jest as quick as I can so's to see to Alice an' the dog, an' to earn money for the doctor; but I'm kinder 'fraid I'll meet Guiseppe somewhere on the road."

"Don't worry about that, for my husband will carry you into town on his team tomorrow, when he goes to market. He'll prevent the Italians from making any trouble, and I'm going to give you some money with which to pay the doctor so that you can get some medicine for yourself."

"There wouldn't be any use in that," Joe said, laughing merrily at the idea of his being looked upon as an invalid. "I'll get awful fat when I'm at work once more."

Mrs. Webster shook her head gravely as she asked:

“Will you tell him that I say you need medicine?”

“Of course I will,” was the prompt reply. “If you’d ask me to stand on my head for an hour I’d do it if it almost broke my neck.”

During the remainder of the day it seemed to Joe that he must be in a land of enchantment. He had no fear that Guiseppe would dare to molest him there, and walked back and forth from the barn to the house as if his pleasure was too great to permit of remaining quiet.

If anything had been needed to make him appreciate Mrs. Webster’s kindness more fully, that which she did when the afternoon was about half spent would have been sufficient.

She was in one of the chambers some time, leaving him alone, and on coming down-stairs said, while he wondered why

her eyes looked red as if she had been weeping:

“ I had a little boy once, Josey, and he was not much larger than you when God sent for him. I did think I could never part with anything which belonged to him; but now I realize that it would be wicked to keep what others need. In the room where you are to sleep to-night I have laid out a suit of his clothes, and you are to put them on in the morning.”

Joe was silent for a moment; although it had never been his good fortune to understand what a mother's love is, he realized from the tremulous voice something of the sorrow in her heart, and he said as he laid his hand affectionately on hers:

“ Your boy was lucky to have such a nice mother all for his own.”

After that there was a long silence, and then Mrs. Webster said in a more cheerful tone:

“ I would like to have you come out here

very often, Josey, and you can bring the dog when he's able to walk. My husband will explain where to find him on market-days, and you must pay us a visit soon, for I shall be anxious to know how all your family are."

"You won't want to see me half as much as I'll want to come," Joe said, and as his hostess left the room to attend to some work he crept softly up-stairs to admire the first suit of "whole" clothes he ever owned.

It was yet dark next morning when he was awakened, and, after a hurried breakfast, he clambered up on the huge wagon, Mrs. Webster saying, as she put something into his hand and kissed him:

"Be sure to come again before many days."

"I'll be here as quick as ever I can, an' every minute of the time I'll keep thinkin' how good you've been to me."

Then the farmer chirruped to the patient horses; Joe pushed himself back on the

high seat lest the jolting of the wagon should throw him off, while he held tightly to that which Mrs. Webster gave him, wondering what it was, and the journey to the city had begun.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARRIVAL.

THE first portion of the journey was made before daylight, for Farmer Webster started at two o'clock in the morning that he might arrive at the market by sunrise, and during this time Joe had quite as much as he could do to hold himself on the high seat which swayed, shook, or rocked violently to and fro according to the speed of the horses until, as he afterwards told Slip Johnson, he sometimes feared his "head would be snapped off, so he kept his neck kinder limber" to prevent such an accident.

When the first gray light of dawn appeared in the sky Joe examined that which Mrs. Webster gave him, for he had kept a firm hold of it during all the time when he was tossed about on the wagon-box like a

mariner in a storm, and to his great surprise it proved to be a two-dollar bank-note.

He looked at it in silent amazement for several minutes, Farmer Webster watching him closely all the while, and, after folding it carefully, tucked it safely away in one corner of his trousers' pocket. Then he gazed at his new clothes, hat and boots, and after the most critical examination pushed himself still further back on the seat, as he exclaimed in a half-whisper:

“ Well, by gracious ! ”

“ What is it, lad ? ” the farmer asked, as he tried to prevent the smile on his face from deepening into noisy laughter.

“ It don't seem's though this was me, ” Joe said, after a short pause, “ an' I was wonderin' if Doctor will find me out when I show up so swell as this. Did you know I had a real shirt on with a stiff front ? ”

“ Well, I sorter reckoned that's what it was, ” and as Mr. Webster laid his hard, brown hand on Joe's slender fingers the

smile disappeared from his lips, leaving them drawn and quivering as if for the moment he had allowed himself to fancy it was his own little boy alive once more. Then, after urging the horses from a slow walk to a lazy trot, he asked, "When are you comin' out to see us two lonesome old people? Mother said you'd promised to visit at the farm right often."

"Jest as soon as Si is home again. I've got money enough to pay the doctor for fixin' the dog up, an' by to-morrow I can square off Alice's board. "Will it be very far to walk out to your house?"

"Bless your heart, there's no reason for doin' that! I go in town every Tuesday an' Saturday, an' by comin' down to Vesey-street market early in the mornin' you can catch me. I'll show you where my team generally stands, so you'll make sure of seein' me, rain or shine."

"Then p'rhaps by next Saturday I'll be ready to go out, if you want me so soon."

“You can’t come any too quick to please us. I’m beginin’ to feel sorry already that we didn’t keep you altogether, instead of lettin’ you run wild agin in a big city like New York.”

“Oh, I couldn’t a’ staid any longer this time,” Joe replied in a decided tone. “I’ve got to earn money for Alice an’ Doctor, you know, an’ I haven’t been home since Monday night.”

Then Mr. Webster asked many questions relative to his being made prisoner by old Marco, and regarding his life, all of which required so much time in answering that he had hardly concluded when they arrived at the ferry.

Joe half-fancied Guiseppe might be waiting to intercept him. Although he knew the farmer would prevent anything of that kind, he breathed more freely when the heavy team was brought to a halt in front of the market and he had not seen the Italian.

“This is where I always stop,” Mr. Webster said, as he lifted the boy down from his lofty perch, “an’ I’ll be looking for you next Saturday. Now, instead of walkin’ up-town, I want you to ride on the elevated railroad, an’ then we’ll be sure them organ-grinders can’t do any mischief.”

Joe could not well refuse to do this since the farmer and his wife had been so kind, although he thought it a clear waste of five cents, and after Mr. Webster had shaken hands with him so heartily that his fingers ached from the pressure, he started up Vesey Street, thinking he was a wonderfully fortunate boy in finding such good friends.

The morning trade had but just begun when he left the cars at Thirty-fourth Street and went across the city at full speed, eager to learn how his family had gotten on during his enforced absence. He first visited the lumber-yard news-stand, not with any expectation that it would be open; but because it was the place he looked upon as

home, and it seemed only natural to go there at once.

To his great surprise he saw, while yet nearly half a block away, that business was still being carried on in the open-air establishment, and his pleasure at having escaped was sadly marred by the thought that another had taken his place.

Before it was possible to grieve very much, however, he caught a glimpse of the new merchant's face, and then he ran forward with a shrill cry of joy, for he had recognized the well-known, if not beautiful features of Slippey.

Master Johnson looked up quickly as if he fancied the voice sounded familiar; but turned away again when he saw no one but a remarkably well-dressed boy with whom he was quite certain he had not the slightest acquaintance.

“Hi! Slip! Slippey!” Joe shouted as he pressed forward yet faster until he stood panting and breathless directly in front of

the news-stand, while his friend stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

“Why don’t you say somethin’?” Joe demanded, as he reached across the boards and seized Slip by the hand.

“Cricky!” Master Johnson exclaimed, as if in reply to the question, and then several seconds elapsed before he recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to ask, “Where have you been?”

Joe gave a very brief account of his wanderings, and had hardly finished speaking when a low whine from the board-pile attracted his attention.

“Yes, it’s Doctor,” Slip said, in reply to the questioning look in Joe’s eyes, and an instant later the dog was licking the hands of the boy who had saved him from a cruel death.

“He knows me; I do believe he knows me!”

“Of course he does,” Slip said confidently. “If that dog could a’ talked he’d asked

every day where you was. I bring him down here mornin's, an' take him home nights. D'yer see how fat he's gettin'?"

"Where's Alice?" Joe asked, as he sat on the boards with Doctor in his arms.

"Up to my house. When I couldn't find you last Tuesday mornin', an' the dog was layin' here lookin' as if he'd like to tell what he knew, we all thought you'd got hurt an' been carried to a hospital. Then mother said Alice could stay with us till Si got back, or you come; but after Dick White showed up Wednesday with the yarn about the *Italians*, things got lively. Tom an' I knocked right off work, an' went down with the biggest p'liceman the folks at the station-house would let us have; but you wasn't there. The old *Italian* said he didn't know anything about a boy, an' the cop got mad 'cause he thought we was foolin' him. Then I give you up for sure; but me an' Tom pounded Bill Dunham till he was sorry for what he'd done."

“ I wish you hadn’t,” Joe said regretfully.

“ Why not? Didn’t he get you in the scrape? ”

“ He wasn’t meanin’ to do it. Of course he couldn’t know anything about the *Italians*, an’ was only tryin’ to drive me away from here. Now he’ll be down on me worse’n ever.”

“ He won’t even dare to curl his lip. But say, run up to the house while I’m ’tendin’ to business, an’ after you come back we’ll go ’round to see the fellers. Tom Brady’ll jest about go outer his skin ’cause your lookin’ so fine.”

“ Hadn’t I better take Doctor with me? ”

“ Oh, no, all the fellers know he’s here, an’ every one of ’em looks in when I ain’t ’round to see if he wants anything.”

Doctor did not appear well pleased at parting with his master so soon, and Joe kissed his little brown nose several times before he laid him in the box with the promise to return very soon.

Ten minutes later Joe was telling his story to Mrs. Johnson and Alice, both of whom were plunged into the same delightful state of astonishment by his appearance as Slip had been, and it was a long time before he succeeded in gratifying their curiosity.

When this was finally done, he proposed to pay Mrs. Johnson one dollar on account of Alice's board; but she positively refused to take anything.

"Keep the money," she said decidedly, "and on Monday try to find her a good home. She has been sleeping on the lounge when she ought to have a comfortable bed, and I'm sure you'll succeed in getting what's needed now that you can pay for it."

Joe would have felt better satisfied to liquidate what he considered a personal debt; but since this was impossible, he said:

"I'm goin' now, for I want to get to work with the afternoon papers; but I'll be up here to-morrow."

"You will come to-night and sleep with

Walter," Mrs. Johnson said in a matter-of-fact tone. "You are not strong enough to stay out-of-doors all the time, and we'll crowd you in some way which will be more comfortable than lying on the damp boards."

It was several seconds before Joe realized that Mrs. Johnson referred to Slippey when she spoke of "Walter," and then he said in a voice which was not remarkable for its steadiness:

"It seems as if everybody was awful nice to me lately. The lumber-yard is plenty good enough for me; but I'm 'fraid it'll be kinder rough on these fine clothes to lay 'round in 'em."

"You will be hurt more than the clothes," Mrs. Johnson said, as she gazed sadly at the hectic flush on the sunken cheeks and the unnatural brilliancy of his eyes.

"You'll come, won't you, Joe?" Alice whispered, and he replied, as he caressed her hand:

“I’ll walk over with Slip—Walter, I mean, an’ then we’ll see what’s best to do.”

When he was on the street once more he knew from long experience that the morning trade in newspapers would not be over for some time, and instead of going directly to the lumber-yard he started toward Third Avenue to make his second and most important business call.

The veterinary surgeon was in his office and at leisure when Joe looked timidly through the half-opened door, uncertain whether to enter before receiving a special invitation.

“Hello! Have you come to poke fun at me for believing you’d pay that dollar?” the man asked, as he saw his visitor’s face.

“Indeed, I haven’t,” Joe replied indignantly, as he entered. “I was lugged off by a old Italian man, an’ couldn’t come till now; but I’ve got the whole of the money.”

“What makes you so willing to pay the

debt after keeping me out of the cash a week? Is the dog sick an' in need of me?"

"He looks as if he was 'most well, an' I only want to do what I promised."

Joe's cheeks were flaming red now, for he was both grieved and ashamed that the surgeon should think he would not keep his agreement.

"Tell me why you didn't come before?" the man asked, speaking in a more gentle tone; but paying no attention to the money which his debtor held toward him.

Joe told the story of his being detained in the Italian quarter and subsequent wanderings, in detail, concluding by saying:

"I come right up to pay you jest as soon as I had seen Slippey an' Alice an' Doctor. Mrs. Webster told me to ask you to give me some medicine."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin', an' that's why I didn't want to speak about it; but she made me promise."

The surgeon looked at him attentively for a moment, and then he said slowly :

“ It ain’t in my line to doctor boys ; but I reckon good food and a bed to sleep in nights will fix you all right. You’ll pick up fast enough out at that farm. What do you propose to do now ? ”

“ I’m goin’ to sell papers, an’ when trade is dull get the boys to help me find Tonio. I don’t know what old Marco did with him the day I was taken away by Guiseppe ; but somebody ought to try and help him. ”

“ That’s a fact, ” the surgeon replied heartily, “ and if a little shaver like you is willing to go around helping dogs, girls and boys, a big, overgrown man like me ought to be ashamed of not lifting his hands for anybody but his own precious self. What time did the Italian boys usually come home at night ? ”

“ When it was dark, ”

“ Then this is what I’ll do. Meet me here at twelve o’clock, and we’ll visit police headquarters to see what can be done. ”

“Are you goin’ to help me find Tonio?” Joe cried, his eyes opening wide with surprise and delight.

“I’ll make sure that the officers listen to your story, and while I can’t claim any special interest in your Italian friend, there’ll be considerable satisfaction in doing something toward breaking up this padrone business.”

“Then we’ll get Tonio for sure, an’ he’ll be pretty near tickled to death if he’s clear from old Marco. Say, take the ninety cents what I owe, so’s I won’t have to bother you every mornin’,” and Joe held out the money once more.

“I guess I’ll keep you in my debt awhile longer,” and the surgeon pushed the money from him. “You need that to pay the little girl’s board, and we’ll wait till the dog can walk before the bill is settled. If it’s a good job I may want more than a dollar.”

“But I’d rather pay it now, ’cause that’s what Mrs. Webster gave me the money for,

an' it wouldn't be right to use it any other way."

"If I don't choose to take the cash you can spend it as you please. Get away now, while I attend to some work that ought to be done before I go out, and come back at twelve o'clock sharp."

Joe looked a trifle bewildered as he obeyed the gruffly-spoken command, and when he arrived at the lumber-yard where fully a dozen acquaintances were waiting to greet him, he had not decided whether the surgeon was really a very ill-tempered old gentleman, or was simply trying to make other people believe such to be the case.

CHAPTER X.

TONIO'S RESCUE.

LITTLE JOE never fancied he had so many friends among the newsboys until this morning when twelve had gathered to congratulate him upon having escaped from the old padrone's power, and, what was most gratifying, they all appeared to be happy at seeing him again.

Never was an audience more attentive than this one as he related, for the fourth time that morning, all the particulars of his imprisonment; they were deeply interested in every unimportant detail, and when he spoke of the farmer, Slip Johnson said excitedly:

"Now he was a decent kind of an old chap. Let's all go down to the market next Tuesday mornin' an' load him right up with

papers. Them sort of men oughter be encouraged."

"We're with yer," Tom Brady replied approvingly; "but what's to hinder our cleanin' that old *Italian's* place out for him first? There's enough of us here to do it, an' Tonio could be let loose."

For a moment it seemed as if Tom's suggestion would be carried into effect regardless of Joe's wishes, so excited were the boys over the wrongs inflicted upon their friend, and not until he had insisted very warmly that the matter should be allowed to rest wholly in the surgeon's hands, did they consent to forego the pleasure of making reprisals after their own fashion.

"Anyhow, we can sneak down to police headquarters before Joe an' the doctor get there. Then we'll foller an' see the fun," Slip proposed, and with this Joe was forced to be content, while the others were satisfied, believing that by such an arrangement they would have a view of all that took place.

Neither Bill Dunham nor any of his friends were to be seen during the forenoon. They had been frightened on learning how much misery Joe was suffering as the result of their effort to drive him away, and the flogging which Slip and Tom administered after the visit to the Italian quarter failed of its purpose, caused them to fear a repetition in case they were caught on the day of their victim's return.

Joe could make no complaint that time passed slowly during the forenoon. Until fifteen minutes before twelve he was busy receiving the congratulations of his friends and acquaintances, and when he started for the surgeon's office fully eighteen boys went at full speed toward police headquarters, that there might be plenty of opportunity for posting themselves in such positions as would be most advantageous for keeping a strict watch.

"We'll be there before you an' the doctor are, whether you see us or not," Slippey

said, as he parted with Joe, "an' we'll be ready to stand right behind both of you when the perlice come down on that old Italian."

"All right," was the reply in anything rather than a tone of satisfaction. "You'll be sure not to let the other fellers do what the officers wouldn't like, won't you, Slip? I'm kinder 'fraid the doctor'll be mad when he finds out that so many are 'round watchin'."

"Don't bother 'bout us," was the calm reply. "Nobody'll know 'less we're needed in case of a row, an' then we'd show mighty quick what we could do."

Joe would have been much better pleased had the boys remained quietly near the lumber-yard until his return; but he understood how useless it would be to make any attempt at dissuading them from their purpose, and as he walked along his mind was filled with misgivings.

A heavy phaeton stood in front of the Third-avenue office when Joe arrived, and

before he could enter the building the surgeon stepped out on the sidewalk.

"You're on time, an' so am I," he said, as he buttoned his gloves with the greatest deliberation. "Jump in, and it won't be many minutes before I'll land you at headquarters with the trimmest piece of horse-flesh you ever rode behind."

This was not a very extravagant boast, since Farmer Webster's lazy team was the only one with which Joe had a riding acquaintance; but thinking the surgeon expected him to make some remark on the merits of the horse, he said, as he scrambled into one corner of the roomy vehicle:

"He looks like a nice one."

"Nice? Why, he's sound as a dollar, and can do his mile in twenty-four without raisin' a hair. Kind as a kitten, well broke, an' money can't buy him."

Joe looked up in bewilderment, understanding not a word of the slang, and the man started with what seemed very like

astonishment as he noted for the first time the flaming spots on the little fellow's face, his short, quick breathing, and the intense brilliancy of his eyes.

"Are you feeling pretty good to-day?" he asked in a tone which sounded very friendly.

"It would be kinder queer if I didn't," was the quick reply. "It ain't many fellers what are as lucky as I am."

"I mean are you feeling well?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I'm all right, only you see I ain't used to ridin', an' I guess bein' so long on Mr. Webster's wagon made me tired."

"Look here, Joe," and the surgeon held the reins in one hand while he laid the other softly on the boy's shoulder. "I'm only a horse-doctor, and don't know how to prescribe for human beings as your friend Mrs. Webster fancied from what you probably told her. Now, as soon as this job is finished I want you to see a physician, and ask

him if he thinks you are well enough to knock around the streets."

Joe looked up with a puzzled expression on his face, as if fancying there was something in the request which he did not understand, and then he said slowly:

"I'll do it, of course; but I don't need any medicine. I s'pose you think I'm sick 'cause I ain't fat."

"I don't say you're sick; I only want to know what a physician thinks about it. Here we are, and now let's see whether the police have got time to attend to such as your Italian friends."

Rapidly as they had been whirled along, the party of would-be spectators were there first, for Joe saw at least half a dozen faces from as many nooks and corners when he jumped out of the carriage, and all of them he recognized as belonging to his friends.

They dodged in and out their places of concealment in the most agile manner as if to prove their ability to screen themselves

from view in case any emergency should arise, and Joe felt decidedly uncomfortable in mind lest this numerous following should provoke the anger of the officers.

As a matter of course the surgeon was in total ignorance of the fact that so many sharp eyes were watching his movements, and he looked around impatiently for some one to hold his horse. Slip Johnson understood what was wanted, and appearing suddenly from behind a cask, asked innocently, as he twisted his face into a variety of queer shapes under the impression that he was winking at Joe:

“Want a boy, sir?”

“Yes; just stand by his head awhile,” the surgeon said, as he motioned Joe to follow him, and the two had hardly disappeared within the building when Slip was surrounded by all his friends, each of whom tried to appear as if he was especially detailed to watch the horse.

During the next hour Joe was in a very

uncomfortable frame of mind. He was led from one official to another, and called upon to repeat his story until it seemed as if he had laid the facts before the entire police force, and then, after a long, private conversation between half a dozen men and the surgeon, the latter said to him :

“ You are to stay here until it is time to make the descent upon Marco's house, when you will go with the officers. It won't be very pleasant loafing around so long ; but you ought to be willing to put up with a little inconvenience for the sake of helping your friend, Tonio.”

“ I'll do anything I can,” Joe replied, and before he had an opportunity to ask if he might go out a moment, the surgeon left the room, saying in an unusually friendly tone :

“ Come up to see me in the morning, for I shall want to know how you succeed.”

One of the officers led Joe to a room in the basement, and there he was left to while away the time as best he could with nothing

to occupy his mind save the thought of what his friends would think because he had not left the building in company with the surgeon.

The hours passed slowly, but not wearily, for the knowledge of what was to be accomplished animated him, and the hands of the big clock moved steadily on until their position and the gathering gloom in the cheerless room told that the hour for action had come.

“Tired of waiting?” an officer asked, as a party of five, all dressed in citizen's clothes, entered, and Joe replied timidly:

“I'd be willin' to stay here a good deal longer if I could help Tonio get away.”

“Well, it's time to start now, and if the old padrone didn't get so scared when you escaped that he shut up his establishment, we shall take your friend out of the den very soon. Come with us, and if there should happen to be any trouble after we arrive, keep close at our heels.”

Then the speaker led the way out of the building, and on reaching the sidewalk Joe's first care was to look quickly around for the boys.

Scurrying footsteps, and the sight of half a dozen pair of heels as their owners vainly tried to conceal themselves in the nearest hiding-places, told that all the party of self-appointed watchers had remained on duty, and Joe knew they would not be far away when the officers arrived at Crosby Street.

When they were in the open air the men did not walk together; but separated as if each was going in a different direction, and Joe asked in astonishment, as he did his best to keep pace with the leader:

“Are you going there alone?”

“Oh, no; we shall find the others close around when we need them,” and five minutes later, when they were near old Marco's dwelling, Joe saw the remainder of the officers lounging in the immediate vicinity.

“Follow me right in,” the man said, as he

made a sign to the others, "and point out that precious Guiseppe, for I want to make sure of catching him."

It was not without an inward fear that Joe walked behind the officer up the stone steps into the hallway, for the remembrance of what he had suffered in that house was yet too fresh in his mind to permit of indifference, however strongly he was guarded.

But little ceremony was used in entering the room. Two of the policeman had been stationed at the corner of the court to prevent an escape from the windows, and the other three were in the hallway when he who had the party in charge commanded the inmates to open the door. After they had waited several minutes and the command was not complied with, the officers burst through the frail barrier just as old Marco was making every effort to gather up the small coins which were spread out on the table in front of him.

“That’s Guiseppe,” Joe said, as he pointed to his former captor who had retreated to one corner of the room as if trying to conceal himself, and in a twinkling the padrone and his assistant were prisoners.

There was no necessity of looking for Tonio. He had recognized Joe despite the great change in the latter’s clothing, and rushed from among the throng of cowering, terrified boys with hands outstretched, as he cried hysterically:

“Do not forget me! Tell the policemen I am very wretched here that they may take me away. Can you not remember poor Tonio?”

“Indeed I can,” Joe replied quickly, throwing his arms around the boy’s neck to assure him he was safe. “Old Marco shan’t stop you from going where you please.”

It seemed as if joy affected Tonio more deeply than grief; he cried, clung to his friend frantically, and then would have fled from the room if one of the officers had not

seized him by the shoulder with a peremptory command to "stop yelling."

"I want you to tell me how many of these boys have been kept here against their will," the officer said, after Tonio had been reduced to silence. "Ask those who do not want to stay with Marco to step forward."

Tonio repeated the words in Italian, and immediately every boy sprang toward him, shouting and talking vehemently until the din was almost deafening.

"Now explain that they must go with us until the padrone has been brought into court," the officer said to the little interpreter. "They will be locked up for a few days; but in a much better place than this, and afterward homes will be provided for all."

It was some time before the excited lads could be made to understand; but when they finally realized that there was nothing more to be feared from old Marco every one was ready to do as the officer commanded.

“Must Tonio go with the others?” Joe asked, after the order had been given for the boys to form in a line.

“Yes; we shall commit them all to the House of Detention until the trial is over. You would be locked up, too, if the Vet. hadn't promised to produce you in court Monday morning.”

“I shall see you then,” Joe whispered to the little Italian, “and when the trial is over perhaps you and I will run the stand together.”

“You are sure these men have told us no lies? We are really to work no more for Marco?” Tonio asked, distrustful of freedom which was to be begun by imprisonment.

Joe assured him that nothing had been misrepresented, and then he stood in line with his companions, all of whom were watching their late masters with the most intense satisfaction.

Marco and Guiseppe looked as despondent

as the boys did happy; their hands were fastened together, and between two officers they were led out of the room, the old man begging to be let free, at the same time protesting that he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

“It will be seen what you have done when I show the marks of the whip on my back,” one of the boys shouted vindictively. “If the officers will look at the lash they will see my blood.”

“You will have a chance to tell that in court,” an officer said. “Tonio, explain to your companions that they are to follow me, and waste no more time.”

A few words in Italian, and nine boys marched out of the room triumphantly, Tonio shouting to Joe:

“We will not forget what you have done!”

“Go home now, but be at the Tombs court early Monday morning,” the officer in charge of the party said, and Joe left the

building where he had been so wretched to be met on the steps by his friends, who were waiting impatiently to receive him.

“That’s what I call a neat job,” Slip Johnson said approvingly, as he and Tom Brady seized Joe by the arms and led him up the street followed by a noisy, joyful crowd. “We begun to think one spell that the doctor was playin’ it rough, an’ had you locked up agin; but we stuck right there till you come out with the cops.”

“An’ we’d a’ staid all night if you hadn’t showed up before,” Tom added.

Then the remainder of the party prevented further progress by clustering around Joe with the demand that he tell all which had occurred since they saw him last, and when the not-very-long story was concluded, Slip said:

“Now, come on; we’re goin’ to give a reg’lar swell supper, an’ if you don’t have the highest old time that ever was, it won’t be our fault.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE INVALID.

THE feast was quite as great a success as Slippey and his friends had anticipated. They went to an out-of-the-way restaurant near Park Row where the proprietor, in consideration of the number of would-be customers and the fact that it was late in the evening, agreed to serve the regularly advertised twenty-five-cent meals at fifty per cent. discount, and each boy, with the exception of Joe, paid for his own food. Slip and Tom contributed the amount necessary for the entertainment of the only invited guest, and although it is quite probable there were more elaborate dinners eaten in the city on that night, it is not possible any could have been more highly appreciated.

It was nearly ten o'clock when the feasters

reached the lumber-yard news-stand again, and Doctor, having been alone since noon, greeted his master and friends with such demonstrations of joy that Joe reproached himself severely for what seemed very much like neglect of the cripple.

“ We ought to have come right back from old Marco’s an’ given him somethin’ to eat before we went off on a good time,” he said, and both Slip and Tom tried to atone for their forgetfulness by purchasing a plentiful supply of milk and rolls from the neighboring grocery store.

While the invalid was enjoying his late repast one by one the boys went home, until Slip and Joe were alone, and the former said, when Doctor lapped up the last drop of milk:

“ Come on; it’s time to go. Mother expects you’ll sleep with me, an’ she’d raise a row if you didn’t.”

Joe made no objection to the plan. He felt so tired and weak that even the exertion

of carrying the dog was too much for him, and as Slippey took the box from his feeble arms he began to wonder if he was really sick as some of his friends seemed to think.

Mrs. Johnson's bed was not nearly as soft and odorous as the one he had slept on at the farm-house; but it was rest-inviting to the weary boy, and he did not open his eyes next morning until Slip awakened him after breakfast was on the table.

It was unnecessary for Joe to say he did not feel refreshed by the slumber. His face told of that fact most eloquently, and Alice cried, running toward him as he entered the room looking pale and haggard:

“What is the matter? Are you sick?”

“I don't believe so, 'cause that couldn't be where everybody is so good to me. It seems as if I was jest like Doctor — when I get into a real bad scrape all the folks I meet are friends.”

Joe tried to appear cheerful, and to shake off the illness which assailed him; but

before he had finished speaking his pallor increased to such an extent that Mrs. Johnson insisted on his lying down.

“Come right here on the lounge,” she said, “and you needn’t think of anything but getting better, for it’s Sunday when there’s no work to be done.”

“I’ve got to go up an’ see the doctor,” Joe said; but at the same time he did as she proposed because it was actually impossible to remain standing.

“You can see him to-morrow just as well,” Alice added, as she arranged the pillows and tried in her poor way to make him more comfortable.

“But he’ll be waitin’ for me, an’ I’ve got to go ’cause I told him I would.”

“Walter shall run up there and explain that you are too sick to go out,” Mrs. Johnson said, growing alarmed at the boy’s appearance, and before he could make any protest Slippey had left the room on his way to Third Avenue.

Joe did his best to act as if he was not really ill; but when Alice brought Doctor in his soap-box kennel to the lounge, he could do little more than hold his hand out for the dog to lick.

“We’ll put both the invalids together,” Si’s tiny sister said, as she took the cripple from his bed of paper and laid him on Joe’s arm, and it seemed as if the dog understood that his master was ill, for he remained very quiet, not once trying to press his little brown nose against the boy’s cheek save when the latter spoke to him.

Poor Alice! She was thoroughly alarmed as her young guardian tried in vain to sip a few spoonfuls of the coffee Mrs. Johnson brought. She had heard what the latter thought of Joe’s condition when they were alone after he paid his first visit, and now she feared he was very near death.

Slip’s mission to the veterinary surgeon resulted differently from what Mrs. Johnson had fancied. That gentleman, on being told

that Joe was too ill to call on him, said, as he took up his hat and cane :

“ I’ll go back with you, my lad, and see what your mother thinks about it. If all the boys in this city were like Little Joe I’d be willing to give something to the orphan asylums, and he musn’t be allowed to suffer for anything while I’m around.”

Slip looked in surprise at this red-faced man who said such kindly things about his friend, yet spoke as if he was terribly angry ; but he made no reply. In silence he led the way to his cleanly but not beautiful home, and his astonishment was increased by hearing the big man speak to the sick boy as kindly and softly as a woman.

“ What’s the matter, Joe ? ”

“ Nothin’ much. I reckon I’ll be all right in the mornin’, but I’m awful tired now. You know the officers told me to come down to the Tombs early to-morrow, an’ I’ve got to be well by then.”

“ Don’t bother about that. I’ll see them

some time to-day, and explain that it won't be convenient for you to come."

"I'm 'fraid they'll be mad, 'cause one of 'em told me I'd a' been locked up with Tonio but for you."

"Then if I say you can't come, that'll settle it," and the surgeon brushed back the brown curls from Joe's forehead with a touch as gentle as Alice's could have been, and after one searching glance at the wan face he turned with his old, gruff air to Slip, as he asked, "What are you loafing around here for when there's so much to be done?"

"I ain't got nothin' to do," and Master Johnson looked from the surgeon to his mother in the most perfect bewilderment. "I don't sell Sunday papers, an' neither does Joe."

"Then take this up to Lexington Avenue — I've put the address on it so you can't make any mistake."

The visitor handed him a card on which were written half a dozen words, and Slip

obeyed, looking as if he believed Joe's friend was a lunatic.

Then the surgeon called Mrs. Johnson aside to explain that he had sent for a physician with whom he was acquainted, and after that had been done he sat down again by the sick boy's side.

An hour later Slip came into the room with an elderly gentleman who aroused Joe from the half-stupor into which he had fallen to ask him a number of questions. Then, as it appeared to Alice, he thumped the little fellow roughly on the back and chest until the invalid cried out with pain, and he wrote something on a small square of white paper which he handed to the surgeon.

After that the two men and Mrs. Johnson held a long conversation in one corner of the room as if afraid Alice or Slip might overhear them, and when it was concluded the surgeon said, as he took some money from his pocket:

“I will supply what cash is needed if you will do the nursing, Mrs. Johnson. In case it should not be possible for me to call in the morning, I wish you would send your son to my office after Doctor Marshall has made his visit, so I can know how Joe is getting along.”

Then both the men went away, and Slip and Alice stood near the lounge watching the invalid with a nameless fear in their hearts until the attention of the former was attracted to the street by a shrill, peculiar whistle.

“It’s Dick White,” he said in a whisper, as he looked out of the window, and Joe’s eyes were opened at once.

“He’s after the fifty cents I owe him. Don’t you s’pose he’d jest as soon come up here, ’cause I don’t feel like goin’ down.”

“Of course he will; but what do you owe him for? I thought you didn’t know him very well.”

Joe told of the bargain he made with Dick

when his need was so great, and concluded by saying:

“It’s lucky your mother an’ the doctor didn’t take what I owed ’em, for I wouldn’t had the money now, an’ he was to have it the day I got clear.”

“You ain’t goin’ to give him half a dollar for jest comin’ up here?” and Slippey spoke very earnestly.

“That’s what I said I’d do, an’ it wouldn’t be fair to back out of a trade. *Please* ask him in, an’ I’ll feel better after it’s squared.”

Slippey looked angry when he went down the stairs, and the reception Dick White met with was not very cordial.

“What are you whistlin’ ’round here for?” he asked sternly.

“The fellers said Joe was in your house, an’ I come for what he owes me.”

“Are you mean enough to take pay for helpin’ a feller out of a scrape like he was in?” Slip asked indignantly.

“I knocked off work so’s to hunt for you

an' Tom, an' he oughter do what he promised," Dick said, in a whining tone, and Slip replied scornfully :

" Oh, he's jest soft enough to pay, an' I'm here to ask if you'll please be so kind as to walk up-stairs an' get the money, 'cause he's sick an' can't come down. But jest wait till you get into a scrape, an' then we'll see whether the fellers will help you except for hard cash."

" A trade's a trade," Master White replied, much as if he was ashamed of himself, and when he ascended the stairs Slippey stepped around the corner where he pounded the lamp-post as a safe way of giving vent to his temper.

" I won't go back till he leaves. If I meet him agin it's most sure I'll thump him, an' that would make Joe feel bad," he said to himself, as he kept his face resolutely turned down the street lest he should see Dick.

The fear of wounding his sick friend pre-

vented him from even so much as looking around until his mother called to him from the corner, and said, as he went quickly to her side:

“I’m going to the druggist’s for Joe’s medicine, and you must stay with him till I get back, for Alice is doing the work.”

“I was waitin’ for Dick White to go,” Slip replied, as he made a great effort to keep his temper within bounds.

“He only staid a moment,” Mrs. Johnson said, as she continued on her way, and Slippey muttered:

“He left the minute he got his money; but jest wait till Joe gets well, an’ I’ll show him whether it pays to be mean.”

Then he entered the house, but without speaking, for the invalid was lying on the lounge with his eyes closed as if asleep, and he did his best to move about noiselessly. He had already seated himself near the sick boy, when a heavy step was heard on the stairs, and in another instant Tom Brady

burst into the room, so excited that he failed to see Slip's warning gestures.

"Where's Alice?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, and Joe opened his eyes immediately.

"She's out in the kitchen. What's the matter?" And now Slippey forgot that he had been trying to preserve silence.

"Her brother is dead. The steamer he went on got wrecked, an' the poor old feller is drowned," Tom said, as he did his best to choke down a sob while he handed his friend a newspaper folded in such a manner that the headline, "LOSS OF THE GREYHOUND," could be seen. "Look! there's his name."

Slippey did not read the article. The one line, "*Silas Hodgdon, Captain's Boy, Drowned,*" arrested his attention, and for several moments he gazed at it in silence as if unable to understand its meaning.

"Let me see," Joe said, as he held out his hand for the paper, and when it was given him he read the brief account of the disaster

slowly, stopping almost at every other word to wipe the tears from his eyes.

“Poor little Alice!” he cried, and then folding the sheet quickly that the article might be hidden from view, he said, “Don’t tell her about this now, fellers; wait awhile.”

“But she’s got to know,” and Tom appeared surprised that such a request should be made.

“Wait till I’m well. If she sees that while I’m sick it’ll seem like she didn’t have anybody to take care of her. I’ll go to work after the trial to-morrow, an’ when we’ve found a place for her to live, so’s she’ll know things are all right, we’ll ask Slippey’s mother to tell her.”

“Of course we’re bound to do what you say,” Tom replied slowly, but looking very much as if he thought the sad news should be made known at once, and before he could ask why Joe was lying down, Slip beckoned for him to go into the hall.

When Mrs. Johnson returned the two

boys were in earnest conversation on the stairs, and after they had shown her the brief account which would plunge so many loving hearts into deepest grief, repeating the request made by the sick boy, she said:

“We will do as he wishes, and it is just as well, perhaps, for he is so ill that the sight of Alice mourning might make him worse.”

Then she entered the room where the invalid lay with the tears trickling down his pale face, while the dog was licking the thin fingers as if understanding his need of sympathy, and from the kitchen could be heard the sweet, clear voice of the drowned boy's tiny sister as she sang while working, all unconscious of the sorrow in store for her.

CHAPTER XII.

JOE'S LETTER.

WHEN the physician came next morning there was no necessity for him to say that Joe was very ill. The invalid's face told the story more plainly than words could have done, and Mrs. Johnson's voice trembled as she asked in a whisper :

“ Is he any worse, Doctor ? ”

“ I am afraid we can do but little save to afford him relief from pain. A change of scene and air might affect more than medicine ; but since that is out of the question nothing can be done except to give him whatever he wants in order to prevent him, so far as possible, from dwelling upon his own condition.”

Then, after writing a prescription more as a matter of form than because the sick boy

needed drugs, he left the room, and the door had hardly closed behind him when Joe, whom Mrs. Johnson believed to be asleep, laid his hand on hers, as he asked:

“Does he mean that I won't *ever* get well?”

For a moment the good woman hesitated, hardly knowing what reply to make, and then as Alice, not having heard the physician's ominous words, went into the adjoining room intent on her household duties, she said, kissing the boy's pale cheeks while she held his face in her hands:

“I'm afraid he does, Joe, dear. Try to be brave for your mother is waiting up there, and if the angels come to take you she will be with them.”

“It don't seem as if I was 'fraid, only I'm awful sorry, 'cause I wanted to keep Alice from feelin' bad, an' I oughter live till Doctor gets well. Do you s'pose I could go to the market to-morrow?”

“No, indeed, Joe, you mustn't think of

such a thing. Can't Walter do the errand for you? He will be home pretty soon, for he wasn't going to buy many papers this morning."

"If you'll let me write somethin' to Mrs. Webster he might carry it down."

The physician had said that the sick boy's mind should be occupied lest he dwell upon his own condition, therefore Mrs. Johnson brought him a sheet of paper and a pencil; but she asked solicitously:

"Can you write, or shall I do it for you?"

"I'll try, an' perhaps she'd rather I did it all, 'cause I'm goin' to ask her to let somebody come out to her farm in my place."

With the paper spread on a book, and an additional pillow placed under his head, Joe went to work, forced to stop every few minutes as his strength failed him, and the task was not completed when Slip entered the room.

"I thought you'd like to know 'bout the trial, so me an' Tom Brady went down to

the court-house," he said, as he patted Doctor, whom Alice had placed on the bed by Joe's side.

"Is the trial over?"

"Part of it is, an' the rest comes off next month. The *Italian* boys told 'bout Marco makin' 'em play on the street, and how he used the whip. Then the judge said he'd bind the old man an' Guiseppe over — whatever that means — an' your hoss-doctor thinks they'll be sent to prison sure."

"What'll be done to Tonio an' the rest of the fellers?" Joe asked, his cheeks growing ominously red with excitement.

"The S'iety for the Pre'ntion of Cruelty to Children promised to get homes for 'em all. Tom an' me went right over to Tonio an' told him you couldn't come on 'count of bein' sick. He says he's livin' high up to the House of 'Tention, an' wants to kiss you; but I don't reckon you'd have a *Italian* slobberin' 'round, even if he is pretty nigh decent."

“ You didn't tell him that, did you, Slippey? ”

“ What d'yer take me for? I jest said he couldn't do it yet awhile, an' he allowed as how he an' all the gang would when they saw you; but it'll be easy enough to keep away from 'em. Tom says he'll stand down by our door with a big club so's they can't get in till you say the word.”

“ Tell him not to do that, Slippey,” and Joe tried in vain to raise himself on the pillows. “ It would make 'em feel bad, an' I'd be sorry.”

“ All right,” Master Johnson said carelessly, “ I'll run down an' make him go away, 'cause he's there now watchin' for *Italians*.”

Then Slippey left the room, and Joe resumed his painful task of letter-writing, stopping not until the following was concluded:

“ Deer Miss Webster im awful sorry i cant come out to see you agin but the doctor says i wont get well an i guess it's so. If God lets me into heaven ill look round for your little boy an tell him how good you was to let me wear his cloes. Alices brother

Si has got drowned an i thought perhaps youd let her come out to see you cause she aint got any home. Shes a nice little girl an if she brings the dog with her so theyll both have a home it wont make so much difference bout me. Theyll be jest as lone-some as i was, an youd be glad to make em feel good the way you did me. Doctor is a little dog an he wouldnt be much trouble but im fraid some of the boys here will kill him if i die. I wish id kissed you twice the mornin i come to New York. Good by
Mis Webster. "Joe"

Before Slippey went to bed that night the invalid did his best to describe the farmer so explicitly that there would be no difficulty in finding him, and Joe was yet asleep when his friend set out next morning.

It was hardly ten o'clock when the rattle of heavy wheels was heard from the street, and an instant later Slippey ushered a stranger into Joe's room. Their footsteps aroused the sick boy from the stupor into which he had fallen, and a look of joy lighted up his face as Mr. Webster entered.

"I'm so glad you've come," he cried; "but I didn't want to ask you 'cause I was 'fraid it wouldn't do to leave the horses."

“I'd a' been a good deal quicker if I'd known this before,” the visitor said huskily. “The last thing I told mother when I left this mornin' was that I'd bring you back with me if you come down to the market. She has fixed up our boy's room, an' we was countin' on keepin' you with us a long while, Josey.”

“You're real good, an' I'd liked to gone there,” Joe replied, as he laid his hand on the farmer's brown fingers. “Don't you think she could ask Alice an' Doctor to stay awhile? Then it wouldn't make any difference whether I died or not.”

“They shall come, Josey, they shall come, an' we'll keep the poor little motherless girl jest the same as if she was our own. So this is the dog?” and Mr. Webster leaned over Doctor ostensibly to pat him; but in reality to hide the tears in his eyes.

“Don't you think he'd be nice to have on a farm?” and there was such a world of entreaty in the question that one could

understand how eager Joe was to know the cripple would have a good home.

“He shall come with the little girl, an’ at the same time you do,” the farmer said with emphasis, after a pause. “I ain’t goin’ to give in that you won’t get well agin till we’ve seen what can be done.”

Joe was too tired to make any reply. He closed his eyes as if oblivious to everything around him now that the future of his pet and Alice had been assured, and while he was thus in a state of partial unconsciousness Farmer Webster arose softly as he beckoned for Mrs. Johnson to follow him into the hall. Once there, and with the door closed to prevent any possibility of his words being overheard, he whispered hoarsely :

“I’m goin’ for mother. She’s a master-hand at doctorin’, an’ can do more in that line than any five men you ever saw. We’ll be back before night-fall, an’ you must keep the little fellow cheerful till then.”

Without waiting for a reply the farmer did his best to go down the stairs swiftly and quietly, but succeeding very poorly in both attempts. On reaching the sidewalk he was confronted by a large number of boys who were waiting just outside the door, and Tom Brady asked in a low tone:

“Mister, will you tell us how Little Joe is now?”

“He’s as fit to go to Heaven as ever a boy was; but if there’s any virtue in mother’s herbs we’ll keep him here awhile longer. I hope that organ-grinder will be made to suffer for what he’s done, an’ he will if I ever clap my eyes on him.”

Then, as if relieved by this outburst, the farmer leaped into his lumbering wagon, and, driving rapidly away, left the little group waiting anxiously for further information regarding the boy whom they once ill-treated, but had now learned to love so well.

“I wonder if he’d let me say I’m sorry ’cause I pounded him the night when the

Italian stole him?" Bill Dunham, who had joined the mourning party an hour previous, asked of Tom Brady.

"Go up an' see."

Bill waited for no further encouragement; but, taking off his shoes in the hall, stole softly up the stairs, and to Mrs. Johnson who was yet on the landing, he whispered:

"I'm the feller what got poor Little Joe into the trouble, an' I'll feel awful bad if he don't hear me say I'm sorry."

For reply she led him into the room where Alice was fanning the thin, pale face, and at the noise of footsteps Joe opened his eyes.

"I wanted to see you, Bill," he said, stretching out his little blue-veined hand, "'cause I'm sorry the boys did anything after Marco got hold of me."

Bill tried to speak, but the words refused to come, and he could only bury his face in the coverlet to hide the tears which would persist in ploughing tiny furrows down his

grimy cheeks. Then Joe sank into an uneasy slumber again, and Mrs. Johnson led the repentant boy from the room, whispering when they were at the stairway:

“You shall come and see him some other time, Bill; but it isn't wise to let him have too much company just now.”

“I'll wait on the sidewalk, ma'am, an' if you'll let me come back when he wakes up p'rhaps I can tell him what I couldn't say this time 'cause of the big lump in my throat.”

“If he feels any better Walter shall call you,” Mrs. Johnson replied kindly, and after looking at her searchingly for a moment as if fearing some effort to deceive him might be made, Bill ran down the stairs where his acquaintances were anxiously awaiting his return.

The report which he gave of Joe's condition was not encouraging to those who were hoping for good news, and a look of despair was apparent on the faces of all until Slippey

said, with an evident attempt at cheerfulness:

“ We'll stay here till the farmer brings his mother, an' then it'll be all right, 'cause he said she could cure him.”

This caused hope to spring up once more in the breast of every member of the mourning party, and during the remainder of that long vigil they suffered from impatience because of the non-return of Mr. Webster, rather than hopeless grief.

Twice during the day Slippey was summoned by his mother to assist her in some household duty, and once he went up-stairs to carry a choice collection of food which had been purchased by the boys for Doctor. As a matter of course he was overwhelmed with questions relative to the invalid's condition each time he rejoined his companions; but the report was always the same — Joe remained in a stupor from which Mrs. Johnson made no effort to arouse him.

It was not until nearly night-fall that the farmer and his wife arrived, and Tom Brady

at once proposed to greet them with "three cheers an' a yell;" but, fortunately, Slippey had his wits about him sufficiently to prevent the outburst, otherwise the sick boy might have been disturbed.

Mr. and Mrs. Webster paid no attention to the anxious group on the sidewalk, but went directly up-stairs, and when half an hour had elapsed Tom Brady and Bill Dunham insisted that Slippey should endeavor to learn what was being done.

He was only too willing to comply with their wishes, and in five minutes, after stealing softly through the hallway, returned looking decidedly happy.

"I didn't see Joe," he said, as his companions gathered around him, "'cause the farmer's mother an' mine are with him; but Alice thinks he'll be cured right up. Now, s'posen you all go home, an' I'll be downtown mighty early in the mornin' to let you know how he feels."

The boys were hungry as well as tired,

and they followed this very good advice after making Slippey solemnly cross his throat in token that the promise would be kept to the letter.

The young merchants had neglected business one entire day owing to the anxiety caused by Joe's illness, and many of them were seriously embarrassed, in a pecuniary way, by even this brief time of idleness. The necessity of earning money immediately, prevented them from lingering in bed next morning very long after daylight, and the majority of the party had been at work nearly an hour when Slippey appeared, fairly radiant with delight.

"Joe's better," he shouted, as he saw Tom Brady quite half a block away, and while running toward him Master Johnson continued the story at the full strength of his lungs, as if it was essential all the particulars should be told in the least possible space of time. "The farmer went home last night, but his mother staid; an' when

the hoss-doctor come up in the evenin' he said she was doin' Joe more good than the whole crowd at the hospital could. I saw him this mornin', an' he says I'm to give his love to all hands."

"Did he tell you he was better?" Tom Brady asked, as if doubting whether this good news could be really true.

"He said he wasn't so tired, an' that Mrs. Webster had been fixin' Doctor up too, so's both of 'em can get out 'bout the same time."

If there was any question in the minds of Joe's friends regarding the truth of this cheering news, the events of the next six days dispelled all doubts. For three successive mornings Slippey reported the invalid as having improved, and on the fourth he announced the pleasing fact that the sick boy was so far advanced toward recovery as to be able to sit up in bed nearly an hour.

"The farmer's mother has gone home," he said in conclusion to this last piece of news;

“but she’s comin’ back in two or three days to take Joe an’ Alice an’ Doctor away.”

“Does Alice know yet ’bout Si’s gettin’ drowned?” Tom asked.

“Mother told her yesterday. She don’t say much, but looks all kinder broke up, an’ I guess goin’ out to the farm will do her as much good as it will Joe an’ Doctor.”

Mrs. Johnson had persistently and, as many of the boys thought, cruelly refused to allow any of Joe’s friends to call on him, giving as a reason that visitors would cause more or less excitement which might prove injurious. But when the day arrived on which he was to be carried to the farm by the veterinary surgeon, Slippey extended a general invitation “for all hands to come up in front of the house an’ give him a swell send-off.”

There was no delay in accepting such an invitation, and fully an hour before the time set for the departure a party of not less than twenty boys were gathered on the sidewalk,

ready to give vent to the most extravagant demonstrations of joy immediately upon the appearance of their friend.

The surgeon arrived three quarters of an hour later with a two-seated carriage drawn by a pair of horses, and his reception by the young merchants was very warm, if noise can be considered a test.

“What’s the matter now?” he asked gruffly as, stepping from the carriage, he looked around upon the shouting crowd. “Can’t you hold your tongues five minutes at a time?”

“There’re only tryin’ to let you know as how all hands ’preciate your bein’ good to Joe,” Slippey said, in a half-apologetic tone, and the surgeon, looking so red in the face that there appeared to be great danger he might explode, cried, with a decided show of anger:

“See to the horses, and don’t be makin’ the people believe you’ve gone crazy.”

In an instant a perfect barricade of boys

had gathered in front of the animals, and the surgeon coughed suspiciously loud and long as if trying to smother a smile which might have prevented him from looking fierce as he entered the house.

Ten minutes later Slippey was summoned by his mother, and when he re-appeared on the sidewalk with a quantity of wraps and pillows the expectant throng, knowing Joe's journey was about to begin, gave vent to a howl expressive of pleasure at his recovery.

While the uproar was at its height the veterinary surgeon emerged from the house with the invalid in his arms, and so pale and feeble did Little Joe look that the noise was hushed immediately. Instead of crowding around with congratulations, as had been their purpose, every boy moved back at a respectful distance while Alice and Mrs. Johnson, the former dressed in black and with deep marks of grief on her face, piled the pillows on the rear seat until they formed

a very comfortable couch. Then, when the tiny girl had perched herself by his side, and Doctor in his soap-box bed was placed on the floor of the carriage, Joe held out his hand to the boy nearest him, who chanced to be Bill Dunham.

“When I get well I’ll come back to see you all,” he said. “Don’t feel bad ’bout what happened the night when old Marco got hold of me, an’ please don’t pick on fellers what have to sell papers for a livin’ jest ’cause they come ’round where you are.”

“I won’t ever so much as yip agin, no matter how many go inter the business,” Bill replied earnestly, and before he could say anything more the remainder of the party had swarmed around the carriage, eager to participate in the leave-taking.

“Slip an’ me will run out some day to see yer,” Tom Brady said, “an’ every mornin’ that the farmer comes to town we’ll send some papers so’s you won’t feel lonesome. Now, if things don’t suit you to a hair, jest

let us know, an' we'll bring you back if it takes every cent the fellers can raise."

"Now you're talkin', Bill!" half a dozen of the boys shouted in chorus, and Joe, too weak to speak so that all might hear him, was forced to make his reply to Slippey, who was almost standing on his head as he leaned over the back of the front seat in the effort to kiss the crippled dog on the nose.

"Tell 'em I'll get along all right, 'cause nobody could ever be any nicer than Mrs. Webster, an' you'll see both Doctor an' me agin before long."

"Jest 'tend to gettin' well," Slippey replied as, having succeeded in kissing the dog, he scrambled down from the carriage. "I'll keep the shop in the lumber-yard goin' so's it'll be ready to step right into when you come back. If you or Alice want anythin', tell the farmer, an' us fellers will send it out."

During all this time the surgeon had waited quietly for the adieux to be said;

but now it appeared as if his patience was exhausted.

“Unless you give me a chance to start the horses without running over six or eight boys, we shall never get to the farm. Joe's too weak to stand any more of your nonsense just now, so leave him alone!” he shouted gruffly, as he flourished the whip, and the throng barely had time to fall back before the spirited animals were off at full speed.

It was not until the vehicle had disappeared around the corner that the boys remembered the agreement to give the invalid three cheers at the moment of his departure, and when it was possible to carry into effect this portion of the programme, the travellers were too far away to hear them.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE FARM.

To tell the story of Joe's convalescence in detail would not only occupy too much space, but it might prove uninteresting reading, for during three weeks following his removal from the city one day was passed very much like another. He was forced to remain in bed, and either Mrs. Webster or Alice was by his side almost constantly.

In one sense the anxiety and labor of nursing the invalid was a positive benefit to Alice, since it prevented her from dwelling upon the loss of her brother as she would otherwise have done. She mourned very deeply, as a matter of course; but the employment did not allow grief to engross all her thoughts, which was probably fortunate so far as her health was concerned.

The veterinary surgeon rode out to the farm twice each week for nearly a month, and he told Mrs. Webster in his old gruff tone, on the day when Joe was able to dress himself and walk a short distance in the open air, that the boy's life was saved by her skilful nursing.

"A week more in town would have killed him," he said as, with the farmer and his wife, he watched the invalid take his first walk under the guidance and direction of his tiny nurse, while the crippled dog, now almost recovered, limped slowly behind. "Not that doctors don't know what to do, but because, as Marshall said, he needed an entire change of scene and air. Now he is nearly well again, what are you going to do with him? It seems too bad to let him run wild on the streets as he did before the Italians stole him."

"Joe will never have to do that while mother an' me have a roof over our heads," the farmer said with emphasis. "We shall

give him the place our boy would have occupied if God had not taken him, and the little girl is to stay with us also. It won't require much more bread to fill four mouths than two, an' I reckon the sunshine they bring into the old house will more'n make things square."

"Now, that's what I call being charitable," the surgeon said approvingly. "I never had any very great love for boys, because it seems as if their only aim in life is to annoy other people; but Joe jest fills the bill, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', an' if the time ever comes when he or you need any help, give me a call."

Then the surgeon drove away behind that "particularly neat bit of horse-flesh," and the farmer returned to his work in the field, while Mrs. Webster set about preparing a dainty lunch to tempt the invalid's rapidly increasing appetite.

Joe was by no means ignorant of what his friends in the city had been doing during

his absence, and they were equally well-informed as to his continued improvement. Never once had Mr. Webster driven to market without being met by one or all of them, and on every occasion something was sent to the sick boy. Bill Dunham was particularly careful to be on hand with a token of remembrance; but since his offerings usually consisted of "nigger eyeballs," "Jim Crows," or some other equally sticky delicacy, Alice had more enjoyment from the gifts than did her little guardian. As for newspapers! Why, the Webster home was overflowing with such reading matter which the boys would insist on his taking, until the farmer declared that it was really becoming very much like work to look over them all.

"It'll make Joe more contented like if he sees plenty papers around," Slippey said once when the farmer made objections to carrying away so many, and the latter replied, with a hearty laugh:

"Contented? Why, a cat with butter on

her paws couldn't be more contented than he is, an' when he gets so he can toddle 'round the farm I reckon it would take a pretty likely yoke of steers to pull him away. Jest wait till the harvestin' is done, an' then I'm comin' in with the big wagon an' haul every one of you out home to stay from Saturday till Monday. Our house ain't very big; but I reckon you won't grumble at sleepin' on a mow of sweet, clean hay?"

"You bet we won't," Tom Brady said emphatically, and from that time forth the farmer's bundle of papers increased wonderfully in size.

Before the harvesting was finished Joe looked stronger and in better health than on the night when he was kidnapped by old Marco. Both he and Alice spent so much time out-of-doors that the sun had painted their faces brown, and the assistance which they were able to give in the way of husking corn and other light work was by no means

slight. Both were eager to show their gratitude, and it was possible to save the farmer and his wife very many steps.

Even Doctor, who could now readily use every one of his four legs, seemed to understand that he owed much to these good people, and never did a dog behave in a more exemplary fashion. He carefully refrained from frightening the chickens, no matter how much the speckled rooster bullied him, and buried all his prizes of bones where no damage would be done by his scratching.

The children were very happy, as may be supposed, in finding such a home as this after their previous sad experience, and, until the harvesting was finished it seemed to them that Mr. and Mrs. Webster were pleased with their charitable work. After that time, however, and when the big barn was literally overflowing with sweet-scented hay, golden grain, yellow pumpkins and rosy-cheeked apples, there was a certain change in the farmer and his wife, the mean-



JOE AND ALICE HUSKING.

ing of which neither Joe nor Alice could explain satisfactorily.

Previously they had spoken of farm matters, the state of the market, or household duties without restraint, allowing the children to hear all that was said. Now they had a secret; when Mr. Webster came back from town there was always something which he found it necessary to tell his wife privately. Several times Joe came in when they were talking very earnestly, and the conversation had been dropped abruptly. Mrs. Webster did a great deal of work, the results of which she was careful to keep hidden from Joe and Alice, and altogether there was an air of mystery brooding over the farm such as caused those who realized their many obligations, to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

“I’m ’fraid they think we’re too much trouble, an’ don’t want us to stay here any longer,” Joe said one afternoon when Mr. Webster had advised him to go with Alice

and Doctor down to the stream for "a good time."

"That can't be true," the tiny girl replied earnestly; but there was a look of mingled trouble and perplexity on her face. "They are both just as kind as anybody ever could be, an' I'm sure they want us to play oftener than work."

"Didn't it seem to you like as if Mr. Webster tried to get us out the way when he said we should come down here? I've always helped him load the wagon for market; but this time he went to the barn alone, an' told me not to feed the cows to-night."

"Perhaps he thinks you ain't strong enough yet to do much work," Alice suggested, and then Doctor interrupted the conversation, by coaxing her, with his eyes and tail, to throw a stick into the water for him to swim after, a request which she granted at once, entering into the sport with such zest that for the time being the sudden

change in Mr. and Mrs. Webster's manner was forgotten.

When the children returned to the house late in the afternoon all the chores had been done, and what seemed very strange, the barn doors were locked. In the yard was the lumbering wagon which the farmer generally used when going to market; but it was empty, and Joe asked, as Mr. Webster came out of the shed:

“Have you been waiting for me to help you load?”

“No, Josey, I shan't carry much truck into town till the prices get a leetle higher. One of the light teams will do for to-morrow, I reckon. The work is all done, so you'd better scurry into the house an' see if mother hasn't got a cake for you and Alice.”

Joe did as he was bidden, and although the farmer had spoken in the most kindly tone, he again felt decidedly anxious lest in some way those who had cared for him so

tenderly were dissatisfied because of having been so generous.

In the kitchen Mrs. Webster was cooking what appeared to be an enormous amount of food. The shelves of the pantry were literally loaded with cakes, pies and bread until it seemed as if twenty of the hungriest boys to be found in the city could gorge themselves for a week without exhausting the supply. Yet, despite this profusion, the farmer's wife was whipping eggs into a froth, frying crullers, mixing all sorts of good things together, and roasting fowls, at the same time wearing a good-natured but mysterious smile, or breaking into a hearty laugh as she exchanged odd glances with her husband.

She had baked a cake for Joe and Alice; but neither enjoyed it as much as they would have done under other circumstances.

Not until a late hour in the evening did Mrs. Webster bring her labors in the kitchen to a close, and then, as the children were

going to bed, the farmer called in a voice which trembled as if from suppressed mirth:

“If I see them friends of yours, Josey, shall I tell 'em you sent any word?”

“Say I'd like to see every one, an' some day, when you'll let me, I'm comin' into town.”

“Do you really hanker after seein' 'em?” Mr. Webster asked, and Joe from the stairs could hear a queer, gurgling sound as if the farmer was trying to prevent himself from laughing outright.

“Of course I'd like to hear 'em tell how business is,” Joe said hesitatingly, as if afraid the farmer might think he was discontented; “but it's jest as well if I don't see them, 'cause I get word every time you go into town.”

“Perhaps you'll have a chance to talk with 'em before Christmas,” Mr. Webster replied, and as Joe continued on his way to bed he could hear the farmer and his wife laughing heartily.

“It don’t seem as if they felt mad,” he said to himself when he was stowed snugly away in the lavender-scented sheets; “but there’s something about it that I can’t make out.”

Sleep was pressing too heavily on his eyelids to admit of his speculating very long on the mystery, and when he went down-stairs next morning the general condition of affairs appeared much as usual. Mr. Webster had gone into town, leaving to him such trifling work about the barn as could be performed without any very severe exertion; but even before this was done Mrs. Webster summoned him to breakfast.

“I want to have the table cleared away early this morning,” the good lady said, as he entered the house, “and both you and Alice are to dress up a little, for we may have company before noon.”

“Then that’s the reason why Mr. Webster took the big, three-seated wagon and the best harnesses,” Joe added.

“So you noticed that they were missing?”

“Yes ma’am, ’cause you see they’ve never been taken out of the barn before since I came here.”

“He thought he might meet some friends, I suppose,” Mrs. Webster replied, as what Joe thought was a queer expression came into her eyes. “You and Alice are to look your very best in case any one does make us a visit, and when both are fixed up you can sit in the kitchen with me.”

It was just such a morning as Joe would have preferred to be out-of-doors. The sun was shining brightly, and the air sufficiently cool to be invigorating; yet the children followed Mrs. Webster’s suggestion after making all possible preparations for receiving company. During fully an hour they remained in the kitchen despite Doctor’s efforts to entice them into the yard, and then the rumble of heavy wheels on the lane which led from the highway told that the farmer had returned. Joe started toward

the door to assist in caring for the horses, as had been the custom since his recovery; but before he could walk across the kitchen a familiar sound was heard. Had he been in New York there would have been no question in his mind but that Slippey was somewhere near, for the exclamations of joy were similar to those used by him, and involuntarily Joe halted to look through the window which opened on to the stable-yard.

One glance was sufficient to explain the singular behavior of Mr. and Mrs. Webster during the past few days, for there was the big wagon literally overflowing with boys, and each of them, even down to Bill Dunham, Joe believed was a particular friend of his. On the front seat, looking quite as excited and happy as any of the noisy crowd, was the farmer, and when the horses halted one could almost fancy he was trying very hard not to join in the cheers which his guests appeared to think necessary on such an occasion.

Joe was so excited that it is extremely doubtful if he knew what he did during the next ten minutes, and Alice appeared but a trifle more composed. It is certain, however, that he gave vent to a yell such as would have lowered him very decidedly in the estimation of the veterinary surgeon, and then rushed into the yard at a pace which he had never equalled since the day he ran away from Guiseppe.

The instant he appeared from around the corner of the house every boy leaped out of the wagon, and then ensued such greetings as caused Mr. Webster to laugh until the tears rolled down his cheeks. First, each member of the party tried to grasp Joe's hand at the same moment, and, failing in that, all began to talk loudly, making a din which caused the speckled rooster to flee in alarm to a safe retreat under the shed, while the geese waddled off toward the stream with all possible speed. Unable to make themselves understood, the excited throng

danced around their friend in the most grotesque fashion, and the uproar might have continued indefinitely had Alice not made her appearance in the yard. The majority of the visitors rushed forward to greet her, and Joe was left comparatively alone with Tom Brady.

“We reckoned as how we’d give you a s’prise, ’cause the farmer said he hadn’t told you ’bout our comin’,” Master Brady began, speaking very rapidly as if afraid of being interrupted before he was ready to conclude his remarks. “Talk about your bein’ sick, old man, why you’re lookin’ fine as silk, an’ Si’s sister don’t act like a girl what’s havin’ a very hard time.”

“That’s ’cause we have it so nice here, Tom. You can’t think how good Mr. an’ Mrs. Webster are to us. Why, they won’t let me work half as much as I’d like to, an’ pretty soon we’re both goin’ to school. I tell you it’s great to have a home.”

“You bet it is, an’ that farmer’s a reg’lar

brick! Do you know he's goin' to keep the whole crowd of us here till Monday mornin'. He said it was to kinder cheer you up, 'cause his wife thought you was gettin' lonesome; but it's us fellers what'll get the most cheerin', I reckon. Say, how's the dog?"

"He's jest as well an' happy as I be. See! Slippey has got him in his arms. He limps a little bit; but his leg is 'bout the same as mended."

After speaking with Alice, Slippey had caught Doctor, and was coming toward the two boys on a swift run as if his excitement would not permit of his walking in the ordinary way.

It was not until he had asked for and received full particulars concerning Joe's life on the farm that he would impart any information as to affairs in the city. When his curiosity was satisfied, however, he began to unfold his budget of news by saying:

"Tom an' me went to see Tonio yester-

day. He's workin' in a fruit store down near Fulton ferry, an' slingin' more style than a wax image. He wanted to come out here, 'cause the farmer told us to ask him; but he couldn't get away on 'count of Saturday bein' a busy day. He can't talk 'bout anything but you, an' he's jest as chipper as a sparrer."

"Where is Marco?" Joe asked, unable to repress a slight tremor as he thought of what he had suffered while in the old padrone's power.

"He got sent to prison for two years, an' so did Guiseppe. The S'iety found jobs for all the boys, an' I reckon they think it was a mighty lucky day for 'em when you was stole. Tom an' me have been runnin' your old stand; but we're goin' to start a reg'lar place before long. The hoss-doctor says he'll fix up a little store what he owns on Third Avenue, an' let it to us cheap."

This news was particularly pleasing to

Joe, and he at once began to discuss the question of what the stock should consist, for the future proprietors of the establishment had already decided to keep on sale certain other goods in addition to newspapers.

Before any satisfactory conclusion was arrived at the remainder of the visiting party gathered around, and the conversation soon became general.

“I calculate you boys have staid out here in the yard long enough,” the farmer said, after the horses had been unharnessed and fed. “You must see mother before the fun begins in downright good earnest, an’ if I ain’t way off on my reckonin’ she’s got something that you won’t turn your backs on.”

Alice and Joe led the way into the house, the latter calling each visitor by name as he entered, for Mrs. Webster’s especial information, and the new-comers stood in a line around the kitchen looking decidedly ill at

ease, the ceremony of an introduction calming them down in a wonderful degree.

It was not long, however, that they were allowed to remain under so much restraint. At the first sound betokening the visitors' arrival Mrs. Webster began to bring from the pantry a quantity of eatables, and when the table was heaped high with such food as would most likely tempt the appetite of boys, the farmer said in a tone which showed that he was enjoying this visit quite as much as his guests:

“ Now, fall to, boys, an' fill yourselves up. This is only a lunch to keep you from bein' too hungry when dinner-time comes, so pitch in an' see who can eat the most.”

There was no necessity for a second invitation. Never before had they seen such a profusion of good things, and when Tom Brady set the example by taking a large piece of cake and a generous slice of cheese, the assault was begun without delay.

During the next ten minutes every boy

ate as if it was doubtful whether he would have another opportunity that day, and when the table was nearly cleared of food all felt reasonably well-acquainted with Mrs. Webster.

“Now, Josey,” the farmer said, when the last boy at the table, who chanced to be Slippey, swallowed the remaining morsels of a large piece of pie with a little squeak of satisfaction and content, “lead the whole crowd out an’ let ’em go where they please, providin’ they don’t chase the cows or the chickens. Give ’em a good time if it costs all the crops, for mother an’ me have made up our minds that they shall have one square taste of what life in the country is like. Alice, you’d better go along, too; I’ve calculated it so I’ve got nothin’ to do but help feed the visitors, and there’ll be no work for you here.”

The boy nearest the door ran out with a wild whoop of exultation or satisfaction which set Doctor into a most severe fit

of barking, and the speckled rooster darted under the shed again as the entire party rushed toward the brook, raising a volume of noise such as would have done credit to a band of Comanche Indians.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VISITORS.

WHEN Farmer Webster invited Joe's friends to the farm he distinctly stated that each one could enjoy himself as he chose. The visitors were free to do whatever they pleased, and although there were no orders against the wanton destruction of property, all felt in a certain degree responsible for any damage which might be done.

Therefore when the first wild rush from the house was ended at the bank of the stream, Tom Brady said:

"Now, Joe, you tell us where we can go without hurtin' things. We want to see the whole place of course; but it won't do to make the farmer sorry 'cause we come."

"He said not to chase the cows or the chickens — I reckon he meant the geese

an' turkeys as well—an' if you don't do anything like that there's no chance for mischief."

"Then let's go where they're makin' hay," Slippey cried eagerly. "I've heard fellers tell 'bout havin' lots of fun mowin', an' rakin', an' workin' them kind of rackets."

Two or three of the boys who had been in the country before laughed at the idea of haying in November, and it required some time for Joe to explain satisfactorily that there could be no such "rackets" until the following summer. Then Slippey, looking a little ashamed at having made a mistake, said as if there could be no error in his second proposition:

"We'll go an' see 'em plant stuff. I never was on a farm before, an' I want to find out how things are done."

Another burst of laughter from the more knowing ones caused Master Johnson's face to grow very red, and when Joe made another explanation, this time relative to the seasons

for sowing and reaping, he cried in desperation:

“What can we see then? Ain’t there anything more’n jest this ground same’s you can find anywhere? I wanted to know how the stuff growed.”

“The pumpkins are still in the field,” Joe replied in a half-apologetic tone, as if he thought he was in some way responsible for his friend’s disappointment. “Mr. Webster was goin’ to put them in the barn to-day; but I guess he won’t now that you are all out here.”

“Say, boys, let’s us do it for him!” Tom Brady cried excitedly. “I’ve allers wanted to work on a farm, an’ now’s the chance.”

Almost anything in the line of novelty, even though it was labor, pleased the boys, and Joe was directed to lead the way to the pumpkin field.

“We’ll do somethin’ towards payin’ for our grub,” Bill Dunham said gleefully, as the party started at full speed for the five-acre

tract, thickly dotted with yellow pumpkins which had been left to ripen when the corn was gathered.

“Cricky! but there’s a stack of ’em!” Slippey said, as the leaders halted at the edge of the field. “Now this begins to look somethin’ like a farm.”

“Where have the things got to be carried?” one of the boys asked.

“Up to the barn,” Joe replied slowly, for he was beginning to wonder if allowing guests to work was true hospitality. “I heard Mr. Webster say he was goin’ to leave ’em there till he could haul the best of the lot into the city.”

“Then come on, fellers!” Tom shouted. “We’ll scrape the whole crop up in a big pile right here, an’ then stand in a line so’s to throw ’em from one to the other straight into the barn, same’s men on the piers pass bricks.”

With the exception of Joe, who felt that it was his duty to insure the visitors a jolly

time and was a little doubtful as to whether pumpkin gathering would come under that head, no one fancied the scheme involved anything like labor, and in the shortest possible space of time the task was begun, Alice seating herself where she would have a full view of all that took place.

Twenty boys can do a large amount of work in a short time, more especially when the labor presents itself under the guise of sport, and the pumpkins, with a little assistance from the visitors, began to pile themselves up until they looked like a veritable mountain. A five-acre field occupies considerable space, however, and when this particular material for pies will insist on growing in the greatest profusion, the task of harvesting it is not slight.

More than one of the boys grew red in the face owing to rapid and repeated trips across the field, and many were the legs that felt weary before the work was finished, but not a single laborer faltered. The game

must be played to a completion, and every fellow's pride was too great to admit of his saying that he had had enough.

The only remark which could by any possibility be construed as a complaint was made by Slippey, and even that was the simple statement of a fact rather than an outburst of weariness.

He had come from the further edge of the field, staggering under the weight of two enormous pumpkins when an evil-disposed corn-stalk insinuated itself between his feet and caused him to fall headlong. Rising slowly and looking cross-eyed in the attempt to see the end of his nose from which some of the skin had been scratched by a rough stone, he said to Alice, with a long-drawn sigh:

“I tell you what it is, farmers have to work pretty hard sometimes, don't they?”

“Are you tired?” Alice asked, as she brushed the dirt from the weary-looking boy's clothes.

“If I was I wouldn't let on to the other fellers,” Slippey replied in a whisper, and then gathering up the pumpkins once more he continued on to the place of deposit.

During nearly three hours the boys worked industriously, and then, when the task was nearly done, Mr. Webster appeared on the scene. He had fancied his guests would swarm over every portion of the farm within five minutes after they were let loose from the house, and their continued absence caused him so much uneasiness that he thought it necessary to learn the cause of their sudden and complete disappearance.

“What's the meanin' of all this?” he asked, as he stood beside the huge pile of pumpkins, gazing at Alice in the most perfect surprise.

“The boys thought they would do something to pay for the good time you are giving them. You're not angry, are you?” she added timidly.

“Well, no, I can't say as I am, seein's how

this saves me a good bit of work; but I brought 'em out here to enjoy themselves."

"I think that's what they are doing, only some of them have grown pretty tired."

At this moment the pumpkin-gatherers approached the farmer with the remainder of the crop, and Tom Brady asked proudly:

"Didn't think we knew so much about farmin', did you, Mr. Webster? Now, it won't take any time to throw 'em into the barn, an' you jest watch us two or three minutes."

Mr. Webster appeared to be on the point of making some protest against his guests doing the work; but he checked himself and stood by Alice's side as the boys formed a line which led to the very door of the barn. Then Tom, who was stationed at the pumpkin heap, threw the first one, and as it passed to each fellow in turn another and another was started until there seemed to be a perfect stream of huge yellow balls in the air.

This portion of the task was finished in short order, and when the last one was successfully housed the farmer cried:

“Now, how many of you own a pocket-knife?”

In an instant every boy was holding one high in the air, and without stopping to inquire what proportion of the stock was serviceable, Mr. Webster continued:

“Come with me, an’ I’ll show you how to make a jack-a-lantern. That’s a part of the farm work which country boys never forget when the pumpkins are harvested. I reckon mother’s got candles enough for all hands, an’ you can have a fine time after dark.”

This invitation was accepted with the greatest alacrity, and soon the farmer was explaining just how thick the shell of the lantern should be, and what strokes were necessary to form a hideously artistic-looking face.

The last lantern had been made when Mrs. Webster summoned the party to dinner,

and Joe and Alice were among the first to respond, so curious were they to learn how such a great number of guests could be fed in the small kitchen.

By dividing the boys into two parties the problem was easily solved, and the second division was not obliged to wait more than half an hour, so industrious with their knives and forks were those first served.

After dinner the visitors, with Joe as guide, walked up the road to the scene of his escape from Guiseppe, and when they returned the shadows of night were beginning to fall. During their absence Alice had taken to the shed a sufficient number of candles to light up the lanterns, and the boys lost no time in carrying out a scheme which Slippey had devised during the ramble.

“When it gets real dark, an’ you hear a big shoutin’, all hands must look out of the window,” he said privately to Alice, and she repeated his instructions to Mr. and Mrs.

Webster, wondering not a little what spectacle was to be arranged.

In a very short time she was enlightened. When it was no longer possible to distinguish surrounding objects because of the gloom, an outcry as "big" as twenty boys could make was heard from the front of the house, and then Slippey's skill as a manager of spectacles was displayed.

The lane appeared to be crowded with grinning, fiery faces which danced about in the most grotesque fashion. They approached in one long line, and then retreated; hid the features of fire to flash them suddenly upon the spectators, or whirled around in a dizzy kind of waltz, causing the farmer and his wife quite as much amusement as it did Alice.

During nearly an hour the revel of lanterns continued, and then as the assistants grew tired, one by one crept into the kitchen until the whole party, decidedly weary with the first day's work and play on a farm,

were gathered about the generous fire of wood which crackled and snapped a hearty welcome to all.

A large bowl of milk with plenty of sweet, fresh bread made such a supper as was by no means to be despised, and then while Mrs. Webster plied her knitting-needles until they clicked most musically, the farmer adjusted his steel-bowed glasses as Alice brought the well-worn Book.

This evening reading of God's word was something novel to the majority, if not all of the visitors; but they listened with profound attention, and a good many had queer lumps in their throats when the farmer asked so fervently of the Father that the hearts of the "strangers within the gates" might be inclined to do His will.

After this came the question of providing the boys with sleeping accommodations, and it was not as difficult as may be imagined. While they were walking up the road Mr. Webster had carried a quantity of blankets

and comfortables on to the mow, and it was only necessary for the guests to crawl under them, the odorous hay forming a most rest-inviting bed.

What sport they had stowing themselves away for the night while Mr. Webster held the lantern! Joe felt almost sorry because he was forced to return to his own cosey little room, and but for Mrs. Webster's positive injunctions to the contrary, he would have remained to share in the jolly time his friends would most certainly have.

Even after he was in bed and both the farmer and his wife had looked in to assure themselves that the excitement of the day had done him no injury, he could hear the shouts and laughter of the visitors as they tumbled about on the novel bed.

If the horses and cattle were not surprised at the unusual noise in the barn that night, they must have been next morning when Farmer Webster came to feed them, and every one of a perfect crowd of boys insisted

on adding something to the breakfast in the way of hay or disabled jack-a-lanterns, until the mangers were piled high with fodder.

About ten o'clock the big wagon was brought out again and the horses harnessed. Then Alice and all the boys were driven to church, which was quite as much of a surprise as the evening's devotions; but the service could not have been displeasing to them, at least, not in Bill Dunham's case, for he whispered to Tom Brady as they emerged from the building:

“If I'd a' thought that was all there is to it, I'd a' sneaked in a good many times when I had pretty fair clothes on, for the music was jest stunnin'.”

The remainder of the day was spent in a quiet way by walking over the farm, inspecting the stock, or listening to stories told by Mrs. Webster. Then came one more noisy, jolly night on the hay, and when Monday morning dawned the visitors were as unwill-

ing to depart as they had been eager to make the visit.

Both the farmer and his wife promised Slippey they would have "another party" in the spring, and that, together with the pumpkin lanterns and a goodly supply of apples and cake which was stowed away in the wagon, as well as the fact that Joe and Alice were to accompany the party as far as Jersey City, lessened the bitterness of parting considerably.

As Little Joe is no longer friendless, and in view of the fact that Alice and Doctor share with him a home where they have every care and comfort, is it well to continue the story at the risk of being thought tiresome?

There have been but few changes since last November among the twenty newsboys who then had their first real experience of country life.

During the winter Joe and Alice attended

school, and it can readily be understood how hard they, who had never such an opportunity before, studied. Joe will probably remain on the farm this summer, for he is so strong as to be a great deal of assistance to Mr. and Mrs. Webster, and he insists on doing all he can toward at least paying the interest on the debt of gratitude he owes the farmer and his wife. Next fall, however, when the harvesting is finished, he will be hard at work over his books again, for one year from then he is to attend a certain school a short distance up the Hudson, and in due course of time — at least, such is the plan now — he will have the benefit of a full collegiate course.

Shortly after Christmas he and Alice went to Mrs. Johnson's in New York, intending to remain three days; but when forty-eight hours had passed Mr. Webster came after them, excusing himself to Slippey's mother for interrupting the visit, by saying:

“We can't let 'em stay away any longer.

It seems like the whole farm was lost since they came into town, an' mother says she *must* have them both with her to-night. You see the children have grown so near to our old hearts that we need 'em every hour."

Joe and Alice were not quite as lonely as the farmer and his wife had been, because their time was fully occupied by pleasure; but both were glad to return thus unexpectedly to the home where they had been so warmly welcomed.

During their visit they called upon Slippey and Tom in the new store which had been fitted up very neatly by the veterinary surgeon. That which most pleased them about the establishment was a pretentious-looking sign bearing in gilt letters the name of the firm

JOHNSON & BRADY.

The merchants have a general stock of stationery, and are doing a flourishing busi-

ness, as Joe could well understand during the two hours he remained with them. The surgeon insisted on loaning the partners sufficient to buy goods enough to make a fine display, and Slippey is quite confident that by next September the debt will have been paid.

“If you get tired of the farm come back here an’ Tom an’ me will give you a share in all we own,” Slippey said, as the visitor bade him good-by, and although Joe thanked him kindly for the generous offer, he felt positive the time would never come when he would willingly leave the only parents he has ever known.

Bill Dunham has taken the lumber-yard news-stand, and is prospering. Remembering his promise to Joe, he no longer tries to control trade in any one section of the city; but is ever ready to aid a young merchant who needs assistance. The fact that he is frequently invited to spend the evening with the veterinary surgeon shows how decided a

change must have come over him since that night when he and his friends attempted to drive Joe out of the news-vending business.

On the occasion of Joe's visit Tonio took a holiday and spent it in visiting familiar places with the boy who had been instrumental in freeing him from old Marco's power. The little Italian now attends a night-school, and fancies that the day is not far distant when he will own a fruit store of his own, for he has deposited from one to two dollars in the bank each week since the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children obtained for him his present employment.

Dick White is the only boy about whom it is impossible to give any further information. From the time he insisted on being paid for taking Joe's message to Slip and Tom, none of his acquaintances have seen him; but the general impression is that he ran away to sea, for that always seemed to be his highest ambition. If he did do so

there has been plenty of time for him to repent taking such a rash step, and he has undoubtedly regretted it every day since leaving port.

Mr and Mrs. Webster are both well, and just as lovable, charitable and good as when Joe and Alice were first welcomed to their happy home, and when they are finally summoned to go down into the valley across the dark river, no petitions from mortals in their behalf will be needed, for all the angels will be waiting to greet them, whose "delight has ever been in the law of the Lord."

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